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Examining the relationship between perceived organizational support, transfer of training and service quality in the Malaysian public sector

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to investigate the relationships among perceived organizational support (POS), transfer of training outcomes to the workplace and service quality in the context of public sector organizations in Malaysia.

Design/methodology/approach – The data for this study have been collected from three sources, the employees of public sector organizations in Malaysia, their supervisors and their colleagues through surveys.

Findings – The findings reveal that transfer of training has a mediating effect on the relationship between POS and service quality.

Practical implications – The findings illustrate that both elements, which are the support from organization (in terms of valuing employee contribution and caring about their well-being) and employee work attitude (applying the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are learned during training on the job) are significant in influencing employee service quality.

Originality/value – This study adds to the small number of studies examining the mediator of the POS and service quality relationship. Such research is essential to understand a mechanism that links POS and service quality. This study also extends the literature by examining together the factor (POS) and the consequence (service quality) of transfer of training. To date, the number of empirical studies that have examined the factors and the consequences of transfer of training in one framework is still limited.

Keywords Public sector, Malaysia, Transfer of training, Service quality, Perceived organizational support

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Transfer of training refers to the consistent application of knowledge, skills and attitudes, gained during training, to the workplace (Blume *et al.*, 2010). An employee is considered to have transferred the training to his/her workplace when he/she can apply the new learned knowledge, skills and attitudes to their job, and this practice becomes consistent over a period of time. Transfer of training is a process that occurs after the training is completed and takes place at the employees' workplace (Goldstein and Ford, 2002).



Review of the literature shows that research related to transfer of training was mostly focused on identifying the factors that influence the transfer of training (Cromwell and Kolb, 2004; Liebermann and Hoffmann, 2008; Velada *et al.*, 2007). Researchers believe an adequate understanding of the factors that will help organizations enhance the application of the new learned knowledge, skills and attitudes in the workplace (Yamkovenko *et al.*, 2007).

Another important issue discussed in the transfer of training literature is the consequences of transfer of training, particularly on employees. Research studies have found that transfer of training was positively and significantly related to employees' performance. For example, in the mid-1980s, Noe and Schmitt (1986) found that transfer of training was significantly related to educator performance improvement including their fiscal management and relationships with the community. Other studies also found that transfer of training was positively related to employees' overall performance, including their cleanliness and financial management (Rouiller and Goldstein, 1993), teaching competencies (Zayed, 1994) and selling performance (Leach and Liu, 2004).

This study is conducted to extend the line of research on transfer of training by simultaneously examining the factors and the consequences of transfer of training. Until now, little attention has been given by previous researchers to empirically examine the factors and the consequences of transfer of training together in one framework. Specifically, this study examines the relationship among perceived organizational support (POS), transfer of training and service quality. A recent study shows that POS has a positive impact on transfer of training (Zumrah *et al.*, 2012). There was also one study which indicated that transfer of training was positively related to service quality (Zumrah *et al.*, 2013). Based on both findings, this study argues that transfer of training could mediate the relationship between POS and service quality.

In addition, there is a considerable body of research evidence conducted in the Western context, demonstrating that where perception of organizational practices impact on employees' job performance, this will often be through the mechanism of transfer of training (Colquitt *et al.*, 2000; Rouiller and Goldstein, 1993). Therefore, it is essential to empirically examine the relationship between POS, transfer of training and service quality in the context of Southeast Asia, such as Malaysia, to extend the literature about such a relationship (perception toward organizational practices – transfer of training – job performance) in the Eastern context. Researchers argue that conducting research related to POS, transfer of training and service quality, in this context, is relevant to enhance the understanding about these issues in the organizations that are located outside the Western countries (Kheng *et al.*, 2010; Shaharuddin and Abiddin, 2009; Tek-Yew, 2009).

By studying the transfer of training as a mediator between POS and service quality relationship in the Malaysian context, this study aims to make four contributions. First, this study extends the literature by examining together the factor (POS) and the consequence (service quality) of transfer of training. To date, the number of empirical studies that have examined the factor and the consequence of transfer of training in one framework is still limited (Rouiller and Goldstein, 1993). Second, this study adds to the small number of studies examining the mediator of the POS and service quality relationship (Bell and Menguc, 2002). Such research is essential to understand a mechanism that links POS and service quality. Third, this study extends the understanding of the factor that influences the transfer of training and the consequence

of transfer of training in Malaysia, a non-Western context. Previous transfer of training studies has been conducted mostly in the Western context (Velada *et al.*, 2007). Fourth, this study provides empirical evidence to validate the relationship among the perception of organizational practices (POS), transfer of training and job performance (service quality), which has been developed by Western researchers in the Asian context. Researchers argue that the management theories and concepts that have been developed in the Western context, are not necessarily applicable to Asian countries (Rees and Johari, 2010). One explanation for this is the cultural differences between Western and Asian countries (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). For example, unlike Western countries, Malaysian culture is more collectivist, respectful of hierarchy and elders, relationship oriented and cooperative rather than competitive (Merriam and Mohamad, 2000; Smith, 2003). The cultures of a particular country can have a great influence on the organization's work culture and practices (Abdullah, 1992; Hassi and Storti, 2011) including human resource management practices (Vadivelu and Klein, 2011). Therefore, it is important to examine the relationship from the perspective of Southeast Asian countries, using organization in Malaysia as an empirical case. Conducting the research in such a context will extend our understanding and provide empirical evidence on the applicability of the theory that has been developed in the Western context.

2. Literature review

2.1 *The relationship between POS and transfer of training*

POS is defined as the employees' general belief that their work organization values their contribution and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). This concept adopts a social exchange approach (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986). The social exchange approach entails unspecified obligations; when one person does another a favor, there is an expectation of some future return (Blau, 1964). However, the focus of POS is on the social exchange between an organization and employees (Wayne *et al.*, 1997). POS underlies employees' inferences concerning their organization's commitment to them, which, in turn, contributes to the employees' commitment to their organization (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986).

POS is essential to the development of employees' positive attitude and behaviors. Previous studies indicate that an employee's job commitment (Tremblay *et al.*, 2010), satisfaction (Liao, 2011), engagement (Kinnunen *et al.*, 2008) and involvement (O'Driscoll and Randall, 1999) to the organization have increased as a result of high POS. The employee is also willing to work above and beyond the specified requirements of the job when they feel their employer (organization) values their contribution and cares about their well-being (Lavelle *et al.*, 2009). Such positive behaviors are expected to encourage employees to put greater effort into gaining new knowledge, skills and attitudes during training, which will subsequently enhance their ability to produce a more positive transfer of training outcomes to their workplace. Therefore, with high POS, employees will apply the knowledge, skills and attitudes that they learned in training to their workplace following the training (Zumrah *et al.*, 2012) as a tradeoff for organization's commitment (providing a budget for training) to them.

2.2 *The relationship between transfer of training and service quality*

It has been suggested that transfer of training should lead to the improvement of an employee's job performance (Colquitt *et al.*, 2000; Kontoghiorghes, 2004), such as service quality. Service quality has been recognized as one of the element of an employee's job performance in service organizations such as public sector organizations (Azmi *et al.*, 2009; Clarke, 2002; Schumaker, 2004). Service quality is generally viewed as a customer's overall evaluation of the service provided to them (Kandampully *et al.*, 2011). The customer's overall evaluation is based on their assessment of a number of service-related attributes such as tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988). Tangibles refer to the physical facilities, equipment and appearance of employees. Reliability refers to employee's ability to perform the promised service reliably and accurately. Responsiveness refers to the employee's willingness to help customers and provide prompt service. Assurance refers to the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence. Empathy refers to caring, individualized attention the employee provides to his or her customers (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988; Zeithaml *et al.*, 1990).

A past study indicates that the application of knowledge, skills and attitudes that are learned from training can facilitate employees to perform the promised service (Zumrah *et al.*, 2013). One possible explanation for this is that when an employee applies the new learned knowledge, skills and attitudes to their job following the training, employees should demonstrate better abilities and competencies in performing their job, which, consequently, can demonstrate higher service quality to their customers.

2.3 *Transfer of training is a mediator between POS and service quality*

According to Kenny *et al.* (1998), the previous discussions are necessary and sufficient to establish the mediation effect. Accordingly, this study proposing a mediated model, in that POS is expected to influence transfer of training, which, in turn, will improve service quality. In other words, this study argues that employees who believe that their work organization values their contribution and cares about their well-being will apply the knowledge, skills and attitudes that they learned in training to their workplace following the training, which, in turn, will enable them to demonstrate higher service quality to their customers. In addition, there is a considerable body of research evidence demonstrating that where perception of organizational practices impact on employees' job performance, this will often be through the mechanism of employees who are able to transfer the training outcomes to their workplace. For example, Rouiller and Goldstein (1993) found the employees' perception toward the organization transfer climate (e.g. gain support from supervisor and peers and opportunity to apply the training outcomes on the job) was positively related to their training transfer behavior, which, in turn, improved their job performance. Colquitt *et al.* (2000) also found that the organizational climate and support was positive and significantly related to transfer of training, which, in turn, positively and significantly related to job performance. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- H1. Transfer of training is a mediator between the perceived organizational support and service quality.

Figure 1 shows the proposed model of this study based on the previously developed hypothesis.

3. Methodology

3.1 Sample

A purposive sampling technique has been used to select the sample for this study. This technique was chosen because this study focuses on a specific target group (e.g. trainees of one specific type of training) (Sekaran and Bougie, 2010). Using the trainees of one specific type of training as the study sample has been applied by most of the empirical transfer of training research (Brown *et al.*, 2011; Kauffeld and Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2010; Sookhai and Budworth, 2010). This is due, in part, to the fact that each training type has its own specific content and objectives, which may influence the transfer of training (Laker and Powell, 2011).

Specifically, the sample of this study consists of employees of public sector organizations in Malaysia who participated in a training course (basic financial management training program) organized by the National Institute of Public Administration (INTAN) along with their supervisors and colleagues. INTAN is a training center that provides employees of Malaysian public sectors with various types of training relating to language and communication, leadership, finance, information technology, professional development, quality and human resource development. The main aim of INTAN is to enhance the development of human capital in the public sector. Specifically, the focus of INTAN is to develop talented and “thinking civil servants” with the aim of creating public sector officers who are knowledgeable, skilled, creative and innovative. INTAN also has the role of developing the right attitudes toward public sector transformation (National Institute of Public Administration, INTAN, 2014).

The choice of sample was based on the limited empirical research that has been conducted on public sector organizations in developing countries (Subedi, 2004). The majority of transfer of training studies have been conducted in Western countries, especially in the USA (Velada *et al.*, 2007), and mainly in private sector organizations (Chiaburu and Lindsay, 2008; Liebermann and Hoffmann, 2008; Tziner *et al.*, 2007).

The sample of employees consisted of 222 employees. Sixty-eight per cent ($N = 151$) were female and 32 per cent ($N = 71$) were male. The average age was 34 years. The majority, 68.5 per cent ($N = 152$), have worked in public sector organizations between 1 and 9 years, and the remaining 31.5 ($N = 70$) per cent have worked in public sector organizations for more than 10 years. The sample of supervisors consisted of 222 supervisors; 51.4 per cent ($N = 114$) were female and 48.6 per cent ($N = 108$) were male. The average age was 41 years. In terms of work experience, 38.7 per cent ($N = 86$) had worked in public sector organizations between 1 and 9 years, and the remaining 61.3 per cent ($N = 136$) had 10 years or more experience in the public sector. The sample of employees’ colleagues consisted of 624 employees. Of these, 69.7 per cent ($N = 435$) were female and 30.3 per cent ($N = 189$) were male. The average age was 34 years. In terms of work experience, 63.6 per cent ($N = 397$) have worked in public sector organizations

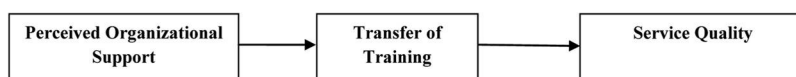


Figure 1.
The proposed model

between 1 and 9 years, and the remaining 36.4 per cent ($N = 227$) have worked in public sector organizations for more than 10 years.

3.2 Procedures

The data for this study were collected from three types of respondents (the employees, their supervisors and colleagues) through a survey.

The employee questionnaire contained questions relating to POS. It is argued that the employees themselves are credible persons who can provide data on POS (Bal *et al.*, 2010).

The employees' supervisors' questionnaire contained questions related to the transfer of training. According to Arthur *et al.* (2003) and Pineda (2010), the supervisor is the best source of data to measure transfer of training of a subordinate because of the fact that they know the daily performance of their employees in detail and can assess whether changes have been achieved following the training.

The employees' colleagues are regarded for the purposes of this study as internal customers. They received a questionnaire containing questions to evaluate service quality. Measuring service quality based on internal employees' perception has been applied in a number of previous studies by Cook and Verma (2002), Glisson and James (2002) and Slatten *et al.* (2011), as it can provide a more accurate assessment of the quality of service provided by employees to their customers. Internal customers experience service provision from the employees on a daily basis and therefore should be able to observe the employees' service quality more than external customers (Lai, 2006).

An arbitrary code was assigned to each survey to associate the feedback received from employees, the employees' supervisors and the employees' colleagues.

3.3 Measures

The measures for this study were based on reliable and valid measures previously used and reported in the literature as details below.

3.3.1 Perceived organizational support. POS was measured using eight items based on a short version of the survey of POS (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1997). Researchers argue that this short version can be applied to a wide variety of organizations (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1997) in the context of Asian countries (Liao, 2011; Zhang *et al.*, 2012). An example of these items is "My organization cares about my opinions". This short version of POS has been applied by recent studies, which show high internal reliability; 0.99 in the study by Suazo and Stone-Romero (2011); and 0.86 in the study by Liao (2011).

3.3.2 Transfer of training. Transfer of training is measured using six items developed by Xiao (1996). The six items are applicable to measure transfer of training in the context of Asian countries (Xiao, 1996). An example is "He/she can accomplish the job tasks better by using new knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired from the training course". This measurement scale has been used in recent studies and yielded a reliability of 0.83 in the study of Scaduto *et al.* (2008) and 0.76 in the study of Chiaburu *et al.* (2010).

3.3.3 Service quality. Service quality was measured using the SERVQUAL instrument developed by Parasuraman *et al.* (1988). The SERVQUAL instrument is used in this study because it is relevant in measuring the service quality of not-for-profit organizations such as public organizations (Zeithaml *et al.*, 1990) in the general context of Asian countries (Kim *et al.*, 2012) and specifically in the Malaysian context (John *et al.*,

2011; Ismail *et al.*, 2006). Example of items used are “When he/she promises to do something by a certain time, he/she does so”. Coefficient alpha reliability of this measure was reported to be 0.88 in the study by Malhotra and Mukherjee (2003).

4. Analysis and finding

4.1 Measurement model

The three measures (POS, transfer of training and service quality) were tested together in one measurement model to verify the relationship between the indicators of different constructs (Cheng, 2001; Hair *et al.*, 2010). The assessment of the measurement model is based on the model fit and the construct’s validity (convergent and discriminant validity). The model fit is assessed through multiple fit indexes, which are based on values of χ^2/df , comparative fit index (CFI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and standardized root mean residual (SRMR), as recommended by recent researchers (Hair *et al.*, 2010; Williams *et al.*, 2009). A well-fitting model will have the χ^2/df smaller than 2, CFI values that are 0.95 or higher, RMSEA value below 0.08 and SRMR value less than 0.10 (Hair *et al.*, 2010; Williams *et al.*, 2009). The construct convergent validity is examined based on two criteria:

- (1) The loading estimates are statistically significant; and
- (2) The result of the average variance extracted (AVE) should equal or exceed 50 per cent (Hair *et al.*, 2010).

The construct discriminant validity is examined by comparing the square root of AVE estimates for each construct with the interconstruct correlations with that factor. The discriminant validity is confirmed if the square roots of AVE estimates are greater than the corresponding interconstruct correlation estimates (Hair *et al.*, 2010).

According to the results of the confirmatory factor analysis, one item from POS (POS6) was dropped because of insignificant loading estimates (Critical Ratio = 1.489). The final measurement model fit indices yielded acceptable results (χ^2/df = 1.971; CFI = 0.947; RMSEA = 0.066; SRMR = 0.048).

Moreover, as shown in Table I, factor loadings of the measurement indicators ranged from 0.492 to 0.915. The indicators of each construct also showed good efficacy to measure the constructs, with AVE values equal to or exceeding 0.50 and the reliability, achieving acceptable values, above 0.70 (Hair *et al.*, 2010). All indicators also are statistically significant.

Furthermore, Table II shows that the square root of AVE of each construct exceeds the coefficient representing its correlation with other constructs, indicating discriminant validity (Hair *et al.*, 2010). For example, the square root AVE of the service quality (0.820) exceeds the intercorrelation between service quality and transfer of training (0.174). In addition, Table II shows the correlation matrix and descriptive statistics for the research variables in the model. The variable means (*M*) range from 5.36 to 5.90, while the standard deviations (*SD*) for the variables range from 0.64 to 0.72. Table II also shows that all the correlations between the constructs are positive. The values of the correlation range from 0.159 to 0.261. All correlations were lower than 0.90, suggesting less probability of multicollinearity (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007).

EJTD 39,2	List of items	Service quality	POS	Transfer of training	
		Reliability	0.89	0.88	0.91
	Average variance extracted	0.67	0.50	0.64	
150	<i>Item abbreviation</i>				
		SQ1	0.875		
		SQ2	0.704		
		SQ3	0.915		
		SQ4	0.769		
		POS1		0.676	
		POS2		0.750	
		POS3		0.837	
		POS4		0.827	
		POS5		0.610	
		POS7		0.492	
		POS8		0.687	
		TOT1			0.748
		TOT2			0.829
		TOT3			0.830
		TOT4			0.816
	TOT5			0.837	
	TOT6			0.730	

Table I. Standardized measurement coefficients resulting from CFA

Notes: $N = 222$; $\chi^2 = 228.582$; $df = 116$; $p < 0.000$; $\chi^2/df = 1.971$; CFI = 0.947; RMSEA = 0.066; SRMR = 0.048; all are significant ($p < 0.001$)

Variable	M	SD	SQ	POS	TOT
SQ	5.51	0.66	0.820		
POS	5.36	0.72	0.159*	0.706	
TOT	5.90	0.64	0.174*	0.261*	0.800

Table II. Means, standard deviation and correlation matrix

Notes: SQ = service quality; POS = perceived organizational support; TOT = transfer of training; The square root of AVE value mark with bold; * = $p < 0.05$

4.2 Test of the model and research hypotheses

As demonstrated in Table III, all the fit indices suggest a reasonable fit between the model and the data.

As the structural model of this study manifested a relatively good fit of the data, the proposed hypotheses were tested (Schumacker and Lomax, 1996). Figure 2 presents the results of the structural model analysis. It was predicted that transfer of training would mediate the relationship between POS and service quality. The result shows that POS has a significant and positive relationship with transfer of training (coefficient = + 0.263, Critical Ratio = 3.372, $p < 0.001$). The effect of transfer of training on service quality was also significant and positive (coefficient = + 0.176, Critical Ratio = 2.397, $p < 0.05$). These results indicate that the effects of POS on service quality are mediated by transfer of training (Chand, 2010; Kenny *et al.*, 1998; Mitchell *et al.*, 2013), so *H1* of this study is supported.

5. Discussion

This study proposed that transfer of training will mediate the POS and service quality relationship. The result of data analysis has revealed a significant and positive link between POS and transfer of training and that between transfer of training and service quality. Given that direct relationships exist between POS and transfer of training and those between transfer of training and service quality, transfer of training seems to mediate the relationship between POS and service quality (Chand, 2010; Kenny *et al.*, 1998), supporting *H1* of this study.

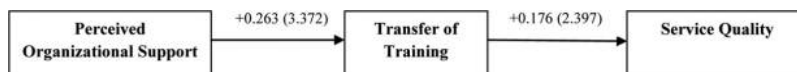
The results suggest that POS can encourage employees to transfer the learning outcomes in the workplace, which, in turn, increase service quality provided to customers. The significant relationship between the variables in this study (POS – transfer of training – service quality) is an important finding that has not been empirically determined previously, particularly in the human resource management literature. The findings show that transfer of training plays an essential role as a mediator in the relationship between POS and service quality. This extends recent research that found a direct effect of POS on transfer of training (Zumrah *et al.*, 2012) and the effect of transfer of training on service quality (Zumrah *et al.*, 2013). This study also extends the discussion and understanding of the factor and consequence of transfer of training to employees in the non-Western context, specific public sector organizations in Malaysia. Although the findings presented here are limited to the specific context of the public sector in Malaysia, a developing country in Southeast Asia, the results of this study overall clearly point toward POS being an important factor that can foster transfer of training and ultimately service quality.

6. Implications of the study

From a theoretical perspective, this study is unique because it provides empirical evidence about the role of transfer of training as a mediator in the relationship between POS and service quality. Review of the literature reveals that relatively few studies have

Fit indices	Value
χ^2 (<i>p</i> -value)	231.117 (<i>p</i> < 0.000)
Degree of freedom (df)	117
Normed Chi-square (χ^2 /df)	1.975
Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)	0.066
Comparative fit index (CFI)	0.946
Standardized root mean residual (SRMR)	0.052

Table III. Structural model goodness-of-fit statistics



Notes: Figures are factor loadings followed by critical ratio value. The critical ratio value indicates the significant level of factor loading. The minimum critical ratio value of 1.960 is required for the factor loading to be significant

Source: Byrne (2010)

Figure 2. The result of structural model analysis

examined the factors that may mediate the relationship between POS and service quality. One study did, however, test the role of organizational citizenship behaviors as a mediating factor in the association between POS and service quality (Bell and Menguc, 2002). This study improves this line of research by extending the discussion and understanding on factor that mediate POS–service quality relationship at non-Western context, which is public sector organizations in Malaysia, a developing country in Southeast Asia.

From the findings highlighted earlier also, there are some key implications for organizations to consider. The main implication is that employee perceptions toward the organization and their work attitude (e.g. applying the knowledge, skills and attitudes that learned in training on the job) can be expected to influence the quality of service they provide to customers. This study shows that both elements, which are the support from organizations (in term of valuing employee contributions and cares about their well-being) and employee work attitude (applying the knowledge, skills and attitudes that learned in training on the job) are significant in influencing employee service quality.

Results demonstrate that organizations should focus on ways to demonstrate their support for individual employees, as this should improve their work attitude (e.g. applying the knowledge, skills and attitudes that learned in training on the job), which, in turn, will encourage them to deliver greater services to their customers. When employees perceive their organization highly values their contribution and cares about them as individuals, their effort to apply the knowledge, skills and attitudes that they learned during training on the job increases. As the level to transfer the training outcomes on the job increases, so does the likelihood of the employee deliver quality service to their customers.

Therefore, organizations should be encouraged to make every effort to ensure that they always demonstrate adequate support for their employees to develop such positive beliefs in their employees. Organizations can demonstrate their support to employees through a number of practices such as caring about employees' opinions and well-being, being considerate of their individual career goals, valuing their contributions, providing assistance to them when needed, being forgiving of their honest mistakes and not taking advantage of them (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1997). Based upon social exchange theory, when employees perceive that their organization has demonstrated those above practices, they are more likely to feel obligated to engage in behaviors that are beneficial to the organization (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986; Eisenberger *et al.*, 2001) such as in this study implementing the knowledge and skills that they learned in the training program on their job and deliver quality service to customers. In addition, organizations should consider factors related to both the workplace and employee to enhance their service quality. This study shows that although the transfer of training is an important predictor of service quality, workplace environmental factors such as POS still need to be taken into account for enhance organization service quality.

In regard to the training practice itself, organizations need to ensure that the employees do not only gain new knowledge and skills from a particular training activity they have attended but, more importantly, organizations should look for ways to encourage employee to transfer their learned knowledge and skills in the workplace. The findings of this study show that the ability of an employee to apply the new learned knowledge and skills in the workplace is significantly related to employee's

effectiveness in service delivery. An alternative way to encourage employees to transfer their learned knowledge and skills in the workplace is by valuing them and their contribution to the workplace and caring about their well-being. Such values and caring can be shown up by considering the employees' opinions, supporting their career goals, considering their welfare as a person and as an employee and providing support or help to them when they face a problem (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1997). From the study presented here, it can be seen that high levels of support from the organization (e.g. valuing of employees' contributions and welfare) plays an essential role in the success of transfer of training in the workplace.

However, because of the limited amount of research in the context, the results of this study can be regarded as tentative until further similar studies are conducted. Future studies could re-examine the identified relationships in related context, such as financial services organizations (e.g. banks, insurance company), professional services organizations (e.g. consulting, accounting firms) and hotels and utilities organizations in non-Western countries. The same elements in contrasting working environments may differentially impact on the transfer of training (Clarke, 2002), the nature of service quality provided by employees (Clemes *et al.*, 2011) and the way employees will perceive the support from their organization.

7. Limitations and suggestions for future study

One limitation of this study is that data were collected at one point of time, applying a cross-sectional design methodology. Although researchers such as Chiaburu and Lindsay (2008) indicate that this design is commonly used in training research; some view the collection of data at one point of time, making it difficult to draw inferences of causality (Dysvik and Kuvass, 2008) and limiting the explanatory power of the results (Gegenfurtner *et al.*, 2009). Therefore, undertaking a longitudinal study in this area would assist in validating the current findings.

In addition, this study applies a quantitative research design where the data were collected through a questionnaire survey. Future studies should consider collecting deeper qualitative data from their respondents. The use of both qualitative and quantitative methods would provide an opportunity for more in-depth and richer explanations of how employees' POS, why employees transfer the training outcomes in the workplace and how the transfer of training affect their service quality (Brown *et al.*, 2011).

There are also limitations that need to be placed on the generalizability of this study beyond the current organization where it was conducted. Data for this study were collected from public sector organizations in Malaysia. Clearly, replication is necessary to test the relationships reported here. Thus, future studies could replicate the proposed conceptual framework used here in other types of organizations such as private sector organizations. Conducting research across different organizational settings will help to build a greater understanding of the role of the proposed factors in affecting and sustaining application of training outcomes to the workplace and the consequences of this transfer of training on the employee. It is because the elements in working environments may differentially impact on the level of employees' POS (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986), the transfer of training (Clarke, 2002) and the nature of service quality provided by employees (Clemes *et al.*, 2011).

This study has focused on the mediating role of transfer of training in the relationship between POS and service quality. Because of the limited amount of research in exploring the factors that mediates the link between POS and service quality (Bell and Menguc, 2002), future study could examine other factors that will mediate the relationship. One potential factor that could mediate POS–service quality relationship is organizational commitment. A recent study shows that POS has a positive impact on organizational commitment (Tremblay *et al.*, 2010). There was also one study that indicated that organizational commitment was positively related to service quality (Hung, 2006). Based on both findings, it can be argued that organizational commitment could mediate the relationship between POS and service quality. However, such a relationship has not yet tested in the literature.

8. Conclusion

This study disseminates essential knowledge to enhance our understanding of the relationship among POS, transfer of training and service quality in a non-Western context, specifically in the Malaysian public sector. This study has provided empirical evidence on the importance of transfer of training as a mediator that links the effect of POS on service quality. Employees general perception that their organization values their contribution highly and cares about their well-being can positively influence them to apply any knowledge and skills that they have learned while undertaking training to their workplace, and are, in turn, more likely to demonstrate high quality outcomes. In the context of this study, these outcomes were manifested in the level of service quality they provide to other staff members. Although this finding is limited to the context of public sector organizations in Malaysia, they can be a reference for other organizational types and assist them to maximize the outcomes from the training investment they make in their employees.

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Appendix

Perceived organizational support

- (1) My organization cares about my opinions.
- (2) My organization really cares about my well-being.
- (3) My organization strongly considers my goals and values.
- (4) Help is available from my organization when I have a problem.
- (5) My organization would forgive an honest mistake on my part.
- (6) If given the opportunity, my organization would take advantage of me.
- (7) My organization shows very little concern for me.
- (8) My organization is willing to help me when I need a special favor.

Transfer of training

- (1) Using the new knowledge and skills acquired from the training has helped him/her improve his/her work.
- (2) He/she can accomplish his/her tasks faster than before training.
- (3) He/she has accomplished his/her job tasks faster than before training.
- (4) He/she can accomplish the job tasks better using new knowledge and skills acquired from the training course.
- (5) The quality of his/her work has improved after using new knowledge and skills acquired from the training course.
- (6) He/she makes fewer mistakes in the job activities when using new knowledge and skills that learned in training.

Service quality

- (1) When he/she promises to do something by a certain time, he/she does so.
- (2) When I have problems, he/she is sympathetic and reassuring.
- (3) He/she is dependable.
- (4) He/she provides services at the time he/she promises to do so.
- (5) He/she keeps their work accurately.
- (6) He/she does not tell others exactly when services will be performed.
- (7) I do not receive prompt service from him/her.

- (8) He/she is not always willing to help others.
- (9) He/she is too busy to respond to other requests promptly.
- (10) I can trust him/her.
- (11) I feel safe in my transactions with him/her.
- (12) He/she is polite.
- (13) I get adequate support from him/her to do my jobs well.
- (14) He/she does not give me individual attention.
- (15) He/she does not give me personal attention.
- (16) He/she does not know my needs.
- (17) He/she does not has my best interests at heart.
- (18) He/she does not has operating hours convenient to all their customers.

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