

Government Administration HRD Role in Developing Countries: What can be learned from the Malaysian HRD experience?

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Abstract

This case study is about conceptualizing the proper role of government administration in promoting HRD in developing countries. The main objective is to provide thoughts relevant to the topic based on lessons learned from the Malaysian experience during ten years (1997- 2007). The conclusions of the research are built upon analysis of data obtained through interviews of Malaysian government officials and examination of Malaysian government documents. Over all, the analysis suggests that in order to design and implement sound HRD programs, a developing country needs to: a- realize the general challenges associated with HRD, and how these challenges should be dealt with; b- distinguish its special HRD needs in light of its unique circumstances; c- identify the specific obstacles that are likely to hinder its particular HRD operations; d- define accurately its available resources; and e-

understand correctly the adequate role of government administration in the process.

Introduction

Experts and leaders of development have always maintained that: "the real treasure of a country is its human resources". This can not be disputed. But what is yet to win consensus is deciding what a developing country can and should do to develop its human resources meaningfully and efficiently.

Malaysia is an example of a developing country which has engaged in a relentless effort of human resources' development since independence. Even though not absolute, its accomplishments with respect to stability, prosperity, sufficiency, and

evident. Understandably, such accomplishments are HRD based; and are essential for the well being of the people. Relevant studies and neutral expert reports have praised the relative positive results of the Malaysian HRD efforts thus far (i.e., the World Bank latest report on Malaysia, published 2007).

To admire Malaysia's HRD previous and current efforts based on observed results should not be considered a judgment about these efforts long term meaningfulness. In fact, the meaningfulness of Malaysia's HRD previous and current programs in the long run is not at all that clear. It would be reasonable to suggest that a country's HRD achievements are deemed meaningful if they serve the purpose of sustaining long-term economic, human, and social progress; and are compatible with the country's special social, political, and technical development needs and ambitions. Given this criteria, we will soon enough be able to find out the quality level of Malaysia's HRD.

Useful lessons can be learned from reviewing the Malaysian HRD experience regardless of the long term quality of its results. Generally speaking, such review should help achieve the following:

- 1- Underline the major challenges and obstacles that a developing country needs to overcome to effectively develop its human resources.
- 2- Define the role of government administration in overcoming these challenges and obstacles.
- 3- Identify suitable measures to guarantee good HRD results in light of the developing country's special needs and circumstances.

Methodological Framework

Statement of the problem

What can, and what should a developing country's government administration do to promote meaningful

national HRD? How can a developing country's government administration achieve national HRD most efficiently in light of the complexity and difficult realities of modern world?

The issues raised by the previous questions can be problematic as far as HRD in developing countries is concerned. Never the less, a number of observers argue that the Malaysian HRD experience provides significant leads regarding those issues. Malaysia's economic progress and its general development status up to now, support such argument. Seemingly, the Malaysian HRD programs have made its focus and prime objective the general good of the people. This has been done despite the constraints imposed by international realities, and the difficulties caused by many unfavorable internal social, cultural, economic, and political conditions (which certainly restrict the country's options in relation to related issues; and impose many constraints on its ability to act independently).

Needless to say, contemporary life is full of challenging contradictions and inconsistencies. These can have negative impact on a developing country's surge to advance. These include: limited resources, the complications associated with seeking agreement and consensus, and cultural, technical, and psychological obstacles hindering people's readiness to be utilized effectively in development. Malaysia appears to have done relatively well in dealing with these challenges.

If Malaysia can do it, any other developing country can. What is required? What is the formula for HRD success in a developing country given the Malaysian experience? The current case study is an attempt to provide an answer.

Research purpose

To be precise, this research is a qualitative investigation of government administration HRD role in Malaysia during the years from 1997 until 2007. The purpose is to reach some constructive conclusions

regarding government administration proper HRD role in developing countries.

Research question

To guide the accomplishment of the specific purpose of the current research, the following research questions were established:

- 1- Considering the ten years time frame on which this investigation concentrates, what did government administration in Malaysia have to do to discover, define, and meet the country's HRD needs? What did government administration in Malaysia focused on (in terms of program content and means of accomplishment) to achieve the desired HRD results?
- 2- What were the main factors behind Malaysian HRD programs during the ten years period on which this research concentrates?
- 3- What can be learned from the Malaysian HRD experience regarding government

administration HRD role in a developing country?

Research design

In order to answer the previous questions, theoretical review of relevant literature; exploratory interviews with government officials from Malaysian Ministries involved intensely in national HRD; and examination of relevant government documents were conducted. Interviews and examination of documents are prime methods in qualitative research (Bryman, 1989).

Interviews were used in this research as a fact gathering tool; and to verify and substantiate findings of literature survey. By and large, the procedures observed in conducting the interviews followed those suggested by Oppenheim in his discussion of exploratory interview as a research tool (Oppenheim, 1992). Arrangements were made to meet with officials of different ranks at selected government organizations. These organizations were chosen on the basis of their very close link to HRD programs. The meetings' arrangements were made

through contact by phone or personal visit. Local acquaintances were helpful in this regard.

To create a comfortable and un-intimidating atmosphere, interviews were freed of any matter that could make respondents suspicious of the researcher's intentions. At the beginning of each interview, the respondent was assured about the interview's pure academic purpose. Also, interviews were not tape recorded. All interviews (except one) took place at the respondent's office during office hours.

Government documents were used as a source of data to fulfill the following functions:

- 1- provide information on issues that were not addressed during interviews.
- 2- Check the validity of information derived from interviews.
- 3- Discover the gap (if any) between official HRD policy and practice.

Such functions are valuable in qualitative research (Bryman, 1989).

The Theoretical Framework

Literature review

A large body of literature exists on HRD at both: the macro (national), and micro (organization) levels. The subject continues to attract researchers' interest. Focus of research in relation to the subject covered a wide spectrum of issues.

At the macro level, recent research included the presentation and review of theories and perspectives on national HRD in developing countries (i.e., Wang and Swanson, 2008; Garavan, 2007; Garavan et al., 2007; Lynham and Cunningham, 2006; Nafukho et al., 2004; McLean, 2004). Analyzing cases of national HRD in the developing world was also a focus of recent research (i.e., Cox et al., 2006; Bardhan, 2002; Noorbakhsh et al., 2001)

At the micro level, a number of issues relating to

HRD in developing countries were explored in recent literature. Among these issues are employees' satisfaction (Wan, 2007; Chen et al., 2004); employees' organizational commitment (Ahmad and Abu Bakar, 2003); and organizational values (Hassan, 2007).

On a more general frame of reference, researchers studied HRD in relation to many modern working environment concerns. Included are technology (Felker and Sundaram, 2007; Sun, 2001); culture (Baker and Mohammed, 2007; McGuire et al., 2002); and small organizations (Nolan, 2002). Of the more important findings of HRD research at the micro level are the following:

- ♦ Investing in HRD would trigger high level organizational and individual performance (Marchington and Wilkinson, 2002).
- ♦ HRD should be viewed and used as a business strategy tool (Gilley et al., 2002).

- ♦ A positive correlation exists between HRD and employees' satisfaction (Guest, 2002).
- ♦ Adequate HRD practices contribute to a high level of organizational commitment among employees (Iles et al., 1990).

Literature on government HRD role in Malaysia is limited. Comprehensive studies on HRD in Malaysia in general, and on the Malaysian government HRD role in particular are lacking. A most recent relevant study, which according to its authors, is "the first known" on HRD in Malaysia has made note of the fact (Abdullah et al, 2007). Still, however, we can find useful references to the issue in the literature.

To begin with, we review the study of Abdullah et al, referred to above. The study indicated that the current national HRD policy of Malaysia is a product of the Human Resources Development Act of 1992, which highlights the importance of providing

potential, unskilled, or low skilled workers with skills, knowledge and expertise to enhance their innovativeness and creativity through development and training (op cit). The policy reflects Malaysian government's endeavor to establish knowledge – based economy (op cit). The foundation for this endeavor was laid in the 1990s under the Third Outline Perspective Plan. The key element of the plan is to build knowledge – based workforce, to support the country's vision of achieving a fully developed nation statues by the year 2020 (op cit). Since then, the government has actively emphasized and promoted its objective of creating knowledge – based economy (k-economy), taking initiatives and providing incentives and support to the private sector for that cause (op cit).

Relatively recent government reports indicate that government's latest activities in relation to HRD, has been directed towards the manufacturing industry. This is because the industry

accounts for the country's major exports and economic growth (Ministry of Finance, 2004). As suggested by Abdullah and colleagues (2007), this is evident by way of the many initiatives and incentives which the government offers to the private sector. Obviously, this implies that the private sectors' HRD practices reflect to a considerable extent government HRD policy.

On the basis of the previous implication, studies focusing on HRD practices in the private sector can be reviewed for the purpose of learning more about government administration HRD role in Malaysia. One of these studies is relevant to some of the notions laid in the current research hypothesis. The study examined the relationship between HRD and organizational values in 8 private sector organizations in Malaysia (Hassan; 2007). The study found that HRD practices are positively related to organizational values such as creativity, quality and initiative; which are highly emphasized by Malaysian government HRD policy.

So, according to Hassan's study, it is not only that government had initiated HRD policy that gives weight and stress HRD practices that would make a difference, including training, appraisal, and career planning; but it considered in its initiatives, values that have proved to trigger employees' enthusiasm and eagerness. Moreover, the government has not isolated itself in its ivory headquarters. On the contrary, it has been following world market development and business advancements, bearing in mind the interests of the national private sector.

Another study relating to HRD in Malaysia focused on analyzing the relationship between training, as an HRD practice, and the organizational commitment of white collar workers (Ahmed and Rida; 2003). The study found a high level of organizational commitment among Malaysian white collar workers. This was explained on the basis of the availability of and support for training. Similarly, in an analysis of 4 multinational companies operating in Malaysia,

performed by Wan (2007), he found that human capital development practices – including training which is highly emphasized by Malaysian government HRD policy – were positively related to employees' satisfaction, and hence, their high level of productivity.

Other earlier relevant studies considered the nature of Malaysia's previous HRD experience. For example, in a study undertaken by Debrah, McGovern and Budhwar (2000), it was found that the Malaysian HRD policies and practices complement the South-East Asian Growth Triangle. Another study explained that early HRD in Malaysia is affected by transnational companies in the advent of technological innovation and labor market (Abdullah et al, 2007).

Conclusions drawn from literature review

Three important conclusions can be drawn from literature review. First, in order to form meaningful HRD programs a developing country needs to consider and

address a number of challenges that grow out of its unique internal and external environment. Only through careful understanding of these challenges can the developing country tackle the issue of HRD with hope. This is a prime responsibility of government administration.

Another conclusion is that the success of a developing country in dealing with the challenges of HRD wisely is determined by its understanding of the requirements and limitations imposed on it by its special needs and circumstances. Each developing country is in fact a distinct case, requiring a set of HRD activities that take into account the exclusivity of the situation. The recognition and consideration of this fact is another important responsibility of government administration.

Last but not least, a developing country's HRD programs should reflect sound government administration ethical and technical principles and practices. This necessitates a government administration role established on the bases of

strong sense of responsibility and accountability; and reinforced formally by law, regulations and rigorous control.

The case study

The study hypotheses

The previous conclusions drawn from literature review were points of reference on which the induction of five hypotheses regarding the Malaysian government administration HRD role were based. These hypotheses are:

- 1- In the context of its endeavor to design meaningful HRD programs, the Malaysian government administration considers the challenges that must be addressed to overcome obstacles growing out from its unique internal conditions and the realities of modern world which can hinder its HRD.
- 2- The Malaysian government administration has focused its HRD activities on areas which it perceives should receive priority care in light of the challenges and obstacles it envisions; the

human and social development objectives it seeks; and the social, human and economic progress level it wants to reach.

- 3- Government organizations in Malaysia which are concerned with national HRD initiation and execution coordinate their efforts effectively as a pre-condition for understanding the country's special HRD needs, and identifying the requirements of effective HRD programs.
- 4- Government administration in Malaysia defines early and carefully the resources (financial and non-financial) needed to achieve its HRD priorities. This enables it to maintain strong resolve to deliver satisfying results, and to skillfully: a- utilize culture diversity to support its programs; b- learn useful lessons from models of modernization and industrialization; and c- identify and benefit from opportunities associated with market globalization trends.

- 5- In order to deliver sensible HRD results, the Malaysian government administration demonstrates strong sense of responsibility and accountability both ethically and technically.

Interviews

To examine the validity of the above hypotheses, 4 interviews with 4 high Malaysian government officials were conducted. The interviewed officials come from:

- The Prim Minister Office Economic Planning Unite (2 officials).
- The Ministry of Works (1 official).
- The Ministry of Human Resources (1 official).

Related recent government publications and reports were reviewed and analyzed to verify and supplement the interviews. Also, the researcher engaged in relevant discussion with some academics at the University of Malaya working regularly (in a consultative

capacity) on relevant government programs.

Interviews 1 and 2

The specific research questions regarding the overall Malaysian government HRD role were presented to two high government officials from the Economic Planning Unit (EPU); an agency linked to the office of the Prime Minister. One of those officials is a leading authority within the Human Resources Section; and the other is a leading authority from the Macro Economic Section. The responses of the two officials to the questions can be summarized as follows:

- ◆ In planning and designing HRD programs, the government bases its decisions on the intensive work undertaken by the Interagency Planning Committee. This committee is made up of representatives from different ministries; and is established for the purpose of identifying relevant issues, and introducing strategies to meet the challenges these issues pose.
- ◆ A number of measures have been utilized by the government to understand and conceptualize HRD needs; hence, envision suitable policy options. Only after that, HRD policy formulation actually takes place. Among these measures:
 - ◆ Intensive relevant studies by the National Human Resources (ISMK), which is a government agency under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Human Resources.
 - ◆ Relevant research by scholars from different universities.
 - ◆ Research undertaken by EPU in its capacity as an information gathering agency. The EPU employs different techniques to acquire sensible information including field visits and accessing intelligence data-base.
 - ◆ Through analysis of annual population sensor projections.

- ◆ Through analysis of relevant reports released by independent national and international identities such as scholars, universities, research centers, and the world-bank.
- ◆ Bench-marking countries that have undertaken serious actions and concentrated efforts in relation to HRD, including China, Brazil, Singapore, and Taiwan. The objective is to learn, through well-conducted and carefully analyzed comparative studies, from the mistakes and strengths of the experiences of others.
- ◆ The government has projected, during the early stages of national development planning, that the country would be economically secured with a 70,000.000 population; as it will, with this population size, count on local market and the diversification of its working force skills to

keep production going. However, since reaching the 70,000.000 population target is a long term objective, the country has to depend in the short run more heavily on international markets to sell what it produces. Therefore, the government has adapted certain measures to reduce the negative effects of this dependence on the countries' economic well being. Among the most important of these measures are the followings:

- 1- Specializing in areas of production where the country can perform best in light of existing capabilities and resources.
- 2- Looking into regional markets and the markets of developing countries to identify relatively stable partners to align its economic planning with. This is thought to be an arrangement that makes the production of the country less subject to

fluctuations caused by international economic and political factors.

Finally, interviewees indicated that the government examines the rate of return of investment in education and training through studying and defining the occupation structure of the working force, and the salary and income situation of the working people.

Interview 3

Another high government official (from the Ministry of Works) was asked the same research questions. In response, the official indicated the followings:

- ◆ The government HRD policy emphasizes a step – by- step approach; prioritizing what is more important for the well-being of the people at the time of program development (e.g. during the years following independence, the government gave priority to eliminating poverty through developing basic skills; that is, skills of

cheap labor). This view was reinforced by a highly situated professor at the University of Malaya with links to relevant government activities.

- ◆ The government strong awareness of world and domestic realities and affairs is utterly present during development and execution stages of HRD programs; and that enables the government to understand what is required.
- ◆ One of the most perpetual factors that influence the government HRD decisions is the adaptation of technology and management policies which are compatible with modern trends, approaches, and advancements.
- ◆ Government HRD programs have always been flexible, when needed.
- ◆ The government has aligned itself recently with the private sector; taking into consideration the private sector's interests,

and supporting its HRD programs.

- ◆ Government HRD programs are designed on the basis of realistic national strategic planning. This fact reflects a well maintained feature of Malaysian government; that is acting upon its decisions.
- ◆ The government has continued to prepare the stage for adequate HRD programs' delivery by undertaking complex projects that are most essential for meaningful programs' design and execution, such as universities, roads, bridges, and public facilities (including hospitals, parks, schools, prisons, and police stations). Such complex projects are changing how people think; which is a most important outcome as far as HRD programs' design and execution are concerned.
- ◆ Recently, HRD programs, initiated or supported by the government, started to emphasize the

development of human skills, while continuing to emphasize the development of technical skills.

- ◆ The basic formula for success that has for long been advertised by government HRD programs is manufacturing plus cheap labor.

Interview 4

A fourth government official (from the Ministry of Human Resources) had the following to say in response to the research questions:

- ◆ Ministry of Human Resources focuses on offering training that provides targeted high school graduates (those with low cumulative grade average; and consequently, have no opportunity to pursue higher education) with skills required by industry.
- ◆ The Ministry of Human Resources is working at closing the gap between what local markets and national industry require and the output of

government training schemes.

- ◆ The Ministry of Human Resources advertises extensively for its training schemes.
- ◆ Government training is cutting cross all government industries; particularly, Ministry of Youth, Ministry of Entrepreneur and Cooperative Development, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Higher Education, and Ministry of Agriculture.
- ◆ The government supports HRD by offering:
 - 1- More and greater capacity for training.
 - 2- Apprenticeship schemes.
 - 3- Financial support to compensate the private sector for some of the cost of hiring unskilled workers and providing training to them.

Analysis and discussion

Review and analysis of the information obtained from interviews support to a great extent the hypotheses of the

current research. The following discussion provides justifications.

- ◆ First, it was clear from interviews of Malaysian government officials, review of government publications and reports, and discussion exchange with Malaysian academics that the Malaysian government's involvement in HRD, during the ten years from 1997-2007 (and since independence for that matter), has been characterized by **intensive investigation** to define **areas of focus** that should receive **priority care**. These areas must have direct positive impact on the **government strategic objective of improving the pace of social and human development and economic progress**. For that purpose, Malaysian government organizations concerned with HRD realized the importance of coordinating their activities. Coordination would facilitate the accurate realization of the country's special HRD needs and what is required

to meet these needs. The strong emphasis on **inter-government coordination** with regard to HRD activities is reflected in many government HRD formal arrangements (see: Ministry of Human Resources Annual Report; 2007). Coordination between government agencies involved in HRD has proved valuable in the Malaysian scene. Because of it, **the prime challenges** facing the government HRD efforts have become better recognized, and **thoroughly addressed during strategic planning**. And this has enhanced government administration ability to skillfully and effectively assume the role of active HRD agent.

◆ Second, government administration responsible for HRD in Malaysia realized the significance of the **availability of adequate financial resources** in particular, to achieve established HRD priorities. Evidence to that is the Ministry of Finance allocation of extra

resources for the purpose of HRD. Government administration has also displayed efficiency in using available financial resources. Evidence to that is the Ministry of Human Resources readiness to stop funding training programs that don't prove valuable in delivering meaningful outcomes.

◆ Third, government administration in Malaysia has enhanced its HRD practices through utilization of culture diversity. Its focus with respect to this matter has been **"continues praising of the country's national identity and integration"**.

◆ Fourth, government administration has understood the value of **bench-marking** the modernization efforts and industrialization models of countries with admirable experiences, including Japan, China, and Ireland. Also, the government HRD practices have benefited from decision makers' consciousness of the fact that attractive **opportunities** which are

worth considering for national HRD programs do emerge from **trends of market globalization.**

- ◆ Fifth, in order to deliver effective and sensible results in relation to its HRD, Malaysian government administration has **applied bench-marking correctly.** Bench-marking for HRD does not mean following the foot steps of those considered examples of success with relation to the subject indiscriminately. Rather, it means comprehending the messages of those examples as they offer the best available philosophy, ideas and practices for HRD. Based on its government administration correct comprehension of the lessons learned, Malaysia has been able to design its own HRD project that is suitable to its needs and special circumstances.
- ◆ Sixth, the country's **education system** is an indication of the quality of government HRD policy. Particularly speaking,

university under-graduate and higher education curriculums are designed and updated in accordance with government **HRD strategies.**

- ◆ Most importantly, the government of Malaysia, through its departments that carry national HRD responsibilities (i.e., The Ministry of Human Resources; the Ministry of Finance; the Ministry of Works) has:
 - ◆ Invested heavily in the construction of more **industrial training institutes.**
 - ◆ Established HRDF Act (levy-grant system) to **encourage** (some times, **force**) employers to continuously **train** their workers.
 - ◆ Provided **soft loan** to encourage students to pursue their **career in I-skill.**
 - ◆ Forged closer relationship with the **industrial players** to **close the gap** between

government and the industries.

The above conclusions give a bright impression about the Malaysian national HRD programs. However, a degree of skepticism regarding some technical aspects and the long term quality and value of the Malaysian national HRD can be detected from some officials point of views; and from the literature (i.e., Abdullah et al, 2007; Cox et al., 2006). Although important, the current investigation was not undertaken to present details on such skepticism; nor to discuss and analyze its legitimacy. Rather, the intention associated with this investigation (as stressed repeatedly through out this research) was to provide information, based on the Malaysian experience, about government administration HRD role in developing countries, and the challenges it needs to confront in order to deal with national HRD problem with hope. These challenges are outlined below.

1- Upholding cultural values and norms. If a

developing country is to succeed in developing the skills of its human resources in a way that serves its real and correct development needs most efficiently, its plans must respect the cultural values and norms which people are strongly attached to. This will secure a stronger commitment on the part of those targeted by the development efforts than would be the case otherwise. It is therefore essential that government administration in developing countries be careful when reviewing its development options, not to ignore the fact that the attitude and reaction of people towards its HRD plans and actions are shaped by what is culturally accepted and rejected. And this implies a necessity on the part of government authorities and concerned organizations to concentrate on pursuing HRD programs which result in the development of corporate cultures that coincide with people's norms and values. Corporate culture has been

defined as "the moral, social, and behavioral norms of an organization based on the beliefs, attitudes, and priorities of its members". Learning through education and training is central for the development of strong corporate culture. Strong corporate culture will likely enhance the efforts of effective national human resources development. Hence, this must be considered a first and important step in a national HRD program. National HRD programs which are based on officials' consciousness of the special cultural features and requirements of the work force signify respect and high regard to community values. And that should be a factor motivating the workforce to respond positively to the programs. For this reason, it is important to develop and maintain this consciousness among government HR developers and planners through extensive training.

2- Realization that states are not equal in their needs and interests.

The best national human resources development plan is one that is designed to best serve the special needs and interests of the country and its sectors. National human resources development planning should be objective, providing means to eventually set the stage for achievement of priorities, goals, and interests that truly make a difference as far as the fate of the country and the well-being of its people are concerned. Planning is not a chance for planners only to show how professional and skillful they are; but also how ethical, realistic and precise their judgment and choices can be.

3-Developing comprehensive HR strategy.

The best national HRD program is one that is part of a comprehensive national HR strategy. Good national HR strategies begin with identifying national work

needs and work requirements. Recruitment and selection of those who have the greatest potential for development in light of job needs and requirements can then be initialized. To be effective, recruitment and selection should be based on projections of workers' flows into, out of, and within work organizations. Information about past flows and the products of education system is the starting point, of course, to make well founded projections of future workforce requirements. Strategic planning is the best means through which selections decisions can be made. Following recruitment and selection, the process of HRD begins. Mentoring and coaching should be fundamental elements of the development programs. Mentoring and coaching are essential to guide workers and provide them with reference points on their progress. Also effective HR strategy provides for HRD programs that invest heavily in learning through

training. The identification of training needs and policy; and the details relating to training content, scope, and overall thrust should be entirely in the hands of those who will supervise its beneficiaries. Workers should be encouraged to discuss their training needs, both for their current job and for planned career moves. Longer range training to meet career goals and strategic planning objectives should also be part of HRD. Moreover, career broadening should be a prime focus in HRD programs in order to secure flexibility to quickly adapt to changes in the work environment. This would ensure the existence of a large cadre of mobile employees who are willing and able to move to new, demanding work assignments. In addition, effective HR strategy provides for effective HRD through competition among workers for career progression; effective performance review process; effective means

for knowledge transfer;
and effective leadership.

4-Allocating sufficient financial resources and using the resources wisely.

Surly, financial resources can only be available by a limited amount. But the amount must be adequate to achieve the goals of national HRD. If the amount is too small the task can not be accomplished, simply because the money available to finance its accomplishment is not enough. Also it is essential not to miss-use financial resources available for the process of HRD. In short, the failure to continue the HRD course of action after starting it must not be allowed. Such failure can only happen if allocated financial resources are not enough; or if allocated resources are spent un-wisely. It is a most important requirement, therefore, to be able to continue financing HRD programs

at all times and regardless of volatile swings in financial budget levels. Hence, good quality management of financial resources is vital.

5-Utilizing HR assessment technology to plan

HRD. HR assessment technologies have developed to a very advanced stage now days. It can only be beneficial, therefore, to initiate a particular HRD program that serves the national HRD strategy through application of suitable HR assessment technology systems such as those developed by Thomas International. Such systems are designed to assist in the selection, appraisal, development and coaching of workers. These systems are best used in conjunction with a process whereby workers' experience, education, qualifications, competence and trainability can be assessed. Correct applications of such technology should

produce objective results relating to the precise HR development and training needs which are essential in light of specific country requirements and ambitions.

6- Promoting positive work force attitudes toward HRD.

An attitude is a psychological stand of a person in relation to an issue. National HRD programs need to be designed with full recognition that members of work force attitudes towards HRD constitute an essential factor for HRD success. In other words Positive attitudes among members of the work force towards national HRD programs constitute a condition for absorbing the programs requirements; and that is important for smooth program execution. It is certainly not enough to have well planned HRD programs only. Work force positive reaction to the programs and its enthusiastic interaction with them will prove to be more important for the

fate of the programs. Therefore, it is central that work force members realize their personal needs for change and improvement, and be convinced of the direct and clear link between these needs and the designed HRD programs. Certainly this can be an incentive for active participation on the part of those who are supposed to benefit from HRD programs; and that will be for the good of the programs.

7-Differentiating between change and transformation.

The concept of change is not synonymous with the concept of transformation. National HRD programs are not always based on this understanding. Hence they do not produce the right results. An HRD program may be triggered by efforts to improve processes. In that case the focus of the HRD program would be on changing workers' skills and knowledge while

maintaining the culture. On the other hand, HRD programs could be triggered by a strategy designed to transform the image of skills' identity of the entire work force. In this case the focus would be more on changing workers' mindsets and culture than their technical capabilities. Obviously, HRD requirements for the two ends are different. HRD programs which focus on transformation are meant to create a new identity with new characteristics and reputation. And that change is more fundamental and enduring for a developing country now days than changing work style and improving workers' skills.

8-Accepting the challenges of modern technological changes and developments.

Technological advances are changing the way people do things. Current requirements are for more professional and technical

tasks, and fewer support activities. Therefore, national HRD programs need to be built on realization that flexibility, skills, and professionalism are essential requirements to face up to modern work challenges. Since the nature of most aspects of now days work requires a high level of skill and versatility, HRD programs in developing countries should be committed to investing heavily in training and career development. To do that properly four key HR issues need to be given adequate attention: utilizing knowledge and experience accumulated locally; intensifying training of the workforce in up-to-date skills necessary for planned assignments; developing long-term career potential; and creating a positive work environment which motivates and promotes productivity.

9- Creating a positive work environment.

The creation of a positive work environment is an

essential requirement for successful national HRD programs. A positive work environment ensures that workers have a strong sense of their value and contribution. It helps encourage commitment on workers' part, increase retention, and facilitate mobility and versatility. That helps organizational identities achieve their goals of which workers' commitment to the success of HRD programs is an important one. Thus, government organizations should promote national HRD practices indicative of their emphasis on creating positive work environment. A positive work environment encourages, with caution, risk taking; allows for flexible work schedules; offers different options to employees. A positive work environment is also characterized by consistency and tradition. Consistency and tradition are essential because they build trust and commitment, and spawns openness by enabling employees to focus on

work and on career development.

10-Sustaining the effort.

National HRD is not a one go effort. It is an on-going process. Government organizations concerned with HRD should on an ongoing basis, review, discuss and monitor the identification of changes in work force development and training needs and policy.

To end this discussion, it seems that the ideal formula for HRD success in developing countries, as can be realized from the Malaysian experience, is one that emphasizes the following:

- ♦ Maintaining a political and administrative will to defy the challenges of limited resources, resistance, understanding, shortage of skills, global conditions, local conditions, strategic planning, continuity, and above all, safeguarding the distinct value system people strongly identify with.
- ♦ Maintaining an administrative resolve to act competently,

skillfully, and ethically according to the real interests of the people.

- ♦ Maintaining a government belief that the best, most efficient, and most rewarding way for the country to advance and prosper, is to rely on its own human resources.

This is the formula which seems to have worked relatively well for Malaysia. And it can be suggested that the same formula would yield reasonable results for any developing country, provided that government administration acts wisely and with a strong sense of responsibility.

Conclusion

This research examined the Malaysian national HRD experience during ten years (1997 - 2007). The objective was to learn lessons that help conceptualize government administration proper HRD role in developing countries. This objective was sought through an analysis that concentrated on identifying major challenges confronting HRD efforts in a developing

country. The Malaysian case provides evidence that the success of a developing country in dealing with these challenges wisely is determined by its ability to understand the requirements and limitations imposed on it by its special needs and circumstances. This in turn is largely determined by the quality and effectiveness of government administration. Basically, to be an effective agent of sensible HRD programs, government administration has to adapt practices that reflect effective inter-government coordination (in terms of procedures and arrangements), and sound ethical and technical principles. It is suggested here, that understanding the challenges outlined in this study would enhance the ability of a developing country's government administration to identify ethical and technical principles and practices that are most compatible (both in terms of form and quality) with its special needs and circumstances.

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