
Resources for development: the relationship of HRM practices and continuous learning culture with training success

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Abstract: We tested the importance of two hypothesised resources HRM practices and continuous learning culture – in determining training success in the service industries in Kuwait. Using a sample of 605 employees from different Kuwaiti service firms, our results demonstrate that HRM practices have a positive association with training success by boosting employees' ability to learn and apply the newly learned skills to their work. Moreover, we found that organisations with continuous learning culture were more likely to achieve higher level of training success when they cultivate a climate of encouragement where employees learn and develop their full potential to complete their tasks better and with less mistakes. Furthermore, we tested the role of continuous learning culture in the relationship between HRM practices and training success and found that this relationship is partially mediated by continuous learning culture which illustrates and confirms the existence of a missing link between the two variables.

Keywords: continuous learning; employee development; career development; training success; Human Resource Practices.

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1 Introduction

Researchers have strongly posited the strategic importance of training to organisations' human resource development efforts (Salas and Cannon-Bowers, 2001). The importance of training is particularly relevant in the current era of rapid change, where organisations spend much time and money on improving their workforce's knowledge, skills and abilities (Blume et al., 2010), in order to remain competitive, gain the ability to innovate, improve services and consequently experience increased performance (Patel, 2010). Moreover, through training, the organisations can increase employees' task knowledge, and thus increase employee satisfaction with the organisation (Browning et al., 2009).

That said the literature to date had not pinpointed a secure connection between training and outcomes such as increased organisational participation, improved total quality management, or effective leadership (Bunch, 2007). Thus, with organisations' spending over 200 billion US dollars annually on training, much of their efforts are deemed ill-spent, as many such initiatives fail to garner improved performance (Bunch, 2007). However, this demonstrated failure in establishing a positive relationship between training and improved performance may be due to the study constructs, as empirical studies that have underscored other organisational factors in training success have been able to draw a firm relationship between training and performance and job-related behaviours (Arthur et al., 2003; Jiang et al., 2012). In this realm, Hansen (2002) indicated that firm-specific factors such as HRM practices impact the level of training success across organisations. Moreover, Jiang et al. (2012) cautioned that adequate assessment of training success must take into consideration other moderating organisational factors. In the same line, Ballesteros-Rodriguez et al. (2012) proposed that the level of training program success is not solely influenced by organisational culture and organisational HRM practices, which support the culture of continuous learning, play a significant role in program success rates.

However, the existing literature on the impact of HRM practices and organisational learning culture on training success is mostly derived from western studies. Therefore, little is known about these relationships in the context of non-western societies such as Kuwait. Hofstede et al. (2010) classifies Kuwaiti culture as high on uncertainty avoidance and power distance and low on individualism, which are attributes that are mostly missing from the current literature on organisational studies. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to empirically analyse the relationship between HRM practices and training success considering the mediating effect of the continuous learning culture in the context of service industries in Kuwait. This study will, therefore, contribute to the current literature in analysing the role of HRM and continuous learning culture in a non-western context with high power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and low individualism.

The organisation of the study is as follows: First, we present the conceptual foundations of the research, beginning with a discussion about training success and its relationships with HRM practices and continuous learning culture that contributed to the study's forthcoming hypotheses. Second, we describe the methodology that was designed to test the hypothesised relationships based on a sample of 605 employees working in the services industry in Kuwait. Finally, we present the results obtained and discuss their theoretical and practical implications.

2 Literature review

Training endeavours allow organisations to successfully compete in a changing environment with the aim of changing employees' skills and behaviour to effectively achieve organisational goals (Aguinis and Kraiger, 2009; Hertenstein, 2001). Therefore, for training efforts to be deemed successful, the trainees should be able to transfer their acquired knowledge to their work (Awoniyi et al., 2002). To this end, it is pertinent to communicate the training objectives to employees, as well as, to highlight the importance of transferring their newly acquired skills and behaviour to their jobs (Al-Elisa et al., 2009; Liebermann and Hoffmann, 2008; Yamnill and McLean, 2001).

2.1 *Relationship between HRM practices and training success*

As important as training efforts are to organisations, training does not take place in a vacuum, and the success of training initiatives and the ability of employees to transfer their skills to the job depends on other organisational factors such as organisations' learning culture and HRM practices. To this end, when analysing the effectiveness of a training program, the role of organisations' learning culture and HRM practices must be thoroughly considered (Kusluvan et al., 2010; Horwitz, 1999; Wells and Schminke, 2001).

To this end, it is crucial for organisations to integrate their HRM practices with training initiatives, to achieve the desired outcomes from training efforts (Aguinis and Kraiger, 2009; Thornhill et al., 2000). Among HRM practices favourable to training success is organisations' reward and promotion system that values continuous learning at an individual level and compensates employees accordingly for newly acquired skills (Elangovan and Karakowsky, 1999; Horwitz, 1999). Performance appraisals and internal promotions are also important HRM practices in influencing employees' desire to transfer training to the job. As employees are more likely to transfer

their newly acquired knowledge and skills to the job, if the appraisal process considers those skills, both for employability and promotions (Aguinis and Kraiger, 2009; Tracey and Tews, 2005). To this end, those in charge of developing training programs are encouraged to consider firms' HRM practices to define what constitutes training success and what organisations can do in return to better facilitate the transfer of training (Brown and McCracken, 2009). Moreover, Jiang et al. (2012) reported, based on a meta-analysis of the HRM literature, that there is a direct relationship between both skill-enhancing and motivation-enhancing HRM practices and firms' financial performance. Organisations with performance-minded HRM practices encourage employees' continuous improvement and as a result, provide more positive training. Those above particularly resonate with the services industry. Service organisations spend nearly double the amount of personnel turnover and HRM practices when compared with the manufacturing organisations (Chang, 2003). Therefore, the aforementioned is of particular importance to this study as the study's focus is the service industries, which experience high employee impact as the industry's primary focus is to deal with customers. Therefore, the service industries are very cognisant of their employees' competencies and as a result tend to focus on HRM practices that encourage workforce competitiveness.

2.2 Continuous learning culture and training effectiveness

Park et al. (2004) define culture as shared assumptions that an organisation has developed while reacting to the external environment. McDermott and O'Dell (2001) argued that each organisation has its quintessential culture, which it has developed over time and which can be classified into two groups of visible and invisible values. They further contended that visible characteristics of culture are reflected in the values and mission of the firm, while the invisible characteristics are those that guide the employees' perceptions of the organisation and thus impact their actions within the firm.

Researchers posited that organisations' leaders play a vital role in creating and sustaining a high-performance organisational culture (Chatman and Cha, 2003; Rosenthal and Masarech, 2003). Kotter and Heskett (1992) provided empirical evidence, which indicated that companies with leaders who strongly promoted cultural values outperformed organisations in which the leaders did not emphasise cultural values. Organisations therefore often rely on training endeavours to strengthen their organisational culture and promote the desired behaviours in employees (Den Hartog and Verburg, 2004). Scholars, Cromwell and Kolb (2004) and Bunch (2007) argued that new employees often look at the degree in which organisations value training and react to the training initiatives accordingly. Elangovan and Karakowsky (1999) argued that organisations that promote the culture of change and initiative will experience more successful training outcomes. Furthermore, Awoniyi et al. (2002) contended that firms having the culture of performance and innovation would experience better training transfer on employees' skills and behaviours. In this regard, Tracey et al. (1995) posited that continuous learning culture comprises elements that emphasise the acquisition of knowledge and skills by employees. They further provide adequate opportunities for social interactions in which employees can freely share knowledge while emphasising on firm competitiveness. Also, employees get adequately rewarded for complementing the culture of learning. To this end, organisations that value continuous learning view training initiatives as a long-term investment in their human capital as opposed to

wasteful expenditure. As a result, employees in such organisations understand the emphasis placed on continuous learning and therefore demonstrate increased eagerness in applying their newly learned skills and knowledge in their day-to-day work (Pedler et al., 1989; Noe and Wilk, 1993; Tracey et al., 1995; Cheng and Ho, 2001; Burke and Hutchins, 2008; Hinkin and Tracey, 2010).

2.3 *HRM practices and continuous learning culture*

Scholars have enumerated the importance of corporate renewal as a fundamental mechanism to achieve sustainable competitiveness (Hurst et al., 1989; Beer et al., 1990). Self-renewing organisations are better able to bring about organisation-level changes to their corporate systems, and strive for values creating innovation that leads to sustainable competitive advantage (Crossan et al., 1999; Merrifield, 2000). Since an organisations' ability to constantly change and renew itself plays a fundamental role in the organisations' survival and competitiveness, organisations must endeavour to create an environment that allows their human resources to easily undertake innovative activities (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1999). Lado and Wilson (1994) suggested that organisations' HRM plays a significant role in facilitating the organisational renewal process through generating an explicit climate for competition. Researchers thus propose that organisational HRM systems can concentrate on changing the mental model of the organisation and therefore create a culture of learning that is ongoing in its process and allows not only for the learning to occur but also for it to continue (Wang, 2005). Furthermore, organisational HRM systems must create learning-related HR outcomes to assure the continuity of the learning process at the organisational level and to eliminate the missing link between HRM practices and work outcomes (Barr et al., 1992; Doorewaard and Meihuizen, 2000; Hilsop, 2003). Jaw and Liu (2004) suggested that the creation of a climate of continuous learning requires organisations to espouse characteristics such as openness, innovativeness, discipline, interactive cooperation, and constructive confrontations.

In this vein, scholars have contended that organisational HRM and culture are highly interconnected (Baron and Kreps, 1999; Den Hartog and Verburg, 2004). However, although both organisational culture and HRM influence each other, this study focuses on the role of HRM practices on organisational culture, particularly the culture of continuous learning. Researchers argued that for organisations to cultivate a climate of continuous learning with effective training outcomes, organisations' HRM should be set up as such to give value to training and development in tangible ways (Rouiller and Goldstein, 1993; Tracey et al., 1995; Pidd, 2004). Wei et al. (2008) argued that organisations' HRM's emphasis on the importance of training leads to creating the culture of continuous learning. The culture of learning, in turn, creates a link between training, training transfer, and subsequently improved performance as a result of training (Chiaburu and Lindsay, 2008; Brown and McCracken, 2009). To this end, this study further proposes that continuous learning culture, in turn, will mediate the relationship between human resource practices and training success. The question raised here is: how do human resource practices and continuous learning culture relate to each other in the process of enhancing training success? And how does the culture of learning mediate the relationship between human resource practices and training success? In addressing these questions, and per the reviewed literature, this study proposes the following hypotheses.

- H1 Organisations' HRM practices are positively related to the training success.
- H2 Organisations' continuous learning culture is positively related to the training success.
- H3 Organisational HRM practices positively influence the culture of continuous learning.
- H4 Continuous learning mediates the relationship between human resource practices and training success.

3 Method

To test our proposed hypotheses, we distributed 865 questionnaires among the non-managerial employees working at eight companies headquartered in Kuwait. The study chose to analyse non-managerial employees as to focus on employees' perceptions and how they viewed HRM practices, continuous learning, and training effectiveness. The questionnaire, in turn, was divided into two sections. The first section asked some general information about the employees' demographic information and the organisation for which they work. The second section examined the specific variables related to the determinants of high-involvement work processes and their impact on employee outcomes. The companies represented various industries, including banks, construction, insurance, consulting, and investment. We randomly selected employees from diverse workforce units serving different functions and divisions. We assured the respondents of confidentiality. They returned the questionnaire directly to us for processing. We received 605 usable questionnaires, generating a response rate of 69.94% (31 non-usable questionnaires).

Among the respondents, 62.48% were male, and 64.30% were aged between 21 and 35 years, which means that the sample was relatively young. Concerning positional tenure, 35.87% of the employees had less than five years of experience, 27.6% between six and ten years, and 36.53% more than ten years. 73.06% of employees have been working in their current position for less than five years and 18.18% between six and ten years. Regarding educational level, 4.63% held high school degree, 13.06%, held a two-year diploma, 65.62% held bachelor's degree, 13.71% held a master's degree, and 2.98% held a postgraduate degree.

3.1 Measures

Most variables in the conceptual model were studied earlier either in training or any other related research; therefore, their associated measures were already available. The variables are divided into three major groups: HRM practices, continuous learning culture, and training success. Participants responded to a series of statements for each measure using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1: strongly disagree to 5: strongly agree. HRM practices were measured using six-item scale adapted from Tannenbaum (1997), Richman-Hirsch (2001), Tracey et al. (2001), and Tracey and Tews (2005) to assess the impact of specific HRM practices on training and the extent alignment between these practices and the outcome of training programs. Ex. 'in my firm, there is a climate of continuous progress'. Continuous learning culture was assessed with Tracey et al.'s

(1995) six-item scale to determine the importance that the company emphasises on providing its employees with the needed skills and knowledge to improve their performance. Ex. 'my firm expects high levels of performance at work'. Training success was measured taking into consideration its multidimensional nature. Learning was assessed using two items adapted from Noe and Wilk (1993), Tannenbaum (1997), and Seyler et al. (1998) to evaluate the level of employees' understanding of the knowledge and skills contained in the training course. Ex. 'I learned a lot attending the training course'. Application was also measured using a two-item scale adapted from Gist et al. (1991), Facticeau et al. (1995), Tesluk et al. (1995), Xiao (1996), Awoniyi et al. (2002), Cromwell and Kolb (2004), Brown (2005), and Chiaburu and Marinova (2005) to assess how much of the skills learned in the course are incorporated into the employees' daily work. Ex. 'I have often used at work, knowledge, and skills learned'. Finally, improvement in trainee behaviour was assessed using a two-item scale adapted from Facticeau et al. (1995), Xiao (1996), Awoniyi et al. (2002), and Chiaburu and Marinova (2005) to demonstrate if employees are using the new knowledge, skills, and attitudes learned. Ex. 'I make fewer mistakes at work using the new knowledge, skills and attitudes learned'.

4 Results

In this section, we present the descriptive statistics, the psychometric quality of the research variables, and the results of testing hypotheses.

4.1 Descriptive statistics

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics (means and standard deviation) and the correlation coefficients of the variables. It should be noted that the means vary between 3.35 and 4.04 and the standard deviations between 0.77 and 1.09. Since the central value of a five-point scale is 3, the means are close to the central value. Moreover, the level of the standard deviations shows that there is some variation in the spread around the average values. Meaning that the variables captured the phenomena with both a clear central tendency and a good dispersion (standard deviation between 0.77 and 1.09 points). Moreover, the examination of the correlation reveals that they are all significant at $P < 0.01$. The items of human resource practices are strongly correlated (minimum correlation = 0.324). The correlation matrix also indicates that human resource practices significantly correlate with both continuous learning culture and training success ($p < 0.01$). The items for each dimension of human resource practices are strongly correlated (minimum correlation = 0.336). The correlation matrix also indicates that all the elements of human resource practices significantly correlate with both continuous learning culture and training success ($P < 0.01$).

Table 1 Means, standard deviation and correlations

	Means	Standard deviations	CLS 1	CLS 2	CLS 3	CLS 4	CLS 5	HRM 1	HRM 2	HRM 3	HRM 4	HRM 5	HRM 6	Learning 1	Learning 2	App 1	App 2	Imp 1	Imp 2	
CLS1	3.4380	1.04130	1																	
CLS2	3.8182	.92786	.591**	1																
CLS3	3.5835	.95861	.652**	.549**	1															
CLS4	3.8876	.98697	.468**	.544**	.580**	1														
CLS5	4.0413	.91887	.471**	.607**	.525**	.650**	1													
HRM1	3.5355	1.09672	.393**	.348**	.398**	.398**	.384**	1												
HRM2	3.5140	1.02059	.442**	.419**	.473**	.380**	.435**	.508**	1											
HRM3	3.4645	1.02169	.456**	.437**	.490**	.382**	.406**	.479**	.584**	1										
HRM4	3.3603	1.04331	.464**	.425**	.480**	.356**	.418**	.391**	.558**	.723**	1									
HRM5	3.3554	1.05211	.403**	.329**	.465**	.369**	.332**	.412**	.443**	.585**	.535**	1								
HRM6	3.6198	1.08616	.385**	.386**	.415**	.437**	.465**	.324**	.398**	.422**	.425**	.521**	1							
Learning1	3.6116	.98138	.356**	.390**	.340**	.329**	.319**	.306**	.350**	.360**	.384**	.350**	.399**	1						
Learning2	3.7025	.90660	.340**	.384**	.333**	.296**	.365**	.275**	.343**	.321**	.367**	.305**	.327**	.670**	1					
App1	3.5554	.97263	.363**	.352**	.318**	.315**	.332**	.287**	.317**	.430**	.434**	.336**	.354**	.598**	.520**	1				
App2	3.6727	.96563	.326**	.325**	.325**	.304**	.347**	.253**	.282**	.374**	.372**	.364**	.320**	.531**	.498**	.765**	1			
Imp1	3.8083	.89309	.382**	.367**	.347**	.317**	.363**	.262**	.297**	.375**	.396**	.349**	.346**	.519**	.457**	.643**	.664**	1		
Imp2	3.7339	.94392	.361**	.376**	.324**	.249**	.349**	.250**	.326**	.329**	.368**	.315**	.284**	.487**	.501**	.524**	.587**	.741**	1	

Note: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

4.2 Psychometric quality of the research variables

The psychometric quality of the research variables can be measured via two indicators: reliability and validity.

- *Reliability.* Table 2 shows the reliability statistics evaluated employing Cronbach's alpha coefficients and composite reliability (C.R.). It is noted that all the indexes in our study are above the recommended minimum threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978). Indeed, in our study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients vary from 0.849 (training success) to 0.883 (human resource practices), and the coefficients for composite reliability (C.R.) range from 0.729 (human resource practices) to 0.762 (training success). These variables are considered sufficiently reliable.
- *Validity.* The two primary forms of validity, discriminant validity and convergent validity (Venkatraman and Grant, 1986) are examined. Convergent validity was evaluated through both
 - 1 the average variance extracted (AVE index for which values greater than or equal to 0.50 are considered satisfactory (Chin, 1998)
 - 2 the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) index for which values greater than 0.50 are deemed satisfactory (Lucian et al., 2008).

As shown in Table 2, all the AVE and KMO indexes are greater than or equal to the minimum threshold of 0.50, which suggests that the conditions for convergent validity are fulfilled.

Table 2 Reliability and convergent validity of the research variables

<i>Concepts</i>	<i>Items</i>	<i>Alpha</i>	<i>C.R</i>	<i>AVE</i>	<i>KMO</i>
Human resource practices	6	0.883	0.729	0.752	0.840
Continuous learning culture	5	0.859	0.732	0.769	0.837
Training success	6	0.849	0.762	0.804	0.812

Discriminant validity shows that a measurement is distinct and empirically different from other measurements. It is established when the AVE is greater than the square of the inter-construct correlations (Bagozzi and Yi, 1991). As shown in Table 3, all AVE is greater than the square of the inter-construct correlations, which suggests that the condition for discrimination validity is fulfilled.

Table 3 Discriminant validity of the research variables

<i>Constructs</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>C</i>
A	0.752		
B	0.687	0.769	
C	0.54	0.508	0.804

Notes: The values in the diagonal (bold) represent the AVE and the other values are the squares of the inter-construct correlations.

A: human resource practices;

B: human resource practices;

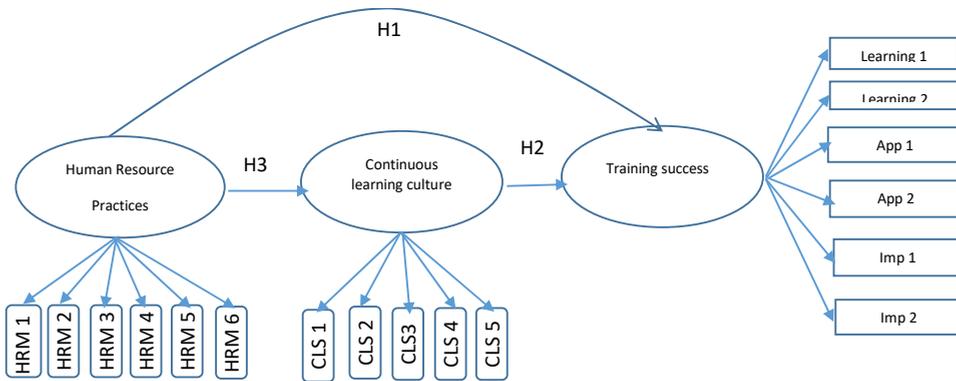
C: training success.

In brief, the analysis of the descriptive statistics (means, standard deviation) and of the psychometric qualities (reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity) of the variables shows that the measurements are good, and therefore it is appropriate for testing the hypotheses.

4.3 Hypotheses testing

The formulated hypotheses were initially tested using the structural equation modelling (SEM) techniques using AMOS software. Three research hypotheses were tested: the relationship between human resource practices and training success, the relationship between continuous learning culture and training success, and the mediating effect of continuous learning culture on the relationship between human resource practices and training success (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Conceptual model (see online version for colours)



Source: Adapted from Ballesteros-Rodriguez et al. (2012)

Table 4 Estimation of the structural equation model

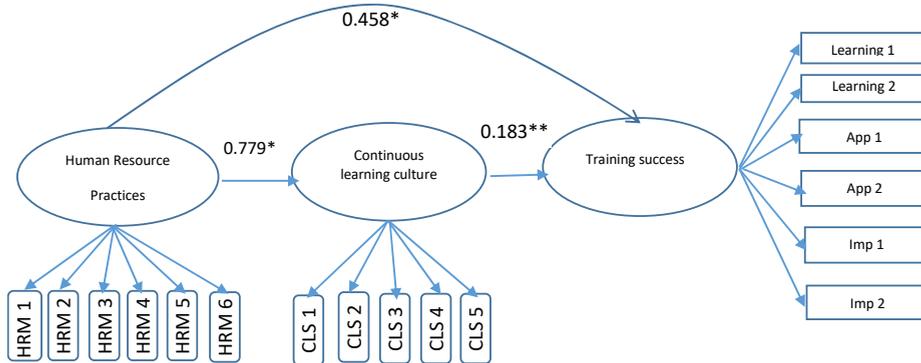
Path specified	Path β	T-value	P-value
HRM practices → continuous learning culture	0.779	10.225	0
Continuous learning culture → training success	0.183	2.059	0
HRM practices → training success	0.458	4.78	0

Note: A relationship is significant if T-value is greater than 1.96.

The estimation of the model produced the following statistical indexes: Chi2 = 2.747; DF = 85; P = .000; RMSEA = .063; GFI = .935; CFI = .958. These indexes suggested that our model is consistent with the data. The results regarding the structural relationships are presented in Table 4. These results show that HRM practices are significantly and positively related to continuous learning culture (B = 0.779; T = 10.225; P < 0.001), thus supporting H3. Likewise, continuous learning culture has a positive and significant relationship with training success (B = 0.183; T = 2.059; P < 0.05); therefore, H2 is supported. Moreover, the results reveal a positive and significant relationship between human resource practices and training success (B = 0.458; T = 4.780; p < 0.001), which confirms H1.

Since there is a positive relationship between human resource practices and continuous learning culture and a positive relationship between continuous learning culture and training success, we conclude that continuous learning culture is a mediator in the relationship between human resource practices and training success. Also, because a direct effect of human resource practices on training success was identified, we conclude that continuous learning culture is a partial mediator.

Figure 2 Standardised regression weights (see online version for colours)



Notes: * $P < 0.001$; ** $P < 0.05$.

5 Discussion

Most empirical studies about influence of continuous learning culture and HRM practices on training success have produced contradictory and inconclusive results (Ballesteros-Rodriguez et al., 2012). In fact, there has been little attempt by scholars to emphasise the importance of the impact of the two variables on the outcomes of training success. Furthermore, no empirical study had examined the relationship between continuous learning cultures and training success on the one hand, and between HRM practices on the other hand, which support the idea that continuous learning culture may mediate the relationship between HRM practices and training success. Thus, this study was amongst the first to test and confirm the mediating role of continuous learning culture in that relationship.

5.1 Managerial implications

From a managerial standpoint, our research findings provided a number of insights. First, the fact that HRM practices have a positive and significant impact on continuous learning culture (as predicted and supported in H3) meant that one of the outcomes of HRM practices is the creation of a learning-oriented culture where companies encourage and reward innovation in a learning context (Wang, 2005). Another outcome of the HRM practices is the existence of a climate of continuous progress. According to Thornhill et al. (2000), HR-centred strategies can change and realign the culture of an organisation through its training programs by increasing the potential value of employees, collectively enhancing their competencies to match the contemporary requirements of the market to

gain competitive advantage over competitors. Kuwaiti organisations, despite access to technology and other resources, can achieve very little without competent employees. Therefore, it is noteworthy that more effective systems of HRM practices lead to better performance and enhanced effectiveness. It will, therefore, be beneficial for organisations to direct their HRM efforts towards providing their employees with extensive planned and long-term oriented training.

Second, the fact that continuous learning culture is positively and significantly associated with training success (as predicted and supported in H2) showed that companies that facilitate learning for all members cultivate a climate of encouragement where individuals learn and develop their full potential. This, in turn, results in employees to incorporate much of the learned skills in the course of their daily work activities, and to complete their tasks better and with fewer mistakes using the newly learned knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Pedler et al., 1989). Our results indicated that private Kuwaiti organisations allocated a considerable amount of their budget for training, which, demonstrates that these organisations try to create a climate of learning culture that encourages trainees to attend the training programs, as well as conveying to them the importance and relevance of these programs, and motivates them to apply the newly acquired skills and knowledge to the job. This highlights the importance of the role top management plays in achieving training success by taking an active part in the training design, providing the needed resources inclusive of aligning HRM practices with training design, and encouraging trainees to use the newly learned skills by motivating them through HRM activities such as promotion and recognition (Wexley and Baldwin, 1986; Pidd, 2004). Furthermore, a lot of Kuwaiti employees attend training programs because their organisations deem training to be mandatory; therefore, those employees are more likely to devote less time and effort in learning and applying the newly learned skills. According to Baumgartel et al. (1984), trainees who value the training and consider the acquired knowledge as relevant and useful are more likely to apply the newly learned skills to the transfer-setting. The above implies that organisations should always encourage employees to effectively use their training through the provision of opportunities and resources needed for practice instead mandating attendance with little follow-up.

Third, we tested the indirect effect of human resource practices on training success. The result showed that human resource practices positively and significantly affect the training success. This result agrees with other researchers who found that some human resource practices, mainly rewards and promotions, are favourable to training success (Elangovan and Karakowsky, 1999; Horwitz, 1999). Human resource practices play a crucial role in enhancing the employees' willingness to learn and apply the newly acquired skills to the job. Therefore, managers in the services industry in Kuwait must be aware of the importance of rewarding the employees for their learning through promotions or incentives to emphasise the value that the company places on training.

Finally, our result showed that the relationship between HRM practices and training success is partially mediated by continuous learning culture. We did not find evidence in the literature that supports our findings. No empirical research had examined the mediating role of continuous learning culture in that relationship. The analysis of our findings shows that the adoption of HRM practices has a significant indirect effect on training success, through its effect on continuous learning culture, which in turn leads to training success. This result is consistent with the general assumption in the literature that there is a missing link between HRM practices and organisation outcomes (Hilsop, 2003;

Morrow and McElroy, 2003). In other words, our findings suggested that continuous learning culture is a crucial tool to encourage and stimulate employees to undertake initiatives that influence their potential to transfer the acquired skills to their jobs successfully. Top management in the Kuwaiti services industry should not ignore the importance of the existence of an organisational learning culture that facilitates the learning process to expand the employees' capacity to create the results they desire.

6 Limitations and future research suggestions

Despite this study being based on well-established theoretical perspectives, some limitations that may constrain their validity should be noted. First, this study is a cross-sectional design since the key variables were measured within the same time frame, and as a result, organisation causal conclusions cannot be supported. For example, it is possible that trainees who perceive a link between positive training outcomes resulting from using and applying the newly learned skills and knowledge to their work and rewards are more likely to be more motivated to transfer their training effectively and successfully to the workplace (Nikandrou et al., 2009). Moreover, we measured HRM practices based on employees' perception of their companies' behaviour after the accomplishment of the training program. Although HRM practices were found to predict organisational learning culture as the key outcome, it raises the question as to what extent the subjective measure of HRM practices reflected the objective aspect of the training outcomes. The subjective nature of the HRM practices measure, as well as the measurement of HRM practices and training success within the same time frame, may partially explain the lack of a direct relationship between them in this study. Therefore, a useful next step would be to conduct experiments or longitudinal studies to examine the causal sequences in the relationships among HRM practices, organisational learning culture, and training success. Second, organisational learning culture is depicted in this study as an individual variable that mediates the relationship between HRM practices and training success. However, there might be other factors that influence training success. For example, literature suggests that knowledge management may play a role in mediating the relationship between HRM practices and training outcomes because employees who demonstrate competence in knowledge management tend to effectively apply the knowledge acquired to their job (Darroch and McNaughton, 2002). Moreover, supervisory support may also moderate the relationship between HRM practices and training success. For example, Wexley and Baldwin (1986) suggest that employees who receive supervisory guidance, along with sufficient practice, will improve their ability to transfer training and positively affect the training process. Therefore, future study needs to examine this assumption directly, by examining both managers' and employees' perceptions of the studied phenomena in this study, and thus enrich our understanding of how the specific aspects of supervisory support will influence the training process.

Third, all variables in this study were assessed at the individual employee level of analysis. A growing number of researchers have investigated the effect of organisational learning on training success at the group and organisation levels (De Gues, 1998; Kim, 1993). However, the absence of multilevel contextual variables in our study design did not allow us to investigate sources of this link between HRM practices and training success. Thus, future research is required to examine various contextual factors at different levels of analysis and not only at the individual level.

7 Conclusions

This study makes a significant contribution by studying the relationship between HRM practices and training success and recognising the role that organisational learning culture plays in this relationship. Importantly, our study suggests that organisational learning culture partially mediates the relationship between the variables mentioned above, yet relatively little is known about the resources that enable trainees to learn, apply, and improve their behaviour after training. We encourage future researchers to extend our findings by studying the effects of other factors that have the potential to enhance the understanding of the complex processes underlying HRM practices, organisational learning culture, and training success and also to increase employees' motivation to learn and apply the newly learned skills and knowledge to their work.

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