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Australian Journal of Basic and Applied Sciences

Journal home page: www.ajbasweb.com



Examining the relationship between employees' perceptions on competency training and affective commitment: The moderating influence of volition

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 20 October 2013

Received in revised form 21 November 2013

Accepted 22 November 2013

Available online 15 December 2013

Keywords:

Competency training, affective commitment, volition

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between employees' perceptions on competency training and affective commitment and the moderating effect of employees' volition on this relationship. Data were collected from a field survey of 159 technicians from selected institutes in Sarawak. Regression analysis indicated that there was a positive relationship between employee's perceived training comprehensiveness and affective commitment. In addition, the results indicated that the relationship between employee's perceptions on competency training and affective commitment will be more positive for those who take on the competency training by own volition. Implications for researchers and practitioners are proposed based on the findings.

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To Cite This Article: Happy Fadzilla Ali, Tek Yew Lew, Adriel K. S. Sim, Examining the relationship between employees' perceptions on competency training and affective commitment: The moderating influence of volition. *Aust. J. Basic & Appl. Sci.*, 7(13): 209-218, 2013

INTRODUCTION

The importance of employing highly committed individuals had shown high significance when scholars began exploring the factors which influenced employees' organizational commitment. Numerous recent studies had investigated the relationship between perceptions of training and organizational commitment (e.g. Ashar *et al.* 2013; Ehrhardt *et al.* 2011; Owoyemi *et al.* 2011; Yang, Sanders and Bumatay 2012). The studies conducted had shown how affective commitment had demonstrated powerful correlations with desirable outcomes. Although all were focused on the same literature, each study was unique. The studies were done using different dimensions of perceptions of training, each included different other influencing factors to the relationship, that they were conducted under different context and in different countries. Earlier study done in Malaysia was by Ahmad and Bakar (2003) where they stated that very little regarding training and organizational commitment had been done in Malaysia and attention seemed to be more on need identification, facilities for training and training activities. Later study by Nasurdin, Hemdi and Lye (2008) on employees in the Malaysian manufacturing industry found lack of support for a positive relationship between perceptions of training and commitment. The study by Nasurdin, Hemdi and Lye (2008) was inconsistent with the mainstream literature.

Theoretically, this study tried to add on current human resource development literature by considering the relationship between organizational training and employees' commitment. Social exchange theory was used as a basis where social exchange theory endorsed relationships between characteristics of organizational training and employees' organizational commitment (Ehrhardt *et al.* 2011). Training characteristics given focus in this study was on employees individual perceptions of the competency training from three dimensions i.e. perceived training comprehensiveness, perceived organization support for competency training and perceived significance of competency training. Organizational commitment in this study focused solely on the employees' affective commitment. Present international human resource management study had strong focus on how organizations can improve the affective commitment of employees. There were many studies which had used affective commitment as a single measure of organizational commitment (i.e. Ashar *et al.* 2013; Ehrhardt *et al.* 2011; Joo and Park 2010; Newman, Thanacoody and Hui 2011). Another question which was posited in this study was whether additional factor that is individual's volition in participation in specific competency training moderates the relationship between individual perceptions of competency training and affective commitment. Stanley *et al.* (2013) in their study had linked commitment and self-determination theory of motivation.

Sarawak is now experiencing high labour force and employment growth with ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) and National Key Economic Area (NKEA) projection of 0.5 million jobs of technical and semi-professional base for Super Corridor of Renewable Energy (SCORE). Practically, this study aimed to observe perceptions and attitudes among Malaysian technical employees in Sarawak regarding training and their

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affective commitment, whether there were any differences with the study outcomes from other countries. This study allowed for better understanding of affective commitment of technical employees' in Sarawak.

Training and Affective Commitment:

There had been many human resource related functions from compensation and benefits a firm may offer to fairness of performance appraisals which scholars had identified to have had an influence to employees' organizational commitment (Ehrhardt *et al.* 2011; Meyer and Smith 2000; Paul and Anantharanam 2003). Organizational training had been identified to have a direct influence on organizational commitment. Therefore this study tried to bring forward the concept of training to employers as a way to keep their employees. Many recent literatures examine the relationship between training and commitment (e.g. Anvari *et al.* 2010; Ashar *et al.* 2013; Bulut and Culha 2010; Ehrhardt *et al.* 2011; Owoyemi *et al.*, 2011). Some scholars stated that "training offered within an organization is important for employees because it provided skills helpful for fulfilling job responsibilities" (Ehrhardt *et al.* 2011; Lambert *et al.* 2009; Lambooij *et al.* 2007). The exploration of the relationship between training and affective commitment continued to spark much interest. Many studies had continued to be done on the relationships between training opportunities and individuals' organizational commitment. An example of study which agreed with training and related development opportunities in an organization resulted in increased commitment among employees was a study by Sahinidis and Bouris (2008). Sahinidis and Bouris (2008) investigated the relationship between perceived training effectiveness and job satisfaction, motivation and commitment. The study which examined employees and lower managers at large Greek organizations supported the hypothesis proposed indicating that there was significant correlation between the employees' perceived training effectiveness and their commitment, job satisfaction and motivation. Other studies had demonstrated that a variety of organizational training dimensions had unique effects on employees' organizational commitment (e.g. Blau *et al.* 2008; Bulut and Culha 2010; Ehrhardt *et al.* 2011; Yang, Sanders and Bumatay 2012).

All the studies mentioned earlier had the same theme as the current study (e.g. Blau *et al.* 2008; Bulut and Culha 2010; Ehrhardt *et al.* 2011; Sahinidis and Bouris 2008). The current study assessed the perceptions of technical employees' in Sarawak on competency training in terms of (1) competency training comprehensiveness, (2) organizational support for competency training and (3) significance of competency training. Then, it explored the effect of individuals' volition to take on the study as a moderating factor to the relationship. However, it was most similar to Yang, Sanders and Bumatay (2012). In the study, they had systematically investigated the connections between employees' perceptions of training in terms of (1) perceived training benefits, (2) perceived supervisor support for training and (3) perceived access to training on all three types of organizational commitment i.e. affective, continuance and normative. Their sample was employees in the Philippines. Yang, Sanders and Bumatay (2012) study had showed that employees' perceptions of training were relevant to their commitment to the organization, and employee self-construal further moderates such connection (Yang, Sanders and Bumatay 2012). Yang, Sanders and Bumatay (2012) concluded that "connections between employees' perceptions of training and their work related attitudes can be generalizable across cultural boundaries". The study findings were found to be consistent with findings in studies done in the western countries. Study done by Nasurdin, Hemdi and Lye (2008) on employees in the manufacturing industry in Malaysia had yielded inconsistent result with the findings in studies done in the western countries. They found in their study that training was not able to contribute to greater commitment even though the extent of training engaged by the organization was perceived to be slightly greater than the other two human resource management practices explored in the study. Thus, the current study would provide an alternative to Nasurdin, Hemdi and Lye (2008) study in the Malaysian context.

On the other hand, implementation wise, Service Modernisation and Quality Unit (2012) of the Sarawak State Civil Service had included training as part of its human resource talent management. According to the Sarawak Civil Service 20-10 action plan, "competency-based training is therefore part of a deliberate intervention to enhance competencies in order to bridge the gap between the officer's role and his capabilities." The current study was hoped to provide support in extending the move to other organizations in the state. The evolving technology required technical workers to keep abreast with the current demand. Therefore, the employers were deemed partly responsible to ensure that the employees were provided the necessary training.

Emphasis was again made where in the current study the researcher examined the employees' perceptions of competency training in terms of their perceived training comprehensiveness; their perceived organization support for competency training; and their perceived significance of the competency training. The relationship with their affective commitment and one moderating factor i.e. their volition to take on the training. The researcher had chosen these three components as a measure for perceptions of training because there were many other studies which had explored relationships between organizational commitment and either perceived training comprehensiveness, perceived organization support for training or perceived significance of the competency training (e.g. Abdollahiet *et al* 2013; Ashar *et al* 2013; Benson 2006; Ehrhardt *et al.* 2011; Maurer and Lippstreu 2008; Whitener 2001; Yang, Sanders and Bumatay 2012). The current study tried to prove that

employees' who had good perceptions on competency training had better affective commitment towards their organization. Hence, this study would try to validate the mainstream western literature in the context of Malaysia, which would be contrary to the findings by Nasurdin, Hemdi and Lye (2008). In sum, the existing literature shows that there is a positive relationship between employee's perceptions of competency training and affective commitment.

Perceived training comprehensiveness and affective commitment:

Perceived training comprehensiveness in this study referred to how the employees perceived the overall outlook of the competency training provided by the employers. Based on social exchange standpoint, when an employee perceived training offered as being comprehensive in nature, he may interpret it as an expression of commitment from the organization (Takeuchi *et al.* 2007). This would make the individual feel that he was important to the organization's overall success (Takeuchi *et al.* 2007). Aguinis and Kraiger (2009) claimed that the comprehensiveness of training offered could mean how much the organization cared about the employee. Thus, social exchange theory would suggest that the individual would reciprocate.

Ehrhardt *et al.* (2011) pointed out that the relationship between the comprehensiveness of training offered and organizational commitment had received limited attention in previous studies. Earlier study by Whitener (2001) reported a weak non-significant relationship between training comprehensiveness and organizational commitment. However, later studies by Benson (2006) and Ehrhardt *et al.* (2011) found positive relationship between the two. Ehrhardt *et al.* (2011) in their study had stated that perceived training comprehensiveness is one of the types of perception which was important to employee work-related attitudes. Ehrhardt *et al.* (2011) study results suggested a positive relationship between employees' perceptions of having received comprehensive training and organizational commitment. Based on their study findings, Ehrhardt *et al.* (2011) suggested that human resource development professionals may benefit by ensuring that the employees perceive training offered by the organization as comprehensive. If the employees perceived that the training offered to them as comprehensive, they would be more likely to appreciate the organization's expenses in training them. Thus, they may respond favourably with increased levels of organizational commitment. Therefore, Ehrhardt *et al.* (2011) claimed that efforts to ensure comprehensive training may serve as an important first step in promoting a variety of other desirable individual-level outcomes. Minor decisions made by human resource development professionals involving the comprehensiveness of training programs may have far-reaching implications (Ehrhardt *et al.* 2011). Therefore, this current study tried to verify Ehrhardt *et al.* (2011) findings in the context of technical employees in Sarawak.

Perceived support for competency training and affective commitment:

Perceived support for competency training in this study referred to how the employees perceived that their organization was providing support for them to obtain the competency needed. This competency training should benefit them to carrying out their duty effectively. Nasurdin, Hemdi and Lye (2008) showed high positive correlations between career development and training in their study on employees in the Malaysian manufacturing industry. They hypothesized that perceptions of training had a direct and positive effect on perceived organizational support (Nasurdin, Hemdi and Lye 2008). The studied sample from among employees in the Malaysian manufacturing industry partly coincided with the current study population. However, their study finding showed that perceived organizational support did not mediate the relationship between employees' evaluation of training activities offered by the organization and their commitment. Nasurdin, Hemdi and Lye 2008 argued that training is likely to be viewed by the Malaysian manufacturing operational employees as a compulsory tool to improve on their present job skills. Thus, that was why the employees therefore were likely to perceive training as a compulsory short term mechanism rather than a voluntary long term initiative from their organization.

However, the current study tried to prove the opposite. It tried to find consistency with existing literature where there is a positive relationship between perceived support for competency training and the employees' affective commitment. Meyer and Smith (2000) had discovered associations between selected human resources management practices and perceived organization support. They demonstrated that benefit and career development had direct links with organizational support (Meyer and Smith 2000). Maurer and Lippstreu (2008) added learning and performance orientation acts i.e. individual differences in the degree to which an individual wanted to pursue learning as the moderator to the relationship between support for employee development and affective commitment. While the study found that perceived support for employee development was positively related to commitment for some individuals, they found that for some other individuals, support for development by an organization cannot be associated with greater commitment and might even be negatively associated with organizational commitment. However, Maurer and Lippstreu (2008) in the study using employees across the US workforce as his sample highlighted that; "notion that support for employee development enhances organizational commitment is widely accepted".

Yang, Sanders and Bumatay (2012) in their study found support for relationship between perceived supervisor support and affective commitment. Similarly, Ashar *et al.* (2013) in their study on perceived availability of trainings and perceived supervisor support on employees from telecom and banking sector in Pakistan resulted in positive association of both training perceptions i.e. perceived availability of trainings and perceived supervisor support, with affective commitment. The current study followed the lead of the earlier studies, and continued to explore the relationship on whether perceived support for competency training will influence the employee's affective commitment.

Perceived significance of the competency training and affective commitment:

Perceived significance of the competency training in this study referred to how the employees viewed the importance of the competency training that they had received. Benefits of trainings were deemed reciprocal between the person who attended the training and the sponsor. However, when the employees felt that the training would be beneficial for both themselves and their organization, that there were chances to practice what was learned, the degree of willingness to participate and the outcomes from training would likely be greater. According to Watson (2008), training was expected to provide employees development, increase productivity and improve performance. On the other hand, employees would view that the training would be beneficial to their jobs, careers and personal development objectives (Bulut and Culha 2010). It could either be job-related i.e. promotion, career-related i.e. development of skills for a future job or personal i.e. improved social status. Thus, the positive feeling would definitely benefit their respective jobs and careers, themselves and their organization.

Some previous studies indicated that there were significantly positive relationships between benefits from training and organizational commitment (e.g. Ahmad and Bakar 2003; Bulut and Culha 2010; Yang, Sanders and Bumatay 2012). According to Facteau *et al.* (1995), individuals with higher organizational commitment would benefit more from training. Bartlett (2001) reported that both career-related and personal benefits increased affective commitment. Bulut and Culha (2010) in their empirical study which aimed to investigate the effects of organizational training on organizational commitment yielded positive result between employees' perceived benefits from training and employees' affective commitment. They concluded that employees who expected benefits from their participation in training activities were more committed to their organizations (Bulut and Culha 2010). This was consistent with a study by Yang, Sanders and Bumatay (2012) which stated that perceived significance of the competency training was one of the types of perception which is important to employee work-related attitudes. Hence, perceived significance of competency training was another dimension of training tested against affective commitment in this study.

Moderating Influence of Volition to Take on Competency Training:

Hicks (1984) claimed that employees who received reasonable training and those who had a higher degree of choice were more likely to perceive the training to be appropriate for them to take and were better able to profit from training. They will also be more committed to their decision to attend the training. Blauet *et al.* (2008) strengthened the notion where in their study that learning motivation was generally defined as an employees' desire to learn new skills. It has been found that an employee's desires to learn new skills were positively related to organizational development activities that included training programs or courses. In an earlier study, McEnue (1989) had found that "employees' level of their organizational commitment was positively correlated with their willingness to self-develop and to voluntarily participate in development activities, where the reverse was also likely." In agreement, Kang, Kim and Chang (2008) claimed that "employee training is exogenous variable that had significant impact on employee motivation". This was consistent with Anvariet *et al.* (2010). Anvariet *et al.* (2010) claimed that the motivational level of employees was a foundational component of the effectiveness of organizational programs. On the other hand, Joo and Park, 2010 studied the impact of personal characteristics that was goal orientation and contextual characteristics on employees' career satisfaction, organizational commitment and turnover intention. In their study, goal orientation was an important individual factor relevant to learning, motivation and performance and contextual characteristics was organizational learning culture and developmental feedback (Joo and Park 2010). Joo and Park (2010) defined learning goal orientation as one's desire to increase one's competence by developing new skills and mastering new situations. The study supported their hypothesis that learning goal orientation had influence on organizational commitment. Another study, Naqviet *et al.* (2011) stated that most scholars had suggested that employees having great empowerment (i.e. self-determination where individual feels freedom from organization) had great affective commitment.

However, Stanley *et al.* (2013) elaborated that "although commitment forms are associated with specific levels of internal drive for the behaviour, the salience of the internal drives may be influenced by the within person context provided by the combination and levels of the commitment forms that compose the profile". While Maurer and Lippstreu (2008) had consistent findings in their study where they found that organizational support for employee development i.e. learning and skill development resources that can help improve skills were positively associated with organizational commitment, they also did find that individual differences also

played a role. Those were inadequacies recognized by Maurer and Lippstreu (2008). According to them, human resource practices such as training may not be valued equally by all employees and thus may also influence organizational commitment (Ehrhardt *et al.* 2011). Maurer and Lippstreu (2008) had extended the existing literature by emphasizing individual differences in the degree to which employees wanted to pursue learning as moderators of the link between support for development and commitment by employees.

Another study done by Newman, Thanacoody and Hui (2011) cited empirical studies by Bartlett (2001) and Ahmad and Bakar (2003). The cited study findings were consistent with the earlier discussed studies' findings and the mainstream literature. This was that there were strongly significant relationship between an individual's motivation to learn and their affective commitment. However Newman, Thanacoody and Hui (2011) in their context of Chinese employees in multinational enterprises study finding was inconsistent with the cited studies. They found there were no relationship between motivation to learn and affective commitment. Newman, Thanacoody and Hui (2011) findings may also be the case in the context of technical employees in Sarawak, Malaysia, which was explored in this study. Subsequently, interests and findings from all the previous studies had provided the support for the integration of volition to take on competency training as a moderator in the relationship between employees' perceptions of competency training and affective commitment among technical employees in Sarawak. This current study adopted Maurer and Lippstreu (2008) idea to explore effect of volition to take on competency training as a moderator in the relationship between employees' perceptions on training competency and affective commitment.

Based on the above literature, we propose to test the following hypotheses:

- H1: There is a positive relationship between employee's perceived training comprehensiveness and affective commitment.
H2: There is a positive relationship between employee's perceived support for competency training and affective commitment.
H3: There is a positive relationship between employee's perceived significance of competency training and affective commitment.
H4: The relationship between employee's perceptions on competency training and affective commitment will be more positive for those who take on the competency training by own volition.

Methodology:

This study used cluster sampling design with convenience sampling technique. Cluster sampling design was where the researcher divided the sample populations into groups. In this study, the cluster formed on basis of geographical proximity. Convenience sampling technique was the process of including whoever happened to be available at the time and were easiest for the researcher to access.

Population and sample:

The population for this study comprised of employees from various organizations in Sarawak who had undertook electrical competency training at institutes. The sample for this study comprised of employees from various organizations in Sarawak who had recently undertook electrical competency training at Kuching institutes for purpose to become certified electrical competent person under the Electricity Ordinance and Electricity Rules, 1999. A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed between the Institutes. Out of the 200 questionnaires distributed, N = 159 useful questionnaires were returned.

Research instruments:

Measurement scales included on the questionnaire were either adapted from validated scales previously published or self-developed.

Affective commitment:

Researcher had identified six items for affective commitment from Meyer and Allen's (1997) 18 items Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ). Meyer *et al.* (2002) performed a meta-analysis of studies using the six-item. They collected data from people who had sought permission to use the OCQ during the last 15 years as well as from computer databases dating back to 1985. The mean reliability from all the studies was 0.82 for affective. Example of the item for affective commitment was "I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization". Items 3, 4 and 5 were negatively worded and therefore were recoded before the analysis. In this study, the reliability (α) of the six-item affective commitment was 0.739.

Employee's perceptions of competency training:

Employee's perceptions on competency training were measured from three dimensions.

a. Perceived training comprehensiveness:

Ehrhardt *et al.* (2011) adaptation of Snell and Dean's (1992) three itemed perceived training comprehensiveness measure was adapted to reflect pertinent to training comprehensiveness in this study. Example of the item was "I receive many hours of training to be certified as competent person". In this study, the reliability (α) of the three-item perceived training comprehensiveness was 0.906.

b. Perceived organization support for competency training :

Ehrhardtet *al.* (2011) two of four items to measure perceived support was adapted to measure perceived support for competency training. Items were adapted to reflect pertinent to perceived support for competency training in this study. The researcher had discarded two items from Ehrhardt *et al.* (2011) original scale. This was because, in order to carry out their job relevant to their competence safely, employers were required by the Occupational Safety and Health Act, OSHA 1994 to provide their workers with the necessary tools and equipments. Therefore the two items in the original scale were not relevant in the context of competent person working on an electrical installation or electrical equipment. Furthermore the two items adopted were deemed sufficient to capture the type of support which the employees expected from their employer. Example of the item was "I received ample information from superiors, peers, and the organization to undertake competency training". In this study, the reliability (α) of the two-item perceived organization support for competency training was 0.804.

c. Perceived significance of competency training:

Other dimension for employee's perceptions on competency training was perceived significance of competency training. The items were three self-developed closed-ended questions. The questions were developed with the purpose to elicit factual information with regard to what the person was thinking of how the competency training will benefit them in their career. Example of the item was "The training subject matter is pertinent to my needs and interests". In this study, the reliability (α) of the three-item perceived significance of competency training was 0.916.

Votion to take on competency training:

Ehrhardt *et al.* (2011) adaptation of a two-itemed version of Kline and Peters's (1991) volition in job acceptance decision measure was adapted pertinent to measure volition to take on competency training. Example of the item was "I freely chose to attend competency training in my line of work". Item 2 was negatively worded and therefore were recoded before the analysis. Four new items were later introduced to the scale for the purpose of analysis in order to improve the scale's reliability. In this study, the reliability (α) of the six-itemed volition to take on competency training was 0.726. This had shown much improvement in internal consistency compared to the earlier two-itemed scale.

The above discussions of each scales used in this study indicated that all the scales were made of reliable sets of items where $\alpha > 0.7$ (De Vaus 2002).

Data analysis:

Prior to hypotheses testing, the validity of the scales was checked. Results of preliminary analysis confirmed that all the assumptions of regressions were met. Multicollinearity was checked through variable inflation factor and condition index. Subsequently, researcher proceeded to conduct linear regression analysis on the treated data to test for H1, H2, H3 and H4.

Results:

Table 1 below showed the linear regression between affective commitment and perceived training comprehensiveness. The result showed that perceived training comprehensiveness was significant in explaining affective commitment. The R² of .031 with adjusted R² of .024 implied that the predictor variable explained 2.4% of the variance in affective commitment. Therefore, hypothesis H1 where there was a positive relationship between employees' perceived training comprehensiveness and affective commitment was supported.

Table 1: Regression analysis results of affective and training comprehensiveness.

Variable	Unstandardized Reg.Co-efficient(B)	Standard Error	Standardized Reg. Co-efficient (β)
Constant	3.067	.223	
Perceived training comprehensiveness	.124	.057	.176*
Note: R = .176 , R ² = .031, Adj. R ² = .024 ; F = 4.673			
*p<.05 **p<.01			

Table 2 below showed the linear regression between affective commitment and perceived support for competency training. The result showed that perceived support for competency training was significant in explaining affective commitment. The R² of .110 with adjusted R² of .104 implied that the predictor variable explained 10.4% of the variance in affective commitment. Therefore, hypothesis H2 where there was a positive relationship between employees' perceived support for competency training and affective commitment was supported.

Table 2: Regression analyses results of affective and support.

Variable	Unstandardized Reg Co-efficient(B)	Standard Error	Standardized Reg. Co-efficient (β)
Constant	2.629	.218	
Perceived support for competency training	.243	.057	.332**

Note: R = .332 , R² = .110, Adj. R² = .104 ; F = 18.334

*p<.05 **p<.01

Table 3 below showed the linear regression between affective commitment and perceived significance of competency training. The result showed that perceived significance of competency training was significant in explaining affective commitment. The R² of .080 with adjusted R² of .074 implied that the predictor variable explained 7.4% of the variance in affective commitment. Therefore, hypothesis H3 where there was a positive relationship between employees' perceived significance of competency training and affective commitment was supported.

Table 3: Regression analysis results of affective and significance.

Variable	Unstandardized Reg. Co-efficient(B)	Standard Error	Standardized Reg. Co-efficient (β)
Constant	2.407	.320	
Perceived significance of competency training	.261	.074	.283*

Note: R = .283 , R² = .080, Adj. R² = .074 ; F = 12.528

*p<.05 **p<.01

Table 4 below showed the linear regression between affective commitment and employee's perceptions of competency training. The result showed that employee's perceptions of competency training were significant in explaining affective commitment. The R² of .093 with adjusted R² of .087 implied that the predictor variable explained 8.7% of the variance in affective commitment. Therefore, hypothesis H1-H3 where there was a positive relationship between employee's perceptions of competency training and affective commitment was supported.

Table 4: Regression analysis results of affective and perceptions of competency training.

Variable	Unstandardized Reg. Co-efficient(B)	Standard Error	Standardized Reg. Co-efficient (β)
Constant	2.396	.298	
Employee's perceptions of competency training	.095	.025	.305**

Note: R = .305 , R² = .093, Adj. R² = .087 ; F = 14.542

*p<.05 **p<.01

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis:

In order to test for H4, researcher conducted hierarchical multiple regression analysis on the treated data. Table 5 below showed the linear regression between affective commitment and employee's perceptions of competency training and volition to take on competency training. Based on the earlier Table 4, employee's perceptions on competency training contributed 8.7% of variance in affective commitment. At the second step, volition to take on competency training made a unique contribution of 3.2% to the variance of affective commitment. Table 5 above indicated that employee's perceptions on competency training were no longer a significant predictor when both employees' perceptions on competency training and volition to take on competency training were entered into the regression equation. In other word, these variables must be significantly correlated so that volition to take on competency training included employees' perceptions on competency training. Based on the analysis, it was apparent that employees' perceptions on competency training on its own are a relevant predictor of affective commitment. This agreed with H1 to H3 where there is a positive relationship between employee's perceived significance of competency training and affective commitment. However, in combination with volition to take on competency training, its effect was insignificant. Based on the analysis, H4 was supported where the relationship between employee's perceptions on competency training and affective commitment will be more positive for those who take on the competency training by own volition.

Table 5: Regression analysis results of affective and selected variables.

Variable	Unstandardized Reg.Co-efficient(B)	Standard Error	Standardized Reg. Co-efficient (β)
Constant	1.898	.354	
Employee's perceptions of competency training	0.033	.035	.105
Volition to take on competency training	.304	.122	.280*

Note: R = .362 , R² = .131, Adj. R² = .119 ; F = 10.655
*p<.05 **p<.01

Discussion & Conclusion:

The study had extended the current human resource development literature. The results showed consistency with most similar studies conducted in other countries. Therefore the theory could be generalized in the context of technical employees in Sarawak. All hypotheses posited in this study were supported. The result was consistent where training improved affective commitment. Training with own volition improved it even better. Hence it rendered support for employers in Sarawak to send their technical employees for competency training. This is despite the challenge that they might lose these competent workers especially since Sarawak is experiencing high labour force and employment growth. Through sending technical employees for competency training, not only would give organizations advantage over their competitors, they benefit the country with skilled workforces. Training their employees would not ultimately only mean enhancing their organizational performance but it will also benefit country with more reliable and capable workforce.

The study had provided evidence for the relationship between training as one human resource practice had on employees' affective commitment, and how the individuals' own volition had effect on this relationship. The results showed the applicability of the social exchange theory (Blau 1964) within the context of Malaysia. It suggested that employees in Malaysia view training as a gift. Further to that, this study had expanded the mainstream western literature on relationships between organizational training and affective commitment in Malaysia. The findings showed consistency with most findings in the western countries. This is despite the contrary findings in earlier study done by Nasurdin, Hemedi and Lye (2008) on Malaysian manufacturing operational employees. The relationship in the current study was further enhanced with the effect of volition to take on the competency training. This was consistent with Hicks (1984) who claimed that employees who received reasonable training and those who had a higher degree of choice were more likely to perceive the training to be appropriate for them to take and were better able to profit from training. Hicks (1984) findings had been supported by many other later studies such as studies by Anvari *et al.* (2010), Blauet *et al.* (2008) and Stanley *et al.* (2013). Therefore, the current study can be viewed as another support for self-determination theory of motivation (Stanley *et al.* 2013).

Based on the findings of this study, the human resource practice of organizations sending their technical employees for competency training at institutes did influence the employee's affective commitment. Employee's volition in their participation in particular competency training had further strengthened the relationship. Technical employees in Sarawak, Malaysia showed that their perceived training comprehensiveness, perceived support for competency training and perceived significance of competency training had positive effect on their affective commitment. Practically, the outcome of this study shall be one basis to convince employers in Sarawak that providing competency training to employees could ingrain higher commitment to the organization within the employees. This is because, according to Stanley *et al.* (2013), "affective commitment showed the strongest negative relationship with turnover intention and turnover." Besides that, the state would be enriched with having skilled workforce and organizations fulfilling regulatory requirements. This will result in the State meeting workforce needs as well as providing uplifted industry standard as demanded by Asean Free Trade Area (AFTA) and foreign investment coming into the Sarawak Super Corridor of Renewable Energy (SCORE).

The government could consider formulating a policy for employers of workers working on electrical installations and systems, both big and small organizations, to send their workers for competency training. In Malaysia, employers could claim the expenses for training from the Human Resources Development Fund which was established by the Federal Government. As such, employers were relieved some expenses of the training. Already in this direction, it should be enhanced further where competency training should be made mandatory for all workers. This would be further supported by the existing regulatory requirement. The Sarawak Civil Service itself were well on its way moving in this direction with its SCS 10-20 talent management. Therefore, measures should be taken to move other organizations in the state, both big and small, to begin stressing and insisting on competency training for all their employees especially those employees who were motivated to learn. This current discussion would be narrowed particularly within the context of the current study, which was for the electrical industry. All works on electrical installations and system should be undertaken or supervised by a certified competent person. Therefore, competency trainings should be made mandatory for all workers. Subsequently, they should obtain the competency certification. In todays' world, electricity had become a necessity in everyday life. Electricity is hazardous when handled unsafely. Taking

measures to ensure that all workers are trained accordingly would ensure our industry is supplied with competent and skilled workers. These competency trainings will also impart the sense of responsibility to the workers when performing their job. Eventually this will change the mind-set of employers from merely sending their employees for competency training for the sake of regulatory requirement to building a skilled and responsible workforce instead. This would result in the number of competent skilled workers in the State to be increased and would improve the industry as well as benefit the state economy indefinitely.

In sum, the study had extended the current human resource development literature. The results showed consistency with most similar studies conducted in other countries. All hypotheses posited in this study were supported. The result was consistent where training improved affective commitment. Training with own volition improved it even better. Hence, it rendered support for employers in Sarawak to send their technical employees for competency training. Through sending technical employees for competency training, not only would give organizations advantage over their competitors, they benefit the country with skilled workforces. Training their employees would not ultimately only mean enhancing their organizational performance but it will also benefit country with more reliable and capable workforce.

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