The Importance of Determining Approaches to Improve Soft Skills Transfer of Training into Workplace in Malaysian Context

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Abstract--- *The impact of Industry Revolution 4.0 (IR4.0) on human workforce is inevitable. More jobs will be automated whereby the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and robotics will be apparent. This situation causes many routine jobs to be reduced, yet it will also create the need for quality manpower in the remaining staff, for example office and administrative roles. In spite of technological advancement, the need for soft skills will remain relevant because not all job functions can be automated and handled by AI and robots, such as jobs that require empathy, interpersonal skills and teamwork. Hence, soft skills training will be a strategic platform in an effort by employers to impart the knowledge to their staff. Thus, this conceptual paper describes the study to be undertaken in an attempt to identify the influencing factors on soft skills transfer of training amongst clerical staff. This study will employ a quantitative research design and Rasch Model for data analysis. To facilitate this study, self-developed questionnaires will be developed using Delphi Method to confirm the validity of the questionnaires. Rasch Model will analyze the construct validity and reliability of instrument prior to actual study. A 6-point Likert-type scale will be utilized to obtain data from respondents and using Rasch analysis, the findings will be presented in the form of descriptive statistics. Results of findings will be justified professionally based on current and relevant literature. It is anticipated that the contribution of this study will generate a compelling model to predict influencing factors of soft skills transfer of training. The call for this study with specific focus on clerical staff is relevant in keeping abreast with the global environment changes affecting Malaysian workforce. The study is deemed necessary to determine approaches that can improve their soft skills transfer of training back into workplace, particularly in Malaysian context.*

Keywords--- *Training, Soft Skills, Transfer of Training, Clerical Staff, Workplace.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Training has been a management strategic approach that organizations usually utilize to enhance employees' performance (Noe, 2010). It is expected that training will enable superior job performance that will result in high productivity, and in turn will generate profitability. There are two categories of training that are typically provided to employees in an organization: hard skills training and soft skills training. Hard skills are technical related skills, such as computer skills, machine operation, typing speed, and other skills that are quantifiable. While soft skills are subjective skills that are harder to quantify (Robles, 2012), such as interpersonal communication, integrity, and time management. This strategic approach is crucial across industries to ensure employees are well equipped in dealing

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with the current competitive work environment (Putta, 2014). Using this approach, employees are more prepared to handle challenges in the workplace. Many workplace issues can negatively affect employees if they are not equipped appropriately.

Furthermore, Ibrahim, Boerhannoeddin and Bakare (2017) suggest that employers have the responsibility to provide necessary training to ensure employees can perform their jobs well while getting along with others. Apart from job performance, training can have positive effect on employees' organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Feng & Richards, 2018; Ibrahim et al., 2017). Besides, for organizations to remain competitive in today's knowledge-driven global economy, learning agility and speed are important (Allan, 2011). This can be achieved through continuously providing training to employees and ensuring effectiveness of training in the workplace. Hence, the relevance of training and its effects must not be undermined.

Truitt (2011) describes training as a planned intervention that employers use to improve job performance of employees. It is a platform where employees gain specific competencies to improve their performance in a given work environment. This platform involves an organized process to tackle employees' problems by imparting new knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) to be acquired by them. Apparently, employees provided with appropriate KSAs will be able to contribute towards long term survival of an organization (Lazarus, 2013; Robert, 2010). The indication of training effectiveness will be demonstrated by employees' capabilities to perform efficiently and effectively in the workplace. According to Bramley (2008), training effectiveness is the improvement of employees' performance in the workplace after training. As such, organizations need to consistently provide training to employees so that they can perform competitively. However, employers should also administer their training efforts more critically in ensuring its effectiveness is in line with the organization's desired outcomes (Obisi, 2011).

The common reason employers spent so much in training is because they expect employees to apply the KSAs learnt back into their jobs (Blume, Ford, Baldwin & Huang, 2010; Noe, 2010). This is because the improvement of their jobs would suggest that training effectiveness has taken place. Obviously, employers anticipate that the improvement in job quality and productivity will reflect favourably in the business bottom line. On the other hand, Franke and Felfe (2012) have highlighted that despite billions of dollars have been spent for training, only about 10% result in the transfer of KSAs. Therefore, to increase training effectiveness employers are encouraged to understand the factors influencing transfer of training (Salas & Grossman, 2011). With proper understanding, employers can intervene if necessary, to improve the factors that hinder transfer. In this way, employers play more active role in the training process rather than solely depending on training consultants.

However, it has been observed that the effect of recession would see soft skills training budget being affected more than hard skills training. According to the Common Purpose (2008) survey report, technical skills training allocation was reduced by only 6%, whereas soft skills training was substantially reduced by 33% during recession. Also, the Society of Petroleum Engineers (SPE, 2012) report has revealed that employers seemed to prefer technical training over soft skills training. The report has shown that out of 65.7% respondents who attended formal training: 76.5% of them received technical training and only 57.8% received soft skills training. This appears that technical training is viewed by employers to have more direct impact on organizational performance, although soft skills are

crucial for employees' development in the workplace (DeKay, 2012). On the contrary, training budget cut is an unwise choice because training could lessen workplace conflicts during economic uncertainty (Truitt, 2011). This means that soft skills training is essential in organizations, as it can facilitate both improvement in job and behavioural performance in the workplace.

In spite of the focus on technological progression in the work environment, Lazarus (2013) expresses that the technical skills alone will not be adequate. The technology would still require human to execute work tasks and the soft skills would ensure the quality of tasks executed. Parallel with this point, World Economic Forum (WEF) reports in 2016 and 2018 have affirmed that soft skills are necessary for employees to perform effectively in the workplace. 'The Future of Jobs Report' by WEF (2018) has published the top ten skills today and skills trending for year 2022, as in Table 1 below. It is apparent that soft skills still dominate the skills needed in year 2022. This clearly indicates that soft skills will be the focal point in an organization's continued success.

Table 1: Skills Demand Comparison, 2018 vs. 2022

Today, 2018	Trending, 2022
Analytical thinking and innovation	Analytical thinking and innovation
Complex problem solving	Active learning and learning strategies
Critical thinking and analysis	Creativity, originality and initiative
Active learning and learning strategies	Technology design and programming
Creativity, originality and initiative	Critical thinking and analysis
Attention to detail, trustworthiness	Complex problem solving
Emotional intelligence	Leadership and social influence
Reasoning, problem solving and ideation	Emotional intelligence
Leadership and social influence	Reasoning, problem solving and ideation
Coordination and time management	Systems analysis and evaluation

Source: WEF (2018)

In addition to fierce global competition, the coming of the Industry Revolution 4.0 (IR4.0) also poses imminent challenges. WEF reports (2016, 2018) have asserted that the worldwide workforce is anticipated to encounter employment reduction. At the same time, the remaining employees are still expected to perform quality jobs with high productivity level. Also, Bonekamp and Sue (2015) have highlighted, even with IR4.0 adverse impact on jobs, experts agree that soft skills like empathy, teamwork and cooperation cannot be performed by machines, except human workforce. To fulfill this expectation, employers recognize that soft skills are needed to promote this effort. On that note, it is safe to say that soft skills training is still relevant now and, in the future.

In Malaysia, both skills are critical for any organization's long-term survival. Realizing the impact of highly competitive global competition is inevitable, Malaysian Government has empowered the Human Resources Development Corporation, more commonly known as HRDF to oversee the human capital development in Malaysia. HRDF is responsible for monitoring consistent participation of organizations in developing the skills of employees through training. In this 21st century business environment, Noe (2010) contends that training is no longer an option, but it is a necessity for employers to upskill and reskill their employees, consistently. Furthermore, Malaysia also needs to be ready for the fast approaching of IR4.0. On the Talent Corporation Malaysia Berhad (TalentCorp) webpage (20 November 2017), several initiatives have been taken to mitigate the IR4.0. These include five key areas to future-proof Malaysia's workforce: engineering of a robust talent ecosystem; enhancing the skills

and capacities of the workforce; reforming talent and human capital policies; employing data to better coordinate human capital policies; and developing a National Future of Work Action Plan. This massive action plan will involve retraining and reskilling of Malaysian workforce as an approach for employees to enhance their KSAs that are essential for the survival of organizations.

Additionally, in Malaysian context the workplace generally consists of multi-racial employees that requires them to work harmoniously in achieving organizational goals. Even though employees are excellent at technical skills, lacking in soft skills can present challenges, such as interpersonal problem, communication problem, and team conflict (Moeller, Robinson, Wilkowski & Hanson, 2012). Ideally, if employees are capable communicating and working as a team, it would be an advantage to employers (Reinsch & Gardner, 2014). With that in mind, it is imperative for employers to provide reasonable balance of technical and soft skills training to ensure organizations' healthy performance. Thus, the overall performance of employees in the workplace is critical to accomplish organizational wellness, and training is an integral part of this effort.

II. Research Background and Rationale

From the literature, it is undeniable that in a highly competitive business environment of the 21st century, technical skills alone are no longer sufficient (Lazarus, 2013). The lack of soft skills amongst the workforce in Malaysia is not an isolated case as other countries are facing similar problems. Workers in other countries, such as the United Kingdom and Australia are also facing the skills gaps (Brungardt, 2011). Therefore, in managing globalization's impact, both hard skills and soft skills are definitely vital.

In particular Malaysian workplace with cultural diversity, soft skills are crucial because employees need to work closely with each other. In this unique setting, employers require their employees to exhibit various soft skills competencies at work (Seetha, 2014), such as interpersonal skills, positive attitude and handling conflicts. These soft skills will facilitate employees to set aside their differences in fostering productive team. Engaging effectively with one another when interacting about work and personal issues can produce desired results (Troth, Jordan, Lawrence & Tse, 2012). Not only that, given the Malaysian context of multi-racial workforce, employees are expected to demonstrate high tolerance level in creating successful team performance. To build successful team, employees must have the relevant soft skills knowledge to do so. However, findings by Seetha (2014), the top three soft skills that are lacking but required by Malaysian employers are communication skills (28%), positive attitude (24%) and teamwork (17%). Hence, the lack of these critical skills may deter the efforts of employers to create successful team of employees in the workplace.

Even though scholars have concurred that soft skills are critical component of human competencies (Ibrahim et al., 2017; Moeller, et al., 2012), yet there is no exact definition but rather a variety of descriptions. Robles (2012) has described that soft skills comprise of character traits, attitudes, and behaviors. Along with that description, several terms have been used to refer to soft skills, such as social skills and people skills. These terms are used to mean the group of skills that among others include communication skills, problems solving skills and leadership skills (Amiruddin, Ngadiman, Abdul Kadir & Saidy, 2016; Klaus, 2010). Employers deem that having these skills, employees will be able to build better relationships with their peers, superiors and customers. Interestingly, Wats

and Wats (2009) have stated that to be successful in a workplace, a person depends more on soft skills; 85% soft skills and only 15% hard skills. This indicates that soft skills are becoming critical as employees have to thrive in their workplace full of challenges. For that reason, the role of soft skills training in organizations are absolutely significant in assisting employees to navigate the challenges, successfully.

Since soft skills are critical in today's workplace, employers should view the budget spent for employees training as investment (Bhanot, 2009) and not as expenditure. Nevertheless, it is common that employers regard decision on training budget like any other business decisions and expect maximum return on investment (ROI). Employers expect employees to apply KSAs learnt back into their jobs to improve work efficiency, quality of services and productivity. However, despite huge provisions to training budget, employers are dissatisfied with the transfer effectiveness of KSAs back into workplace (Laker & Powell, 2011; Wenzel & Cordery, 2014). In other words, employers have claimed that their employees do not apply the soft skills learnt back into the workplace at a satisfactory level. Due to the difficulties to measure the soft skills training effectiveness, many employers prefer to invest little for this type of training. Besides, quantifying the ROI for soft skills training can be complicated (Robles, 2012), despite the fact soft skills are critical for human capital development.

This is consistent with Moeller et al. (2012) comment that deficiency in human capital can cause imbalanced human workforce. Employers need to plan a balanced training programs to accommodate both hard skills and soft skills. Nevertheless, many employers across industries recognize the significance of hard skills compared to soft skills because soft skills are more difficult to evaluate (Ibrahim et al., 2017; Robles, 2012). If such situation persists, it poses a harmful threat to organizational well-being in a long run. In addition, the Association for Talent Development (ATD) report in 2015 has indicated that soft skills are important for workforce market. This supports the findings by Klaus (2010) who has emphasized that for organization to succeed, it depends more on people skills (75%) rather than technical knowledge (25%).

Moreover, in view of the challenges facing by many job categories due to automation, advanced robotics and artificial intelligence, the skills of employees must be consistently upgraded and retrained. This is evident when Bowles (2014) points out that the IR4.0 is causing the routine jobs being decreased. Amongst the affected jobs is office and administrative roles (WEF 2016), such as clerical functions. Generally, clerical staff handle daily routine tasks and they are considered as an important support group in organizations. Still, not all tasks can be automated because human touch elements are still needed, for instance empathy and understanding towards others (Bonekamp & Sue, 2015). Therefore, given that routine tasks performed by clerical staff also include communicating, interacting and dealing with internal and external customers, they require soft skills to execute their job well.

Especially, in the current tumultuous working environment that is triggered by the IR4.0 effect, the work performance that produces high quality job with high productivity level will assure continued survival of organizations. So, to lessen the impact of the IR4.0 on clerical staff, they must be upskilled and reskilled to be competitive as other employees. Employers need to provide the relevant technical skills and essentially to give priority to soft skills training to meet future demand. This is because soft skills training for clerical staff will be able to increase their KSAs of soft skills. Then by applying lessons learnt in training into their workplace more

effectively will improve their overall performance. As such, this present the necessity to ascertain approaches that can further improve soft skills training transfer of clerical staff back into the workplace.

III. DISCUSSION ON PAST RESEARCH FINDINGS

Going through relevant literature, there are abundant of studies focusing on improving transfer of training by scholars. Over the span of 20 years, there are many studies conducted on the transfer of training including in the aspect of organizational setting (Burke & Hutchins, 2008). With organizations insisting that their investment in training must yield the anticipated outcomes, this has ignited researchers' interests to study and understand the transfer of training better. Also, it has been found in a study by Cheng and Hampson (2008) that a number of transfer researchers have observed several inconsistency and differing findings in the transfer literature. Nonetheless, the transfer of training concept has evolved since then but with rooms for improvement. Similarly, in Malaysia there are some studies on the transfer of training performed on adult learners, such as in banking and manufacturing sectors with professionals and supervisors as variables (Mohd Salleh, Sulaiman & Talib, 2010; Raja Kasim & Ali, 2011).

Generally, the transfer of training is described as the application of KSAs learnt in training back to job (Burke, Hutchins & Saks, 2013). Meanwhile, Baldwin and Ford (2008) have suggested that successful transfer of training is when employees are able to apply the KSAs gained during training into the workplace. Employees are expected to apply the lessons learnt and also to maintain over a period of time for the improvement to materialize. For that reason, the transfer of training needs to be measured in ensuring learning is applied properly. However, many employers inconsistently or hardly measure training effectiveness to confirm the actual impact of training on performance (Iqbal, Maharvi, Malik & Khan, 2011). It can be said that not knowing exactly what happens to the actual impact of training is a waste of time, money and efforts. Thus, determining approaches that can boost the soft skills training transfer into the workplace may encourage employers to proactively monitor and measure the actual impact of training.

Moving forward, there are three main theories that are critical in the foundation of training transfer. The first theory is called Theory of Identical Elements, introduced by Thorndike and Woodworth in 1901. The theory explains that the greater the similarity of the trainee's situations, the higher is the degree of training transfer (AlSagheer & Mohammed, 2011). The second theory is the Stimulus Generalization Theory, where habits, knowledge and skills gained in a situation can be turned into generalization depending on the degree of the trainee's aptitude (Wisniewski, Church & Mercado, 2014). The third theory is a more recent theory known as the Cognitive Theory. This theory focuses on the internal processes which include observing, categorizing, and forming generalizations about environment that is significant in terms of increasing the level of training transfer (Wallace, Raison, Ghumman, Moran, Dasguota & Ahmed, 2017). It is synthesized that each theory has its own role in the transfer of training conduct and each theory complements one another. With the combination of these three theories, the transfer of training conduct can be better understood, and this may allow researchers to employ the knowledge of training transfer according to different types of training.

This leads to Baldwin and Ford's Transfer of Training Model (1988) as shown in Figure 1, a priority model

adapted into this study. This theoretical framework has been a significant reference for extensive study by researchers.
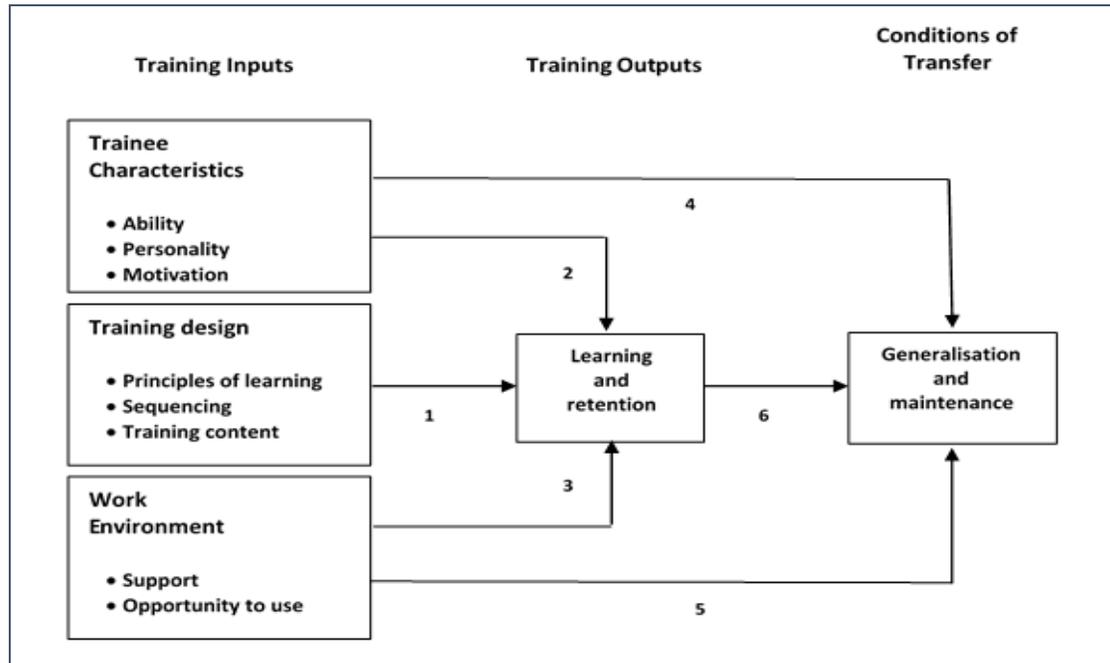

Figure 1: Baldwin and Ford's Transfer of Training Model (1988)

Source: Training transfer research. Wenzel & Cordery (2014)

In a nutshell, Baldwin and Ford's (1988) model illustrates the relationships between training inputs and training transfer, where training input factors have direct effect on training outputs. While training outputs of learning and retention have direct effects on the conditions of transfer. This means for transfer of training to occur will include both generalization of knowledge and skills acquired during training session to be applied back to the job, alongside with the maintenance of learning over a period of time. This model also has many variables that are useful for this study to uncover answers to the research questions. Thus, the researcher has decided to modify the variables in the training inputs of this model to suit the objectives of the study.

Two other models being delved into in order to construct the conceptual framework of this study are Burke & Hutchins' Model of Transfer (2008) and Holton's HRD Evaluation Research and Measurement Model (1996). All the three models consist of factors and variables that are important in the transfer of training process. In addition, these three models have suggested several common factors that have significant influence on the transfer of training: trainee characteristics; training design; and working environment (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Burke & Hutchins, 2008; Holton, 2005).

Over the years, research on the transfer of training persists with findings on various direct and indirect effects and the degree that these effects have on the influencing factors (Burke & Hutchins, 2008). Many previous and current literature on factors influencing transfer of training has observed that a lot of factors can indeed influence effectiveness of training. These range of factors are related to different stages of training programs which are

capable to impact on the training transfer level (Bhatti & Kaur, 2010; Tonhäuser & Büker, 2016). Additionally, many researchers have identified that the influencing factors can vary, whereby the factors can affect the transfer of training directly or indirectly (Blume et al., 2010; Burke & Hutchins, 2008). Similarly, these studies have shown that the three most common categories of the transfer of training factors are individual, training design and environment.

In light of the analysis of the literature on the influencing factors of training transfer, variables for the study have been determined based on the strongest and the least influence on the transfer of training. These strongest influence variables are selected as they are relevant and the relationship to the transfer of training have been proven. Also included in this study are few variables that are least influence because they are under-researched, but they are strongly recommended for further research. As such, findings by other researchers on transfer of training variables can be grouped into two categories:

1. Strongest influence variables on transfer of training (Bhatti & Kaur, 2010; Blume et al., 2010; Cheng & Hampson, 2008; Ibrahim et al., 2017; Grossman & Salas, 2011; Tonhäuser & Büker, 2016):

- Personal Efficacy (PEf)
- Personal Motivation (PM)
- Training Awareness (TA)
- HOD's Support (HS)
- Workplace Support (WS)
- Workplace Climate (WC)

2. Least influence variables but recommended for further research (Burke & Hutchins, 2008; Cheng, Sanders & Hampson, 2015; Chukwu, 2016; Laker & Powell, 2011; Tonhäuser & Büker, 2016):

- Personal Intention (PI)
- Personal Expectations (PE)
- Training Contents (TC)
- Training Delivery (TD)
- Post-Training Interventions (PTI)
- Trainer's Quality (TQ)

For this study, major variables have been selected from both categories and adapted with modification to be studied in depth. It is necessary to study the extent of influence that these variables have on the transfer of training in determining the influence on the soft skills training transfer amongst clerical staff in Malaysian context. This can be considered as amongst the few studies being conducted on clerical staff pertaining to training transfer of soft skills in respect to Malaysian work culture. Also, the researcher will identify the differences in expectations between superiors and clerical staff towards soft skills training. This is in line with the assertion from Stoffers, Schrijver and Kleefstra (2018) that expectations element has a linked to motivation to transfer lessons learnt back into job and workplace. Thus, this present study intends to close the gap by investigating the correlation of these variables to soft skills transfer of training on clerical staff. This then leads to the objectives of this study as presented below:

1. To identify the factors influencing transfer of soft skills learnt back into workplace.

2. To determine the expectations of superiors and clerical staff towards soft skills training.

3. To identify the differences in the expectations of superiors and clerical staff towards soft skills training.

4. To determine the informed approaches in applying soft skills learnt back into workplace to meet the expectations of superiors and clerical staff.

As a result, a conceptual framework has been formed on the basis of several reasons that guided this study. Briefly, the framework is constructed by modifying most training inputs adapted from Baldwin and Ford's Transfer of Training Model (1988) as shown in Figure 2 below:

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR SOFT SKILLS TRANSFER OF TRAINING

Independent Variables (IV) **Dependent Variable (DV)**

Participants Factors (PF)
- Personal Efficacy (PEf)
- Personal Intention (PI)
- Personal Motivation (PM)
- Personal Expectations (PE)

Soft Skills Training Design Factors (SsTdF)
- Training Contents (TC)
- Training Delivery (TD)
- Training Awareness (TA)
- Post-Training Interventions (PTI)

Workplace Factors (WF)
- HOD's Support (HS)
- Trainer's Quality (TQ)
- Workplace Support (WS)
- Workplace Climate (WC)

Soft Skills Transfer of Training (SSTT)

Soft Skills Applied (SSA)
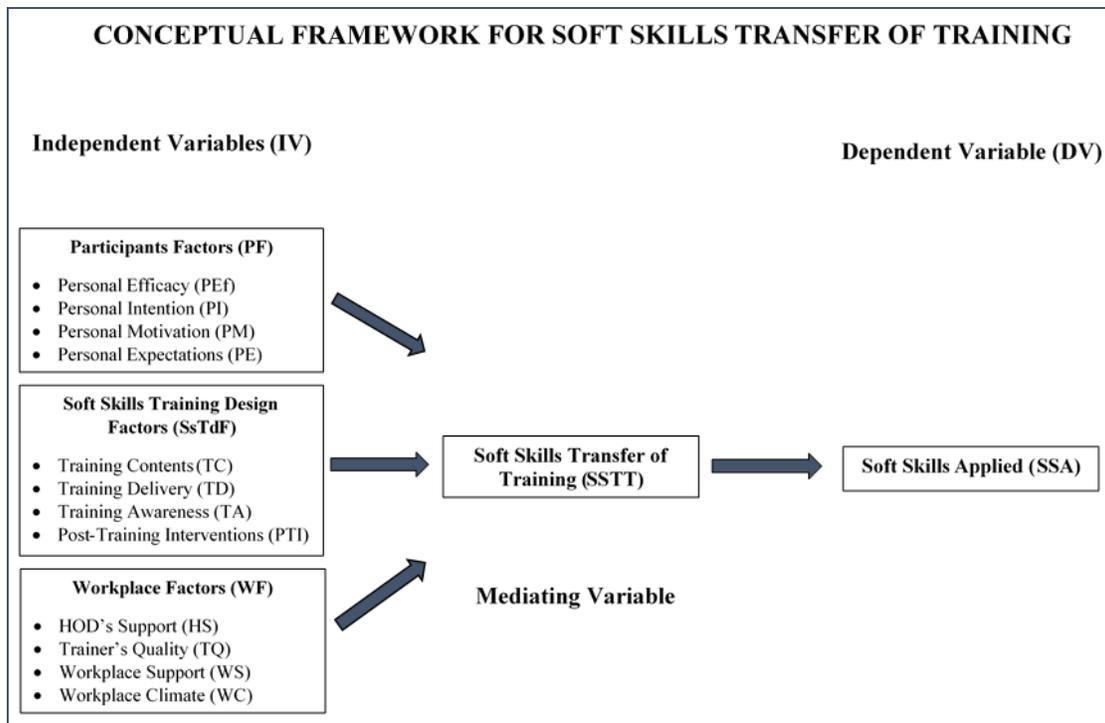
Mediating Variable

Figure 2: Conceptual Framework

The framework consists of three major factors which have been adapted and modified from Baldwin and Ford's Transfer of Training Model (1988). The first factor is Participants Factors (PF), it refers to the target samples of this study, whereby samples have some work experience. The second factor is Soft Skills Training Design Factors (SsTdF) that refers to essential features in planning soft skills training programs. The third factor is Workplace Factors (WF) referring to general environment that contains both physical and non-physical characteristics in workplace setting. In each factor, four independent variables have been selected to be examined in determining the extent of their influence on the Soft Skills Transfer of Training (SSTT). It is posited that the variables' influence on the SSTT will then influence the Soft Skills Applied (SSA) back into workplace. The three major factors with twelve variables must be examined to determine the extent of influence they have on the Soft Skills Transfer of Training (SSTT) amongst clerical staff in Malaysian working environment.

Ultimately, it is crucial to have a theory as a basis to support and justify findings to produce a thorough research. The theory will be able to explain the findings clearly and firmly. For this research, Theory of Planned Behaviour

(TPB) has been chosen to explain the findings. This theory is now one of the most commonly referred to for human social behaviour research (Ajzen, 2011). Briefly, the TPB suggests that people are more likely to enact on their intentions when they feel their surrounding abilities allow them to enact successfully (Buhmann & Brønn, 2018). Moreover, Cheng and Hampson (2008) have conceded that TPB can contribute to the understanding of the training transfer process, particularly the relationship between participants' intentions to the transfer. It is also expected that TPB can explain the relationship of other influencing factors to the transfer of training.

IV. METHODOLOGY

To undertake this study, the researcher will employ a quantitative survey research design. According to Daniel (2016), the quantitative method is suitable as it can provide reasonably conclusive answers to the research questions in a study. Moreover, the data collected from the study are normally reliable and importantly it can be generalized. As such, it will be conducted within the conceptual structures that comprises of the design for data collection, data measurement and data analysis, and data interpretation (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2012). For data collection method, survey design is normally used in quantitative research where the instruments are primarily questionnaires (Creswell, 2014). Meanwhile, a descriptive statistical analysis will be employed in analyzing and interpreting the data.

To facilitate this study, two sets of self-developed questionnaires will be constructed to fit each unit of analysis (UOA), that is clerical staff and superiors. The questionnaires will be based on the research questions to examine the variables presented in the conceptual framework by obtaining participants' perceptions on each variable in each factor. For each set of survey, there will be three sections of questionnaires.

For Clerical Staff

In Section 1, information on participants' demographic profile will be obtained. Section 2 intents to gauge participant's perceptions on factors that may cause him or her to apply soft skills learnt back into workplace. Section 3 attempts to elicit participant's general perceptions towards soft skills training provided by employer.

For Superiors

Section 1 intents to obtain demographic information on participant's background. Section 2 is to gauge participant's perceptions on factors that may cause his or her subordinate (clerical staff) applies soft skills learnt back into workplace. Section 3 attempts to elicit participant's general perceptions towards soft skills training provided by employer.

A 6-point Likert-type scale will be employed to rate participants' perceptions ranging from 1 "strongly disagree" to 6 "strongly agree". This rating scale will have the participants commit to either positive or negative answer. As such, data will not be wasted on the mid-point where they do not provide valuable information. This is because the exclusion of a middle category will not distort the data and avoid meaningless measures (Bradley, Peabody, Akers & Knutson, 2015). This scale is suitable for data analysis using Rasch Model.

Also, most questions will be in first person form point of view and it will be an online survey format to reduce the possibility of data corruption during data collection stage. Given that this is self-developed questionnaires, the

researcher will use Delphi Method to evaluate the questionnaires to ensure objectivity and clarity. As there appears to be no standard panel size for this method (Avella, 2016; Kim & Yeo, 2018), the researcher will appoint five content experts to participate in the development of the questionnaires. This panel of experts will consist of two lecturers with PhD qualification and three training practitioners (1 PhD, 1 DBA and 1 Master). This method will involve at least three rounds of feedback obtaining process from the five content experts in developing the questionnaires.

Then the researcher will conduct a pilot study to identify any problems pertaining to the survey. Rasch analysis will be utilized to verify the acceptable level of the survey questionnaires prior to the actual study, as this will establish the reliability of the instrument. According to Fitkov-Norris and Yeghiazarian (2015), Rasch analysis has been used to analyze questionnaire and construct validity and reliability. Once the survey is ready, a set of survey questionnaires will be administered via online to gain responses from the selected samples of the target population. To attain a sampling frame for both UOA, purposive sampling will be employed. It is because both UOA will be deliberately selected based on the criteria set by the researcher. This is parallel with Stewart (2012) who states that in purposive sampling, the samples are selected consistent with the set criteria for participation in the study. Then the researcher will use the Krejcie and Morgan Table (1970) to determine the sample size to participate in the survey.

Once data is collected, the responses from the participants will be managed, accordingly. This data analysis will be performed using Rasch analysis to develop a quantitative inference. Data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics because it is a common type of data analysis that examines the relationship between two variables (Waterman, 2008). Validity and reliability of data for this study will also be reported. This is in accordance to Awang and Ariffin (2015) who have stated that the accuracy of findings is significant so as it will not be doubtful in the future. Also, in data analysis, the researcher will include correlation analysis to show relationship of variables and regression analysis to show which relationship is more prominent amongst the variables. Results of findings will be justified professionally based on current and relevant literature. In doing so, it is critical that ethical issues to be observed in the study process in ensuring the quality and credibility of this research.

V. CONCLUSION

In summary, identifying factors that can improve soft skills training transfer of clerical staff will reveal findings that will enable improvement in their soft skills application. Subsequently, appropriate approaches to improve soft skills transfer of training into the workplace can be determined. It is anticipated that the contribution of this study will generate a compelling model to predict influencing factors of soft skills transfer of training. Hence, this model will encourage employers to play a bigger role in ensuring transfer of training actually takes place, as it makes it easier for them to manage the effectiveness of soft skills training programs. Employers would be able to manage factors that are hindering positive transfer of soft skills training more effectively.

Besides, the findings of this study will facilitate employers to plan strategically in mitigating expectations between clerical staff and superiors, in respect to Malaysian working environment context. More so, the forthcoming of IR4.0 will add pressure in organizations, if employees are not well trained with proper soft skills competencies to

handle the challenges. As such, it is important to ensure that employees have the correct competencies to deal with people of various backgrounds, particularly in a multi-racial country like Malaysia. Plus, it is hoped that the findings can provide useful insights for trainers and training specialists to formulate better soft skills training programs. Additionally, employers will realize that the ROI in human capital is possible, although it is intangible where it can be observed through establishment of improved working environment.

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