

## COLLABORATIVE LEARNING VIA SHARING SESSION TOWARDS ACHIEVING TRAINING EFFECTIVENESS IN NEGOTIATION EDUCATION

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### ABSTRACT

*Attaining training effectiveness for Negotiation as an elective subject in obtaining Bachelor of Human Resource Management in University Utara Malaysia will be beneficial for students when they start to work. The subject requires strong fundamental knowledge in human resource management and other management related subjects, as it demands students to be able to relate issues and needs in business venture strategic decision. However, the drawback in achieving this is difficult because students are weak in the basics due to low grasp of fundamental understanding. This action research has been conducted in two consecutive semesters in order to find the best way to improve student basic understanding thus connection to the higher-level knowledge is possible. The objective of this study is to evaluate collaborative learning as stipulated in the Theory of Planned Behaviour where we focus on the relationship between the intention to transfer training and training effectiveness. The method used is by introducing a sharing session, through small group discussion has been chosen for the purpose of developing effective negotiation education. As a result, students are more comfortable to be open-minded and less stressful while learning with their peers compared to instructors. Based on interviews and observations, results found that collaborative learning does improve understanding and built critical thinking. The approach developed has resulted in a more relaxed conducive learning environment and the training effectiveness achieved served as evidence in students' performance.*

**Keywords:** *Collaborative Learning, Training Effectiveness; Negotiation Education; Human Resource Management*

### INTRODUCTION

The key aspect of the Negotiation course is that it blends elements of Management and Business into negotiation activities (Barry, Lewicki & Saunders, 2015). From the previous outcome, it is found that students faced difficulties in critically grasping the skills the subject aims to develop and connecting to the course learning outcomes. Unfortunately, most students took the subject without envisaging the importance of application which is crucial when entering the career path. In this study, the ability of collaborative learning is explored to improve understanding of the subject taught.

Furthermore, the evaluation of training is subjective as it only confines to whatever was understood compared to what was learned. Nevertheless, for example, discussing on the aspect of training effectiveness relates closely to the number of complaint received by FMB, a unit under the central bank of Malaysia, in relation to the delivery of General Insurance products. The number of complaints received reflects the level of understanding of General Insurance Agents on each and every product offered to the public. Conversely, the

improvement of training quality much relates to the benchmark that was adopted by each and every company (Tannenbaum & Yukl, 1992).

### EVALUATION METHOD

This training method, increasingly popular in recent years (Hedge *et al.*, 2001), is based on multi-source feedback. Dalessio (1998) terms multi-source feedback as evaluations gathered about a group of subject from two or more rating sources.

In terms of evaluating the effectiveness of training programs, we adapt Kirkpatrick's measurement categories for evaluating the effectiveness of training programs including: reactions; learning; behavior; and results (Alliger and Janak, 1989).

The first category or level in Kirkpatrick's model is the "reaction" or outlooks that participants in a training program have toward the actual program. While this outcome is an important starting point for evaluating program outcomes, it is perhaps the least explored in any other studies. The second category in Kirkpatrick's model is "learning" and is concerned with knowledge outcomes, or ideas, information, and approaches from the training program that are understood and retained by trainees. For the third level in his model, Kirkpatrick identified "behavior" as an outcome. This level is concerned with the actual on-the-job application of learned ideas, information, and approaches from the training program. The final level in the model is concerned with "results," and is broadly conceived as the overall end results achieved. These results could take myriad forms including sales quotas met, cost reductions, increased employee retention or satisfaction, and any number of system outcomes.

When the reviews of training such as Gordon (1985), Burke and Day (1986), Bass (1990), Lewis (1995), and Collins and Holton (2004) are analysed, it becomes more apparent that little is known about successful managerial training that will boost organizational performance. Saari *et al.* (1988) argued that the reason for this lack of knowledge is a scarcity of meaningful and rigorous research; they contended that the evaluation of these training programs is not comprehensive. Similarly, Gordon (1985), in his review, concluded that the effectiveness of training programs devoted to management games or simulations is not clear. Further, Gordon stated that he could not find any published evidence that managers who perform well in management games and simulations will improve their performance on the job. Bass' (1990) conclusion was that despite their widespread use, evaluations of simulations are hard to come by. In the following section, evidence related to managerial training from various meta-analytic studies would be discussed.

The motivation of choosing this method is twofold. First, it aimed to change students' insight towards reading-based subject which was regarded as difficult. In fact, the subject is able to provide interesting findings if technique and styles are translated and understood which will not be effective if there is inadequate level of training program introduced.

Hence, in the sharing session, the objectives are:

- to enhance critical thinking towards better understanding of the subject and
- to enhance communication skill.

It is found that most students have weaknesses and lack of confidence in oral communication. Once communication skill is improved, students are capable of delivering and sharing knowledge acquired to reflect their understanding level.

This paper is organized as follows. In section 2, the literature review and theoretical framework are discussed. In section 3, the methodology is presented. The results are discussed in section 4. Finally, the work of this paper is summarized in the last section.

### **COLLABORATIVE LEARNING**

In general, collaborative learning is an instructional method in which the paired or grouped individuals work together to achieve common goals (Lang, 2008). Besides building interest among participants, this method is able to stimulate training effectiveness (Johnson & Johnson, 2008; Dewhurst, D., Harris, Foster-Bohm & Odell (2015). Grouping individuals of different level make participants responsible not only on their level of learning, but also of the other as well. Reaching the goals set implies that students have helped each other by teaching and learning together (Lang, 2008). A study conducted by Johnson & Johnson (2008), among secondary school students established that collaborative learning allows information acquired to be retained much longer compared to those who learnt individually. Collaborative learning consolidated the components of sharing, debating, arranging thoughts and reflections of thoughts which empower enthusiasm for learning as in agreement to constructivism standard. The procedure obliges students to end up more mindful of their learning and basic in picking the best thoughts. Besides, during the time spent shared learning, students turn out to be more capable as information is shared through examinations in this way turning out to be more basic.

### **SUPERVISOR SUPPORT**

The Issues discussed in supervisor support, in the context of Malaysia, is an explored correlation studies conducted for training effectiveness which showed that lack of support from immediate superior hindered the training effectiveness of organizations (Karuppaiya, 1996). It has also been revealed that supervisor's support in training directly impacts pre-training motivation (Facteau, *et al.*, 1995; Mathieu *et al.*, 1992; Tannenbaum, Cannon-Bowers, Salas and Mathieu, 1993). Prior researches by Rouillier and Goldstein (1991) and Ford *et al.* (1992) revealed transfer environment to be improved through strong approval from the supervisor as employees greatly tend to believe in opportunities to acquire competencies with this support.

Similarly, Tennant *et al.* (2002) revealed that support from immediate supervisory significantly correlated with effectiveness of training indicating an immediate supervisor's key role in determining the effectiveness or lack thereof of the training programs. For students learning Negotiation, lecturers may provide their support through feedback, encouragement and assistance; for instance, training transfer may fail if the supervisor fails to show his support for the transfer or if the trainee is under-motivated to do so.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Training effectiveness is dependent on training delivery method (Anderson et al., 1996; Boyle, Anderson, & Newlands, 1994; Doherty-Sneddon et al., 1997; Hale, 1998; Meline, 1976; Raphael & Wagner, 1974; Veinott, Olson, Olson, & Fu, 1999). Studies have shown that a critical factor influencing skill transferability between training and the job is the extent to which trainees receive the opportunity for practice and constructive feedback (Goldstein, 1993; Latham & Saari, 1979; Wexley & Latham, 1991). In classroom training, interactive activities are often used to engage trainees and enable real-time feedback for the trainees and trainer. These activities are considered critical for a quality learning experience (Wagner,

1998). Buch and Bartley (2002) also observed that most trainees preferred the traditional classroom training to other training delivery methods.

However, monitoring and assessment is crucial for collaborative learning to be effective. Instructor has to set both group goals and individual accountability. This is to ensure that each individual learnt something in the process of completing task. In fact, participant who teaches other is the one who learns most as backed up by most researchers.

## **METHODOLOGY**

During collaborative learning, the approach adapted focused on ensuring the improvement of understanding and building of critical thinking. One way to do it is to make it compulsory to complete the assignment in which whatever outcome attained will show the level of collaborative learning level achieved.

The subject Negotiation is taught as obligatory subject for students of Bachelor of Human Resource Management and an elective for Bachelor of Business Administration. Usually there are around 80 students per semester who are taking the subjects.

During the first semester when this research was conducted, the slot was scheduled for 2 hours, twice a week. The subject is spread out into 14 academic weeks with 28 meetings.

During the first session of meeting, students are divided into permanent groups. Each group consists of students who have both strong and weak preliminary knowledge on human resource management, different university entry qualification, race and gender. The aim of the grouping is to ensure that all groups are similar collectively.

The study is going under 3 phases of experiment using collaborative mode of discussion. The first phase that is in the first sharing session, students are given simple discussion to answer questions during game quiz. Group members are given 60 seconds to discuss before providing short answers. Questions are given in turn to each member, but before answering they are allowed to discuss the correct answer with the member.

During this session, instructor was able to observe whether the principle used above to check the level of understanding was reflected. If student was able to answer without discussing, it was concluded that the student had adequate level of understanding. If student discussed with group members it was inferred that they were either uncertain or had inadequate level of understanding. After completing the game quiz, a simple individual written test was given. At the end of the session, instructor was able to identify training effectiveness among students, individually.

The second phase was conducted by giving information to conclude a negotiation case study. All groups were given 15 minutes to prepare the conclusion before presenting it to the whole class. The discussion allowed all members to talk, evaluate and negotiate on their arguments. The presentation allowed them to compare answers obtained for the task. In the following week, an individual test on the topic was given to check their level of understanding.

The third phase was giving a group assignment after completing the second cycle. The group assignment took 5 weeks to be completed. One of the conditions of the project was to have minimum 3 discussion sessions with instructor to guide, argue and solve problems encountered in order to complete the assignment. However, most groups demanded for more consultation meetings. And the outcome of this task was assessed through written report.

The process was repeated in the following semester with a new set of students to confirm the results. Besides that, before completing each cycle, simple survey was conducted face to face during debriefing session in order to check on students' understanding and also on the training effectiveness. The following questions were asked:

- What have you learnt today?
- What are being discussed during negotiation process?
- Do you feel comfortable talking on the negotiation issue given? Why?
- Are you able to understand the learning content?
- Why the outcome (of the issue) is positive/negative?

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

As being observed during the course, students enjoyed “informal” learning through sharing session. They also felt more comfortable admitting to their peers rather than teachers that they did not know or they did not understand. For example, during the first phase, weaker students were identified where they were indirectly forced to talk and discuss with group member to answer questions given correctly.

In second phase, it was observed that groups were involved totally in discussion, that in an advance sharing session. During the session, instructors were sometimes being called to confirm arguments or seek help for better explanation. Instructor was also needed to clear confusion. When presentation was conducted, students were noted to ask questions promptly by referring to their friends or themselves collectively. For example;

“My friend here asked why in negotiation there is bargaining whilst in bargaining there no negotiation? Why there are differences?”

“We would like to know why integrative negotiation is the same as compromising and often regarded as “Best Alternative to A Negotiated Agreement?” Instead of using “I”, students were found to help their friend to clear confusion, as they were unable to rationalize. In response, instructor was not going to answer the questions directly but throwing it to the whole class and invite to a bigger circle of discussion session. The discussion was then steered by the instructor towards the right answer. Some students even called the instructor to reassure their understanding, such as:

“He/she would like to know why we did have to ensure proper communication, ethics, power, impasse as the main elements in negotiation”

From the information hinted by instructor to probe critical thinking, it was interesting to observe that students had gotten themselves ready in further discussion to find the explanation of the issue.

From the individual test given, it was observed that weak students improved their understanding gradually where students were able to solve given task. During post mortem of the test, students were able to relate to which learning session the questions were reflected. Some even admitted that they remembered who asked the questions being discussed, who argued on the issue and who gave the answers.

The third phase brought discussion into higher level, which was regarded as reflection session; it was to test their teamwork and written communication. Each consultation allowed instructor to identify understanding level of each group member deeper. Weak students were seen to have strong attachment with good students and declared themselves as study partners. Unsupportive students were found to successfully overcome their shyness barrier and were able to overcome their weaknesses on the topic.

In addition, writing report together helped weaker students to articulate their understanding better. During consultation, instructor was able to ask why and who constructed a particular argument for negotiation cases. One group member was explaining the answer orally and sometimes was interrupted and led to further discussion by others, mostly conforming their understanding on the issue.

In general, understanding of the topic was also reflected during and after the course. Individual improvements were recorded through cumulative assessment. Yet, some positive comments were collected as follows:

- “We don’t know that we are actually learning during the semester. All along we only talked to each other.” “It is so fun and interesting.”
- “I am afraid of doing negotiation before but now I understand why you (the instructor) claimed that negotiating with strangers is actually very interesting.”
- “I hate group work as usually we had free riders. However, the compulsory consultation allows us to be more serious in learning. Everybody has to understand the topic before you (instructor) ask question. We do not want to lose mark.” (They thought they would be penalized if a question asked in prompt answered wrongly).
- “I thought negotiation is difficult but my friends make it easier by giving tips and tricks during discussion.”
- “I do not know how but now I found my pre-requisite subject is easy. Why did not I score before?”
- “I do not feel guilty for not knowing. My friends help me and I remember. Excellent”
- “No readings but I know many new things. This is great.”
- Finding shows that results of test and final exams improved through the application of collaborative learning.
- Students who neglect the importance of prior knowledge were able to improve their understanding not only on prior knowledge but also on current knowledge.
- Response received changed from “what is the correct answer?” to “why this is the correct answer?” towards the end of the semester.
- By understanding the concept, students focused more in enhancing their knowledge through critical thinking rather than remembering facts for the purpose of passing exams.
- The learning process helps students to develop their critical thinking through fulfilling the needs of finding solutions.
- The method of taking in likewise varies from different subjects being taught (as a rule repetition educating).
- The learning approach opens more open door for understudies to enhance their correspondence ability through dynamic realizing, which requires talking, exhibiting and report composing. Modest students were obliged to talk instead of floating away and turn out to be free riders.
- Among students with fears on theory subjects, they turn out to be more agreeable and fascinated when the subject was shared via comprehension and the mode of learning also differs from other subjects being taught.

## CONCLUSION

This study proves that collaborative learning is beneficial in achieving training effectiveness. The approach is two-branched, allows formal and informal objectives being targeted simultaneously. In this case, collaborative learning, mainly discussion, was able to improve not only understanding by being more critical but also communication skills; oral and written.

However, findings of this study relied too much on observation and semi-formal survey. The study would have been more reliable if it was supported with comparisons between different natures of subject, as this subject is centred on personal based analysis. It is also suggested that comparisons are made between different groups to see the effectiveness of collaborative learning in negotiation.

In conclusion, the research also prompts teacher to be more sensitive in understanding students' need. The understandings between students-teachers also contributed to students' level of comfort in a sharing session which enabled relaxed learning session. By this, collaborative learning can be fully beneficial to students.

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