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# Organizational culture and development: Testing the structural path of factors affecting employees' work performance in an organization

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ABSTRACT

In the world of business skills training, employees' skills can be generally divided into two main categories: hard skills and soft skills. For organization to wax stronger and competitive in the business environment today, employees need to possess soft skills in addition to hard skills. The purpose of this study is twofold: first, to examine the direct influence of both training methodology and trainers' effectiveness on soft skills acquisition, followed by identifying soft skill competencies and their influence on employees' work performance. The study was designed to use a survey research method in studying the effects of soft skills on employee work performance. The units of analysis were the selected managers and executives of a few Malaysian-based companies. Random sampling procedures were carried out in 10 different Malaysian companies, which consisted of about 1200 soft skills trainees, from which 260 participants were selected. The findings revealed that the model of trainer effectiveness and training methodology factors have provided a reasonable explanation for the influence of soft skill acquisition which is the latent variables. The model also revealed that soft skill acquisition positively influenced employees' work performance. The authors recommend need for employers to restructure the methodology for training employees on soft-skills. It is also recommend that, corporate institutions need to adopt 'time-spaced learning' training method in order to circumvent the hindrances associated with training transfer.



## 1. Introduction

One of the major challenges for leaders and administrators is the issue of managing human resources for achieving the company specified goals. Hence, an individual leader or administrator cannot solely implement institutional responsibilities and reach the desired outcomes without the cooperation of other human beings. Working with people in an organization is an imperative for a leader or administrator. As a result, leadership requires specialized skills, which could aid and enhance interpersonal relationships with other people. In order to achieve skills like interpersonal relationship among employees in organization, it is important to have an avenue for leadership and soft skills traits to be inculcated in the potential leader of any community. In line with this idea, the Malaysian government is making tireless efforts to imbibe soft skills and leadership traits in its stakeholders for national growth and development. The present write-up aims to highlight the efforts of the government in imbibing these leadership and soft skills, as well as identify the leadership and soft skills required for building the Malaysian nation.

## 2. Purpose of the study

Many organizations are now slowly realizing the importance of soft skill development for their workers. They have started investing heavily in the training and development of their workers in order to develop their critical skills, attitude/behavior, and knowledge and to change their existing organizational culture to a higher work performance culture. The purposes of the research are to first, examine the impact of training methodology and trainers' effectiveness on soft skills training, and second, investigate the

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effect of soft skills acquisition on employees' work performance.

## 3. Literature review

Many scholars have explained the concept of leadership from a number of perspectives. In turn, a wide variety of traditional paradigms and theories all purport to describe and define leadership (Dansereau, Seitz, Chiu, Shaughnessy, & Yammarino, 2013). However, the key message from the definitions and the paradigms is that leadership is generally described as an interpersonal process in which a leader influences followers (Dansereau et al., 2013). For instance, Yukl (2006) defined leadership as 'a process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person over other people to guide, structure, and facilitate activities and relationships in a group or organization'. In most definitions, the basic elements of leadership include a leader, a follower, and their relational interactions. The major issue in leadership is how a leader can influence the followers efficiently through relational interactions in order to achieve the stated goals of the institution. From this definition, leadership requires some soft skills traits in order to gain followers' support and attention, as well as cooperation.

Soft skills is a sociological term relating to a person's emotional intelligence quotient (EQ), the cluster of personality traits, social graces, communication, language, personal habits, friendliness, and optimism that characterize relationships with other people (Kamaruddin, Kofli, Ismail, Mohammad, & Takriff, 2012). A person's soft skill EQ is an important part of their individual contribution to the success of an organization (Kamaruddin et al., 2012). Equally, soft skills, which are normally referred to as people skills, are not easily taught, although they are very much needed in the leaders-followers interactions. These skills can be typically categorized into three major categories: personal attributes, interpersonal skills, and problem solving and decision making skills.

The Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia interprets soft skills as 'generic skills that include cognitive elements related to non-academic abilities, such as positive values, leadership, teamwork, communication and lifelong learning' (MOHE, 2006, p.5). Soft skills are divided into seven areas: (1) Communication skills, (2) Critical thinking and problem solving skills, (3) Teamwork, (4) Lifelong learning and information management skills, (5) Entrepreneurship skills, (6) Ethics and professional moral skills, and (7) Leadership skills (MOHE, 2006, pp. 9–13). Each of the areas contain 'must have' and 'good to have' attributes (Nikitina & Furuoka, 2011).

Professional training and development for employees is not uncommon in any organization. However, as organizations become more focused on the provision of behavior-related services (Kantrowitz, 2005), organizational scholars and practitioners are now displaying a growing interest in soft skill competencies and how they make a difference in an organization; recent studies have shown that they really matter. According to Weisinger (1998), more data that are empirical are coming out all the time to show that soft skills really do affect the bottom line of the organization. The recent interest in soft skills competencies appear to be related to the reported results of work success. No, wonder that organizations are more willing to invest in soft skills development for better work performance, especially at the high executives levels (Homer, 2001).

However, some researchers have questioned the performance improvement program, such as soft skill competency, and whether it leads to significant improvement in an organization (Renna & Fedor, 2001). It was argued that the provision of information and feedback about business activities and customer-related issues are now the focus of managers. This information is believed to solve performance-related problems (Dean & Evans, 1994; Lawler, 1998).

In addition, Spencer, McClelland, and Spencer (1994) stated that the success of performance improvement programs depends on the system, which the management sets up within an organization that can adversely affect the employees' work performance. This view is supported by Moss and Tilly (2000), as they share the opinion that employees should be given more say and decision making power within an organization if job performance is to improve. Anderson, Rungtusanatham, and Schroeder (1994) stipulated that even if all required information is given to employees, work performance will still depend on the ability of the employee to utilize the given information to improve his job performance.

The research model was designed to analyze constructs considered by the literature to be fundamental in determining trainers' effectiveness. Constructs of particular interest for this research are soft skills, training methodology, trainers' effectiveness, and work performance. The measures of reaction to training and end of course tests measuring learning are the most commonly used forms of evaluation for training and trainers' effectiveness (Kirkpatrick, 1976; Tannenbaum and Woods, 1992).

Over ten diverse classifications of the role of the trainer have been identified. These range from the simplest—the trainer role consists of just two elements: training practitioner and training administrator, to the more complex where, for instance, the trainer is attributed four major roles: adviser, exponent, diagnostician, and manager. The more recent classifications have mainly been based on research work that either aimed to identify the actual tasks performed by trainers or looked at social interaction and innovation.

The classifications proposed are mainly descriptive in nature, and they can be divided into three broad types. (1) Those based on the functional aspect (classifications concerned with the activities the trainer engages in or the services he or she provides); (2) those based on the positional aspect (classifications concerned with the power of the trainer in the organization and what influence he or she can exert); and those based on the proficiency aspect (classifications concerned with the trainer's actual or required qualities to carry out the job).

Clearly, in any consideration of the trainer's role, thought needs to be given to the exact nature of the organization he or she will operate in and its future development. It has been pointed out that 'there can be no single statement of what the role of a training specialist should be. It is conditioned by a combination of the objective necessities in his firm, subjective and personal elements brought out by the attitudes of managers, and his own conception of his role and personal skills—he and the job help to make each other'. Concerning trainer effectiveness, the literature has concentrated on two major factors: the power and influence that the trainer has in the organization and how this affects his or her work behavior, and issues concerned with personal competence, especially the 'core competencies' that a trainer must have in order to be able to successfully carry out the job.

The extent to which trainees have sufficient time and resources available determines the extent to which training content will be used or constrained on the job (Noe, 1986; Russ-Eft, 2002). These opportunities to use training on the job have been defined as 'the extent to which a trainee is provided with or actively obtains work experiences relevant to the tasks for which he or she was trained' (Ford, Quinones, Sego, & Speer Sorra, 1992). Training method has been reported to have significant impact on the transfer of both hard and soft skills (Arthur, Young, Jordan, & Shebilske, 1996). According to Simone and Nale (2010), spaced training was superior to massed training regarding transfer quality (number of steps implemented after the training), self-reported sales competence, and organizational outcomes (key figures). The synergy effect of the experiential learning model and spaced learning will give a remarkable and successful transfer of skills acquired during

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training to the actual job. However, current literature about learning spaces is built on education and architectural embodiments of educational philosophies (Cauffman, Kimonis, Dmitrieva, & Monahan, 2009). The 'time spaced learning' approach will be favored as the variable of interest for training methodology in this study. Although space learning has been in existence for a long time, its application in the industry has been very minimal compared to other training methods. Better still, the 'space effect' of this approach to the transfer of acquired skills during training has not been critically articulated in literature. Cannon's (1988) extensive synthesis of the research on the impact of the environment on learning provides a starting point for learning space discussion.

## 4. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this study is based on system theory and learning theory (using 'time spaced learning' training methodology) through understanding how adults learn and the different aspects of their effective learning process. According to the system theory, all systems consist of related and interconnected parts which cannot be viewed separately, but are all interconnected as a dynamic whole (Jacobs, 2003). As a result, work performance will be influenced by many different factors, e.g. incentives, remunerations or the training syllabus delivered to the trainees, the training methodology used, the trainer's effectiveness.

In providing a clearer framework for the research, soft skills are referred to as self-confidence or self-assurance (Chowdhury, 2007), interpersonal or human relations (Zenger & Folkman, 2002), communication (Syed Hussain, 2005), attitude (Sail & Alavi, 2007), leadership (Mantel, Meredith, Shafer, & Sutton, 2004; Rosenau, 1998), management skills (Boyatzis, 1982), creative thinking (Rosenau, 1998), and problem solving (Leigh, Lee, & Lindquist, 1999; Lussier, 2003). Training methodology refers to strategies and methods adopted by a trainer to influence the soft skills of a trainee. Thus, developing employees' soft skills, coupled with the training methodology adopted in the process of doing so, will improve employees' work performance. Fig. 1 presents the conceptual model, which shows the relationships between all the variables. The training methodology assigned for this study is defined as 'time spaced learning'; the indicators assigned for soft skills include self-confidence, communication skills, problem solving skills, leadership, attitude and mindset change, and interpersonal skills. As for trainers' effectiveness, Kirkpatrick's (1976) evaluation model is assigned, while the supervisors' evaluation and assessment of their subordinates is the indicator of work performance.

*Theory 1:* Soft skills acquisition will improve/increase employee work performance.

*Theory 2:* Soft skills acquisition will improve/increase employee work performance through training methodology.

*Theory 3*: Soft skills acquisition will improve/increase employee work performance through the trainers' effectiveness.

The theoretical framework on which this research is based is described below:

From the framework above, the following hypotheses are formulated:

**H1**. Training effectiveness (TE) positively affects soft skills (SS)

**H2**. Soft skills (SS) directly influence employee work performance (WP)

**H3**. Training methodology (TM) positively affects soft skills (SS)

## 5. Methodology

### 5.1. Sampling

The study was conducted in both public and private companies in Malaysia. The respondents of this study were active executive-level employees identified by the company to attend the soft skills development program. There were 1200 trainees (executive-level employees) from 10 different companies that attended the training at different times and locations. Since the target population consisted of 1200 trainees, the sample size for this study needed to be at least 260 trainees for a 95 percent confidence level within 0.05 risk of sampling error.

### 5.2. Instrument

The research survey instrument consisted of four main questionnaires answered by the same respondents and their immediate supervisors in their work place. Each demographic questionnaire contained 10 questions, which were multiple-choice questions that collected background information from the trainees. The intent was to collect and use this background data to determine if any tendencies or patterns exist from various defining characteristics such as years of experience and highest degree earned. For the soft skills (SS), trainer effectiveness (TE), and training methodology (TM) questionnaires, an extensive review of professional research and dissertation studies was conducted and several research academician and professionals were consulted on the creation of appropriate questions for this present study. The scale used in this study was a 5-Likert scale of 1-strongly disagree, 2- disagree, 3-neither, 4-agree, 5-strongly agree. A Likert scale presents respondents with a set of statements about a person, thing, or concept and then has them rate their agreement or disagreement with the statements on a numerical scale that is the same for all the statements (Whitley, 2000).

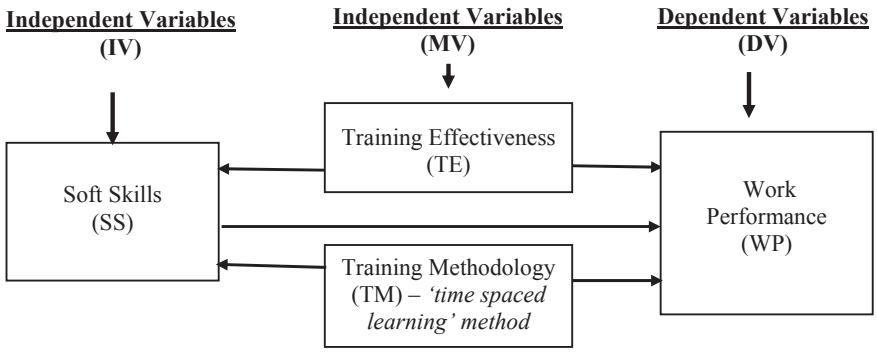


**Fig. 1.** Theoretical framework.

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As for the soft skill (SS) competencies scale, this is a self-developed instrument. The measure of the trainers' effectiveness (TE) was adopted from Kirkpatrick's evaluation model, and the training methodology (TM) precisely determined the effect of the 'time spaced learning' training method used in transferring the soft skills; it is also a self-developed scale. Each instrument was used to collect self-administered responses from both trainees and supervisors of the company during the training session.

Concerning the validity of the instruments, a panel of expert judges reviewed the questionnaire for content validity. The survey was subjected to a series of revisions by professionals and academics in human resources (HR) training and development and human resource management (HRM) professionals, including specialists in the fields of evaluation, education, and business. The experts were asked to provide suggestions on how the researcher could improve the items. The researcher then used the formula and input from the ratings of the experts to establish the content validity index (CVI) for each of the items. The validity index must be established for each item in a questionnaire, and for the instrument to be accepted as valid, the average index of all the items should be 0.7 or above (Amin, 2005).

In this study, the internal consistency method, which mainly assesses the degree to which responses are similar, was used to measure the reliability of the questionnaires. Cronbach's alpha was used to calculate the second part of the three questionnaires completed by 28 pilot trainees from one organization in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Table 1 shows the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the survey responses.

### 5.3. Process of data disseminations and collections

Instead of running the soft skills program over four consecutive days like many typical trainings, the program was conducted in several party. First, for the first two days of training (Part I), participants were trained on soft skills development using training methodology such as adult learning, action or experiential learning methods, practices with coaching methods, discussions, lecture presentations, role play methods, etc. Trainees were asked to complete the soft skills questionnaires to gauge their current soft skills competencies at the beginning of the program. The trainees were also asked to identify their respective supervisor, peers, and/or subordinates to fill the same questionnaires about the trainees. The results were analyzed to find an average figure in order to avoid biases.

Second, using a specific 'time spaced learning' training methodology, the trainees were given about four 'time spaced' weeks (a four-week break) to apply, practice, and internalize what they had learned through the action plan developed in the classroom. They were given some assignments that were to be submitted at the next meeting. This was to ensure that they put into practice what they had learned. The assignment was to be verified and signed by their respective supervisor to make the supervisor aware of what their staff members were going through. Third, after coming back from the four weeks 'time spaced', trainees were asked to report and share with the whole class a few of their experiences—how they had applied and practiced the training and how that had helped them. To recognize and motivate trainees in their efforts, award recognition in the form of a pen was given to one person who received the most nominations from the class members.

Fourth, the trainees then continued their soft skills training and development for another two days (Part II), again utilizing training methodology such as action or experiential learning methods, practices with coaching methods, discussions, lecture presentations, role-plays methods, etc. Fifth, again using a specific 'time spaced learning' training methodology, the trainees were given about another four weeks 'time spaced' to apply, practice, and internalize what they had learned through the action plan developed in the classroom.

Sixth, after coming back from the second 'time spaced' break, in a one-day follow-up session, trainees were again asked to report to the whole class on the new experiences they had applied and practiced and how that helped them. Similarly, one person who received the most nominations from the class members was given a recognition award in the form of a pen in order to encourage the trainees to practice what they had learned. At this stage, after the training program was completed using the 'time spaced learning' method, trainees were asked to complete the questionnaires on trainer effectiveness (TE) and 'time space learning' training methodology (TM). After that, a separate questionnaire on work performance (WP) was given via email to each trainee's supervisor to complete.

**Table 1**
Reliability for measurement scale.

| Variables | Cronbach's alpha |
|---|---|
| Soft skill | 0.97 |
| Trainer's effectiveness | 0.82 |
| Training methodology | 0.913 |
| Work performance | 0.96 |

## 6. Results

### 6.1. Characteristics of the respondents

Table 2 reveals the demographic information of the respondents (employees from different organizations in Malaysia) who

**Table 2**
Demographic summary of respondents (260).

| Demographic variables | No. of responses | Percent (%) |
|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | | |
| Male | 168 | 64.6 |
| Female | 92 | 35.4 |
| **Education** | | |
| High school | 26 | 10 |
| Certificate | 10 | 3.8 |
| Diploma | 39 | 15 |
| Graduate (bachelor degree) | 166 | 63.8 |
| Postgraduate | 16 | 6.2 |
| Other | 3 | 1.2 |
| **Age** | | |
| 18–29 years old | 48 | 18.5 |
| 30–49 years old | 182 | 70 |
| 50–64 years old | 29 | 11.2 |
| 65years old and above | 1 | 0.4 |
| **Race** | | |
| Malay | 233 | 89.6 |
| Chinese | 20 | 7.7 |
| Indian | 4 | 1.5 |
| Others | 3 | 1.2 |
| **Executive** | | |
| Yes | 220 | 84.6 |
| No | 40 | 15.4 |
| **Employment** | | |
| Full-time | 238 | 91.5 |
| Part-time | 17 | 6.5 |
| On contract | 5 | 1.9 |
| **Marital** | | |
| Single | 49 | 18.8 |
| Married | 190 | 73.1 |
| Separated | 2 | 0.8 |
| Divorced | 16 | 6.2 |
| Widow | 3 | 1.2 |

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participated in the training programmes and subsequently provide responses to the survey.

As shown in Table 2, majority (64.6%) of the respondents are male. Most (63.8%) of the trainees are bachelor degree holders. Seventy percent of the trainees are in the age group of 30–49. Majority (89.6%) are Malay race.

### 6.2. Evaluating the model fit

The researcher has estimated the overall model fit with three types of measures: absolute model fit, increment fit indexes, and parsimonious fit. The absolute model fit measures included $x^2$ statistics with p > 0.001 (Hair, Anderson, Babin, & Black, 2010). Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) with values < 0.08 was deemed to be acceptable (Hair et al., 2010), while Levesque, Stanek, Zuehlke and Ryan (2004) outline the values of <0.05 as a good fit, <0.08 as reasonable, and >0.10 as poor. The increment fit index which the researcher has referred to was the goodness of fit index (GFI) and comparative fit index (CFI) with the value approaching 0.9 and above as a good fit model (Hair et al., 2010). Hoyle (1995) indicate the value of the CFI pf > 0.9 as an acceptable fit, while >0.8 as marginally adequate. Parsimonious fit measures were referred to as Normed chi-square; CMIN/*df* represented the chi-square statistics index (CMIN) divided by the degree of freedom (*df*). Kline (2011) provides a value of <3.0 as an acceptable model fit.

### 6.3. Data analysis: validating the structural equation modeling from the proposed and competing models

Based on the prior results of the measurement models using the confirmatory factor analyses, the researcher has formulated a complete latent variable of the relationships between the organizational culture, development variables, and work performance. The researcher has adopted one hypothesized model with no competing models based on the results of previous literature and research. This step of analysis was directed to answer the entire research question formulated for this study. The study explained the hypothesis of which structural model of organizational culture and development fit the data. The models evaluated the path relationships to answer the following hypotheses:

**H1**. Trainers' effectiveness (TE) positively affects employees' soft skills (SS).

**H2**. Soft skills (SS) directly influence employee work performance (WP).

**H3**. Training methodology (TM) positively affects employees' soft skills (SS) acquisition.

### 6.4. Hypothesized model

With respect to model adequacy as a whole, the results have revealed an acceptable model fit with non-significant normed chi-square statistics: $x^2/df$ = 1.374, p = 0.00, RMSEA = 0.038, GFI = 0.908 and CFI = 0.944. The relative chi-square or normed chi-square where the chi-square fit index divided by the degree of freedom (CMIN/*df*), which was estimated to be 1.374, fell below the threshold point of 3.000 (Kline, 2011). Thereby, these results satisfied the general hypothesis that the structural model fit the data. Due to the fit model, the individual parameters were evaluated further and three specific hypotheses of the path relationships were then estimated (see Fig. 2).

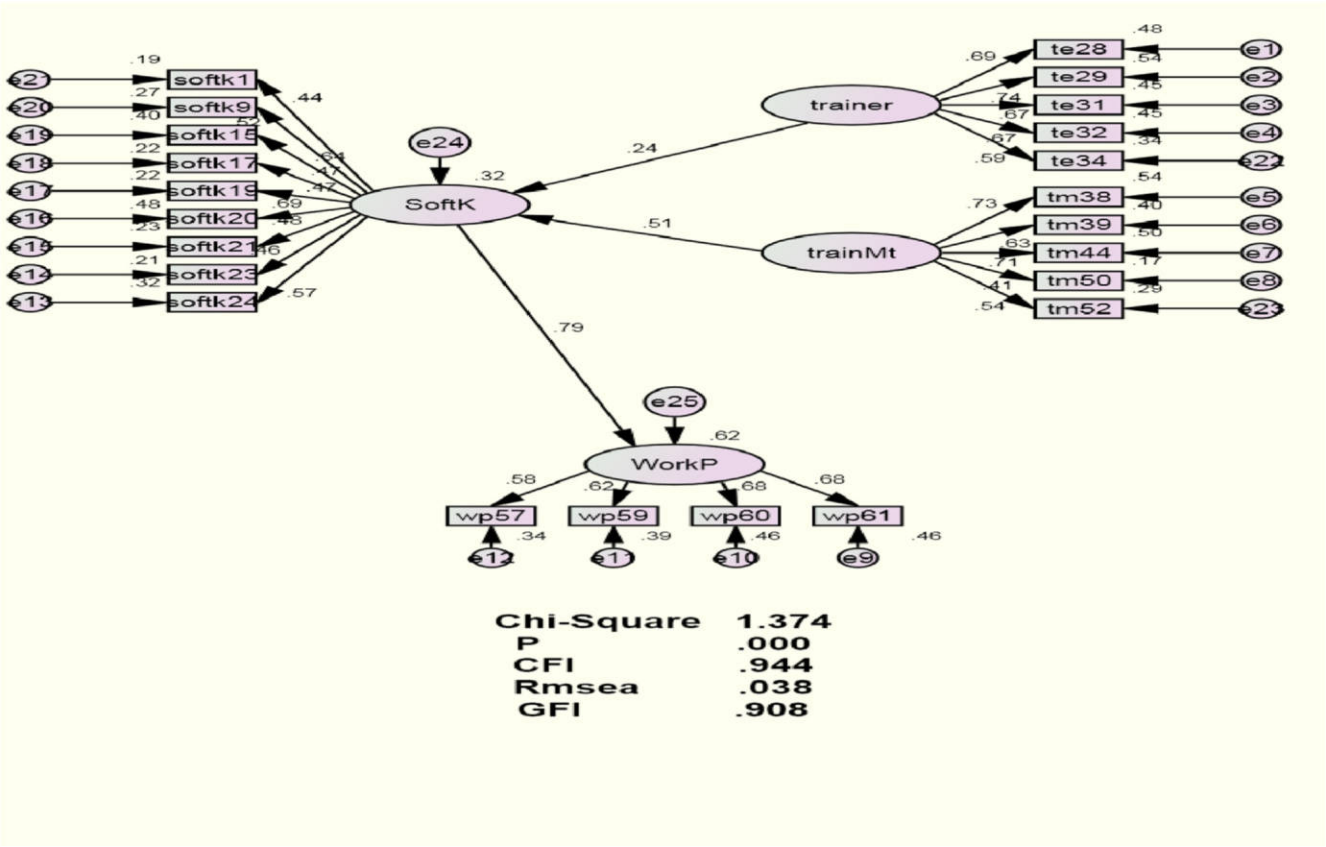


**Fig. 2.** Hypothesis model.

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### 6.5. H1: trainers' effectiveness (TE) positively affects employees' soft skills (SS)

The causal relationship between trainer effectiveness and soft skills acquisition was significant (CR > 1.96) with a standardized direct effect of 0.24. Thirty-two percent of soft skills acquisition can be explained by trainer effectiveness (see Fig. 2). Gagné and Medsker (1996) and Noe (1999) mentioned that trainer effectiveness could be tagged as the solution to trainees' inability to translate training experience to an increase in job performance. Furthermore, in support with Powell and Serkan (2010), a trainer who provides enough information regarding soft skills acquisition will enable the employees to find information for themselves on the soft skills needed to bring about change in their work performance.

### 6.6. H2: soft skills (SS) directly influence employee work performance (WP)

The soft skills acquisition significantly influenced employee work performance by a standardized direct effect of 0.79 (CR > 1.96). Work performance was explained by its predictor, namely soft skills acquisition, by 62% (see Fig. 2). This finding is also in tandem with the propositions of Weber, Finley, Crawford, and Rivera (2009), wherein they contend that soft skills contribute to the work performance of managers in terms of decision-making and problem solving. On the other hand, the results of this study contradict the findings of Renna and Fedor (2001), in which soft skill competency did not greatly contribute to organizational improvement.

However, researchers such as Spencer et al. (1994); Blackburn and Rosen (1993); Heneman, and Judge (2003); and Rungtusanatham, Anderson and Schroeder (1994) are of the opinion that organizational success is a function of the system which the management sets up in an organization that can improve on the employee's work performance. As such, if all required soft skills are given to an employee, work performance within an organization will still depend on the ability of the employee to utilize the given information to improve his job performance. Employee work performance was explained by 79% of its predicted soft skills acquisition. This indicates that a one-unit increase in the soft skills of managerial workers will lead to a 79% increase in work performance. It can be suggested that the more employees acquire and assimilate soft skills, such as problem solving, decision making, communication skills, etc., the more they will develop a positive attitude towards their job, hence an increase in their performance at work.

### 6.7. H3: Training methodology (TM) positively affects employees' soft skills (SS) acquisition

The effects of the training methodology on soft skills acquisition was found to be significant (CR > 1.96) with a moderate positive value of coefficient 0.51 (see Fig. 2). The joint influence of the trainer effectiveness and training methodology indicated that for employees to implement or practice the soft skills acquired during training, they need a competency trainer and must be given some experience during a time-spaced learning period for them to adequately apply the skills they acquire. Referring to Fig. 2, soft skills acquisition ($R^2 = 0.32$) was an indication that more than 30% variance of the latent factor for soft skills acquisition can be explained by its observed variables. As for work performance, ($R^2 = 0.62$), it is an indication that the latent factor for work performance can be explained by its observed variables by 62% of variance. This finding supports the findings of Brown (2005), wherein learning spaces have been described as the full range of places in which learning occurs, from real to virtual and from classroom to job.

In addition, these findings also support the argument of Schneider, Hsieh, Sprod, Carter, and Hayward (2007) and Sutton, Masters, Bagnall, Carew (2001) that the formation of memory is highly sensitive not only to the total amount of training, but also to the pattern of trials used during training, and that time-spaced learning is better able to distribute and retain learning for long-term usage than mass training within an organization. The hypothesized model was accepted due to the significance of all paths and the overall GFI revealed a model fit. In the hypothesized model, all the GFI that fulfilled the requirement of the acceptable model fit within the paths and the correlation were significant. Therefore, the hypothesized model has provided a reasonable explanation of the structural model of organizational culture employed in this study. The model was explained by its three exogenous variables (trainer effectiveness, training methodology, and soft skills acquisition), two endogenous variables (soft skills acquisition and work performance), twenty-three observed variables defined to be their respective factors, twenty-three variance of errors, and two residuals.

The findings have indicated that trainer effectiveness, training methodology, and work performance were constructs that complemented each other rather than competing, while the soft skills acquisition was the only direct predictor of employee work performance. The training methodology would enable trainees to practice what they learned and provide them with the opportunity to continue with the training and improve on their mistakes. The direct impact that training methodology had on soft skills acquisition was higher than the impact of trainer effectiveness.

## 7. Conclusion

The findings from the estimation of the structural models have contributed to the implications for the modeling of organizational culture and soft skills training. It has further extended learning theory in the context of the business environment based on the selected items and the structural hypothesized model. This study has utilized two phases of analysis comprising the two-step analysis of structural equation model analysis.

The first research question directed the researcher to analyze the measurement model to discover whether all of the organizational culture and development items loaded onto the three-factor model, specifically soft skills acquisition, trainer effectiveness, and training methodology from the pooled samples of 260 employees from different organizations. These factors were able to explain the measurement model of the training context. The second analysis led the researcher to prove that employee work performance is a one-factor model. The structural model was analyzed with only one hypothesized model upon which the results revealed a model fit to answer the three research questions.

## 8. Limitation

The main limitation of this study was the data collection. This present study was design to capture the relevant issues using self-rated employee performance scale, which was collected from respondents. As such, there is possibility that some of the employee might exaggerate their actual performance at work.

## 9. Implications of the study

The present research findings have provided a number of implications to organizational culture and development. Additionally

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the findings of the present study act an extension of the literature in the training methodology.

I Theoretical implications

Even though studies have shown that employee work performance, such as a change in attitude towards work and increased productivity, are mostly influenced by hard skills, this study has proven that within the Malaysian context, the acquisition of soft skills directly influences employees' work performance. It can be concluded that if Malaysian employees are provided with soft skills knowledge via a time-spaced training method, it will positively affect their work performance.

II Methodological implications

This study has demonstrated the usefulness of multivariate analysis, specifically the CFA and SEM, which provided an insight concerning the interrelationships between the observed variables and the latent variables related to the theory and the relationships between the latent variables. The instrument used was self-developed emanating from the literature, but was empirically proven to be psychometrically sound in organizational culture and development.

III Implications in the organizational culture and development context

This study has highlighted the need to intervene in the relationship between employees' performance and soft skills acquisition. This is precisely the issue related to the use of time-spaced training methodology to enhance soft skills acquisition and organizational development. In the real organizational context, employers should be able annex the benefit inherent in the use of the time-spaced learning training method in lieu of other training techniques. This will serve as a catalyst in expediting the employees' productivity by giving them the opportunity to apply and evaluate their work performance while the training programme is still ongoing.

IV Implications for future research

The present findings have demonstrated the impact of trainer effectiveness and training methodology on soft skills acquisition, and also that the main effect of soft skills acquisition is on work performance; therefore, future work should examine other external factors such as types of organizations and age groups. Understanding the impact of these external factors will provide an insight into how they influence the employees' performance at work.

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