

# RESEARCH AND PRACTICE IN HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

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## HRM as Enablers of Learning Work Behaviour: Perspectives from Thai ICT Professionals

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### Abstract

Much of the prior research on organisational learning has focused on identifying the characteristics of learning capabilities, rather than on examining how particular practices can shape them. This empirical study considers the impact of human resource management (HRM) practices on such learning capabilities. Using the data obtained through a questionnaire survey from 524 employees of twelve large Thai corporations, it was found that each configuration of HRM practices namely staffing, training and development as well as performance appraisal and pay are strong enabling drivers that enhance people's learning behaviour and promote the climate of organisational learning. The implications of this analysis demonstrate that HRM practices need to be managed with more attention in order to help shape behaviours and interactions in the organisational learning process.

### INTRODUCTION

The process of globalisation and the revolution of information and communication technologies (ICTs) have imposed radical changes in organisations and their work systems. Indeed, an organisation's survival and growth is becoming more dependent on ability to apply new knowledge and technology as well as being able to quickly respond to the competitive changing environment (Champy 1997). In addition, Drucker (1995) notes that the basic economic resource is no longer capital, nor natural resources, nor labour, but is more likely to be knowledge. Currently, and in the future, the most successful organisations are likely to be those that are able to assess, anticipate and transform their environments, constantly developing themselves in the innovative ways (Buckler 1998). How well individuals or organisations perform in absorbing, assimilating and applying knowledge may become the key competitive factor. Consequently, gaining a competitive advantage may well be underpinned by organisational strategies that identify corporate learning attributes (Shrivastava 1983, Davenport & Prusak 1998). According to the resource based view of the company (Barney 1991), sustainable competitive advantage can be achieved by continuously developing existing and creating new resources and capabilities in response to rapidly changing market conditions. Among these resources and capabilities, knowledge represents the most important value creating asset in today's economic landscape (Nonaka & Takeuchi 1995). The only real competitive advantage organisations have in the complex environment is to learn more quickly and effectively than their competitors. Thus, the ability to learn as well as utilise and apply what they have learned could be a major factor resulting in human and organisational performance differences.

The term organisational learning and its concept have received considerable attention in the scholarly literature for a number of years (Stata 1989, Senge 1990, Garvin 1993, Watkins & Marsick 1993). Extensive dialogues (Senge 1990, Pedler, Burgoyne & Boydell 1991) have argued the importance of organisational learning as the most valuable practice that prepares corporations for confronting today's dynamic work conditions. However, contributions in the relevant literature on organisational learning remain largely descriptive, and consequently, there remains a gap between theory and practice (Yeo 2002). Most of the studies concentrate on identifying the characteristics of organisational learning (e.g., Gardiner 1999) or investigating the relationship between organisational learning and performance (e.g., Bontis, Crossan & Hulland 2002), rather than on examining how particular organisational practices can shape or influence the learning process. The relative absence of such empirical research seems to make the whole idea of organisational learning an outdated notion, but there may be some questions regarding the possibility to develop such learning practices in the workplace. Despite argument that the limitation of empirical evidences does not encourage leaders, managers and practitioners to adopt organisational learning practices, further empirical research contributions into this area are warranted to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

A notion that organisational learning practice and individual ability to absorb knowledge become the key competitive factor is the central theme of this article. The purpose of this paper is to report research that evaluated the predictive power of three HRM practices on the construct of organisational learning. The paradigm for this conceptual framework is presented in the next section of the paper.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

Organisational learning has been increasingly recognised as a critical factor for an organisation's ability to create ongoing economic value and maintain competitive advantage. The attention given to this concept has been driven by the need to remain dynamic in a constantly changing work and business environment which is being shaped by globalisation, technological advances, increased levels of competition, and the era of knowledge based economy (Drucker 1995, Davenport & Prusak 1998). As competition becomes more knowledge based, the ability to learn has become one of the critical concerns for today's organisations. Organisations that want to keep pace with the changes and be leaders in the competitive arena may need to induce their people's learning capability and optimise their knowledge (Grant 1996).

Learning occurs when knowledge in one part of an organisation is shared effectively among its members to other parts and used to solve problems or to provide new insights (Goh 2002). Arguably, organisational learning copes with the acquisition process of understanding know how, knowledge, techniques and practices which are to some degree new to organisations. This perspective is defended by Watkins and Marsick (1993) who explain the learning process as the way people learn and work together to overcome changes and lead to better knowledge and performance improvement. Cumulatively, the learning process involves experimentation, observation, analysis, willingness to examine both successes and failures and knowledge sharing among individuals. Thus, the learning process is about encouraging individuals to communicate their knowledge by creating the learning environment and system for capturing, sharing and using knowledge (Senge 1990). This ideal was noted by Argyris and Schon (1996) who wrote:

Organizational learning occurs when individuals within an organization experience a problematic situation and inquire into it on the organization's behalf. They experience a surprising mismatch between expected and actual results of action and respond to that mismatch through a process of thought and further action that leads them to modify their images of the organization and their understanding of organizational phenomena and to restructure their activities so as to bring outcomes and expectations into line (p. 16).

Nevertheless, organisations learn through the experiences, mental models and actions of individuals. Organisations, therefore, may need to ensure that their members who interact and work together have a minimum threshold of knowledge and motivation to learn in order to be able to not only absorb incoming knowledge, but also better apply what they have learned.

Learning in the workplace engages people and their social interactions. These interactions involve the processes of adjusting attitude and behaviour exhibited by individuals and groups related to the absorption, assimilation, generation, diffusion and application of knowledge. Collectively, such action is often manifested in behavioural changes of individuals and groups in response to the new things (Senge 1990, Garvin 1993). The point is made by Davenport and Prusak (1998: 103) who argue, "...learning is such a deeply human endeavour, and because not only absorbing but also accepting new knowledge involves so many personal and psychological factors". This viewpoint is consistent with Argyris' argument that organisational learning process is about altering people's theories of actions so that they, acting as agents of the organisations, will be able to alter the organisational learning systems and practices (Crossan 2003). Thus, a key challenge is to understand how 'people' perspective produces or shapes organisational learning.

Investing and engaging human resources in learning can realise incredible energy. Undoubtedly, the significant question is how organisations develop practical mindsets and motivation toward ability to learn among their people in order to encourage them to assimilate new learning and exploit what they have learned since the learning process is shaped by people's interactions with one another. The role of HRM is discussed in the next section, being considered as a critical enabler through which people's knowledge can be absorbed and their learning work behaviour can be shaped.

## **HRM AS ENABLERS OF LEARNING WORK BEHAVIOUR**

The emerging popular idea, that ability to learn and leverage knowledge of people is truly the primary source of sustainable competitive advantage for organisations, shapes new challenges. For instance, it will become critical for HRM practitioners to understand how such capability can be developed and nurtured. Moreover, learning in the workplace is about a process of change in people's attitude and behaviour. Clearly, the process not only deals with

hard bits of knowledge contents, but more with the interrelationship between people, their actions and process within organisations (Senge 1990). This perspective is supported by Hedberg (1981) who argues that organisations themselves do not learn, but their members acting as agents do learn on behalf of their organisations, and thus organisational learning process takes place. It then follows that HRM practices have a strong potential to shape learning work behaviour and enable the success of organisational learning process (Ulrich & Lake 1991, Soliman & Spooner 2000, Shipton, Dawson, West & Patterson 2002). Such HRM practices act rather as a 'catalyst' to induce learning, being more focused on building and tailoring a supportive learning climate (Pedler, et al. 1991), which is consistent with the 'normative perspective' of organisational learning building block (Goh & Richards 1997) (i.e., learning process is an activity that takes place under certain circumstances). In practice organisations may need to manage the necessary conditions to help their people change behaviours in order to absorb new learning and effectively apply what have been learned to support organisational requirements. Thus, it is important for organisations to effectively manage the way in which people are sourced, paid, consulted with and trained toward the desired organisational learning.

The term 'HRM practices' is defined as the pattern of planned human resource deployment and activities that help organisations attract, evaluate, motivate, and develop people with the appropriate behaviours and competencies to meet current and future needs (Huselid 1995, Schuler & Jackson 1999). HRM practices are often referred to as high involvement or high performance work system (Appelbaum, Bailey, Berg & Kalleberg 2000). Such systems have been defined in various ways, but generally they include three dimensions that are related to 1) relatively skill and competency requirements, 2) developmental approach to enhance continuous learning and performance as well as 3) rewards that drive motivation and commitment (Huselid 1995, MacDuffie 1995, Delery & Doty 1996, Appelbaum, et al. 2000). The first dimension gives emphasis to the role of staffing, which is a relatively rigid process to ensure that people and their capabilities are aligned with business direction (Pfeffer 1998). Scarbrough (2003) notes that conventional approaches to recruitment and selection may need to be revised in the light of unpredictable knowledge flows involved in today's changing environment and innovation pressures. In work settings, it may be too difficult to specify the knowledge and expertise in advance, and to cope with this issue, organisations may need to focus on continuous learning by obtaining appropriately qualified people or rotating multi skilled people across different job domains (Soliman & Spooner 2000, Gardiner, Leat & Sadler-Smith 2001). Arguably, deliberate recruitment and selection process that match corporate strategy and organisational requirements provides strong underpinning to enhance ability to learn and leverage knowledge in the workplace.

The second dimension involves the practice for providing opportunities for individual development and ongoing learning. Evidence for this contention is provided by Appelbaum and Goransson (1997) who argue that HRM practices through training and development are the first step in building organisational learning capability. In addition, some empirical studies have shown significant and positive relationship between employee development and learning capability (D'Netto & Sohal 1999, Goh 2002). Therefore, it may be claimed that organisations that equip their employees with well structured training and development signal an effectiveness to increase skill specificity and establish learning work behaviour to their workforce whom in turn are more likely to suggest productivity improvement.

The third dimension includes motivational factors such as performance based pay system. Indeed, propositions from expectancy theory (Vroom 1964) suggest that pay can influence performance when people perceive a relationship between their efforts and performance and when they obtain a valued outcome if they perform as expected. Also, reviews of the literature show strong relationships between effort, performance outcomes and rewards (Watkins & Marsick 1993, Nelson 1996, Pfeffer 1998). It appears from these contributions that people seem to be more motivated when they know what is going on in their organisations and when they know their efforts and contributions toward such directions are monitored and then appreciated. And, according to Hansen, Nohria and Tierney (1999), the critical approach to encourage learning is to recognise people's contributions and deal with their performance and pay. Consequently, it can be expected that if the organisation provides pay desired by the people or closely linked to their performance employees are more likely to perform or demonstrate their behaviour in a way that will bring them such rewards.

## **ICT PROFESSIONALS IN THAILAND**

Currently ICT segment in Thailand is undergoing rapid changes. The changes have been brought about by globalisation process, economic recovery and increase in ICT usage after the country's financial crisis in 1997, according to the Association of the Thai Computer Industry (Fischbach 2002). Evidences of such dramatic changes are presented in Table 1, which demonstrates that since the crisis, there has been a considerable increase in both monetary value and market growth. In fact, the ICT market value in terms of hardware, software and services in 2001 was worth nearly 68 billion baht. In that year, this growth rate of the market value resumed and reached a peak of 67.43 per cent. Despite weakness in some other sectors of the economy it is estimated that the market value will be 103.19 billion baht in 2004 and it is also projected to show significant growth for the following year.

From the ICT related statistics conducted by National Electronics and Computer Technology Centre, telecommunications, financial services, manufacturing and government sectors were the largest ICT spenders during 1997-2004 (NECTEC 2005). Their spending individually ranges from 14 to 16 per cent of the market value.

Corporations in these sectors invested not only to improve their hardware and network infrastructure, but also to reengineer work processes and information systems through the implementation of Enterprise Resource Planning, Customer Relationship Management and e-Commerce systems. Such investment leads to tremendous requirements of ICT workforces with the related capabilities in the system implementation and operation. From the manpower survey conducted by National Statistical Office, there were approximately 77,529 ICT professionals in Thailand in the year 2003 (NECTEC 2005). These are considered as a highly skilled workforce. However, the demand for such ICT professionals in the same year was estimated to be 106,992 (Puntasen, Suksiriserikul, Panyaswatsuthi & Pantawee 2001).

Table 1 Market Value of ICTs in Thailand.

Year	Value (billion baht)	Growth Rate (%)
1997	42.65	—
1998	25.95	-39.20
1999	35.14	35.41
2000	40.41	15.00
2001	67.66	67.43
2002	73.91	9.24
2003	89.04	20.47
2004(estimated)	103.19	15.89

Source. Association of the Thai Computer Industry ([www.atci.com](http://www.atci.com)).

Table 2 shows that during 2001-2003 the demand for ICT professionals is higher than the available supply. It is predicted this gap will increase which indicates that there will be a continuing strong need for professionals with ICT related skills and knowledge. Hence, a major challenge for the ICT industry (i.e., to keep pace with today's rapid changes and sustain competitive advantage) is the development of both quantity and quality of ICT professionals. Arguably, there may be sufficient numbers of 'ICT workforce' to fill in the demand and supply gap, but there is also a need to prepare and develop this workforce to play a part toward the impending changes and technological advancement. On a positive note, Viljanen and Lahteenmaki (2002) argue that the ICT professionals are expected to upgrade themselves continuously to prevent obsolescence, which may occur under circumstances where high expectations for organisational productivity exist. There is some expectation this workforce will continuously learn and acquire knowledge in the particular fields and apply what they have learned to perform their jobs more innovatively and effectively (Martisons & Cheung 2001). Nevertheless, these professionals need to be continuously equipped with new knowledge related to the changing technology in order to fulfill organisational demand. To support these challenges organisations may need to focus on the role of HRM practices more intensively to develop and nurture competencies and learning capabilities of ICT professionals (Cappelli 2001). These arguments provide foundation for the empirical research (reported in this paper) which was undertaken with personnel to assess the role of three HRM practices as predictors of learning work behaviour.

Table 2 Demand and Supply of ICT Professionals in Thailand.

ICT Professionals	Demand*	Supply**	Gap (%)
2001	77,800	76,514	-1.7
2002	92,100	68,567	-34.3
2003	107,000	77,529	-38.0
2004	122,700	—	—
2005	139,200	—	—

Sources. \* Puntasen, Suksiriserikul, Panyaswatsuthi and Pantawee (2001). \*\* National Statistical Office (NECTEC

## METHODOLOGY

### Sites and Participants

Twelve out of thirty one targeted organisations that had been directly involved with ICT research or recently experienced an array of technological changes due to the implementation of ERP and CRM systems were willing to participate in this survey. Concerns of confidentiality and staff sensitivity issues were the key reasons from those who declined the survey participation. The participating organisations through the assigned coordinators were requested to distribute the surveys to a representative sample of their ICT professionals in all classifications, job levels and genders. Participation was voluntary and the questionnaire was anonymous so the respondents could respond freely. The number of ICT employees in each organisational sample was based on organisational size, with 10 per cent (a minimum of 20 and a maximum of 150) of employees from each organisation being requested to participate. The targeted population consisted of 890 full time ICT employees.

### Procedure

This empirical analysis is based on primary data obtained by a questionnaire survey. The researcher followed a scale development process suggested by Hinkin (1995). A review of the extensive literature on the concepts of organisational learning and HRM practices was conducted to capture the essence of the domain and theoretical definitions of the constructs. This was followed by qualitative work with nine subject matter experts and practitioners in the related fields to better understand the research problems and perspectives. Conducting the qualitative work, the researcher adopted a semi structured in depth interview which is the combination of the three approaches of qualitative interviews; informal conversational interview, interview guide and standardised open ended interview as defined by Patton (1987). The data from the interviews were then interpreted and analysed for research model refinement and further scale development process. After this stage, the pool of questionnaire items obtained from the literature and the qualitative work was developed in English. The academic experts in the fields of HRM and organisational learning also reviewed the instrument for content validity. Since the data collection for this study was undertaken in Thailand, a Thai version of the questionnaire was used. The English version of the validated questionnaire was translated into Thai by a language expert. A back translation of Thai into English was then conducted by another language expert. Both experts are teaching English as a second language at British Council Thailand. Such procedures were employed to ensure comparability of the original and translated versions of the questionnaire.

The Thai translated questionnaire was pre tested prior to the full scale distribution with twelve human resource (HR) practitioners from several sectors. The purpose of this pretest was to ensure understanding and consistent interpretation of the terminologies used in the questionnaire. Furthermore, a pilot test was conducted with 162 employees from three organisations. The main objective was to investigate the potential weaknesses in the research instruments due to the clarity, the wording, the format of questionnaire and the average time to complete.

Following the pilot surveys, the full scale study was conducted during the third quarter of 2003. The researcher contacted HR Heads of the targeted organisations via the telephone to explain the purpose of the study and request for permission to conduct a survey. The formal letter to request for permission to conduct the research (attached with a questionnaire) was submitted directly the HR function Heads immediately after the telephone call with a set of documents that explained the objectives of the study. Once approved, the questionnaires then were prepared for the participating organisations with the cover letter describing the purpose of the study as well as the key instruction to the respondents. The HR department of each participating organisation provided administrative assistance, such as a centre point of contact, and the coordination, distribution and collection of the questionnaires that were printed on paper with the academic institutional logo. This was to guarantee the participating organisations and the respondents that their feedback was strictly confidential and used only for the academic purpose. In addition, each questionnaire was attached with the formal envelop with the researcher's academic institutional logo and labelled with the names of the assigned coordinators of HR departments so the respondents knew where to submit the completed questionnaires. The researcher also conducted on site visits from time to time to assist survey administration.

## Measures

### HRM Practices

The participants in this study reported perceptual scores on a scale of 22 items of HRM practices. The items were adapted from studies by various authors (Delery & Doty 1996, Youndt, Snell, Dean & Lepak 1996). Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each item using a seven point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7) in order to evaluate their perceptions on the current HRM practices in their organisations. Examples of the items are shown in Table 4.

### Learning Work Behaviour

This variable comprised 34 attitudinal questions which aimed to measure employees' perceptions and opinions on the issues that are related to people's behaviours and interactions in the organisational learning process. Attributes which emerged from the literature and qualitative work as characteristics of organisational learning were identified and compared with instruments developed by a number of authors (e.g., Organisational Learning Survey (Goh & Richards 1997) and Learning Organisation Research Inventory (Gardiner 1999)). The questions were scored on a seven point Likert scale, from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). Examples of the items are: (1) Organisational members are encouraged to experiment in order to improve work processes, (2) I often have an opportunity to talk to other staff about successful work activities in order to understand why they succeed, (3) My manager frequently involves people in the decision process, (4) People keenly exchange information or share knowledge with each other, (5) My organisation has constant communication to distribute knowledge across work unit.

### Control Variables / Demographics

No organisation operates in a vacuum, and, therefore, it is important to investigate organisational and people characteristics in order to be able to understand the general relationship between people's perception of HRM activities and their learning work behaviour. The following control measures were used:

- Job level (staff = 1, management = 2),
- Gender (male = 1, female = 2),
- Work experience with other organisations before joining the current organisation (no = 1, yes = 2),
- Tenure (less than two years = 1, two to five years = 2, six to ten years = 3, 11 to 15 years = 4, 16 to 20 years = 5 and over 20 years = 6),
- Educational level (Diploma = 1, Bachelor's Degree = 2 and Master Degree or Above = 3),
- Team size (one to ten = 1, 11 to 25 = 2, 25 to 50 = 3, 51 to 75 = 4, 76 to 100 = 5 and more than 100 = 6) and
- Age (under 25 years of age = 1, 26 to 30 years of age = 2, 31 to 35 years of age = 3, 36 to 40 years of age = 4, 41 to 45 years of age = 5 and 46 plus years of age = 6).

## Analysis

The study data were evaluated by two key approaches. First, data reduction was undertaken by factor analysis using the varimax option, to identify possible underlying dimensions of HRM practices. Subsequently, the reliabilities of the identified HRM constructs and learning work behaviour variable were estimated with Cronbach's alpha. Second, a range of statistical procedures were undertaken. Frequency analysis was employed to determine the sample profile and regression analysis were then undertaken to evaluate construct relationships.

## RESULTS

A total of 524 usable questionnaires were returned providing a response rate of 58.88 per cent. This response rate compares very favourably for survey research in this area (Scandura & Williams 2000). A profile of the participating organisations and their respondents is shown as Table 3.

Table 3 Participating Organisations and Their Respondents's Profile.

Industry	Number of Organisations	Number of ICT Respondents
Total	12	524
Information System Consulting	2	58
Telecommunications	3	75
ICT Public Research Agency	1	151
Finance and Banking	4	129
Retail	2	111

More specifically the samples in this study are from consulting, telecommunications, finance and banking, retails and public sector. Their demographic characteristics are as follows: 74 per cent of respondents were professional staff and 26 per cent management. About 43.6 per cent of the respondents were male and 56.4 per cent were female. In terms of educational background, 70.4 per cent hold a bachelor's degree while 29.6 per cent hold a master's degree or a higher level of educational achievement. The respondents in this study are relatively young (i.e., 80.7 per cent of which were 25 to 35 years of age while 19.3 per cent were above 35 years of age). The majority of the respondents had relatively short organisational tenure. Indeed, nearly 58 per cent had worked for the current organisation for less than five years, and about 35 per cent had been employed by the same corporation for six to 15 years, while only seven per cent had more than 15 years of service.

Table 4 shows relevant information from the results of the factor analysis with the HRM practices. A principal component analysis with the varimax rotation was performed to uncover the underlying factors associated with such practices. Three significant factors, namely 1) staffing, 2) training and development and 3) performance appraisal and pay emerged from the analysis, explaining 59.24 per cent of total variance. The variables that had high factor loading of greater than 0.5 for a single factor were grouped. Only two out of 22 HRM practice items related to staffing practice were not taken into consideration since they were not loaded well and had relatively low communalities. Thus, twenty items remained for further analysis.

Table 4 Varimax Rotated Factor Matrix of HRM Practices.

Factors	1	2	3
Eigenvalue	9.89	2.05	1.10
Percentage of variance explained	44.94	9.32	4.98
Cumulative percentage of variance explained	44.94	54.26	59.24
<i>Performance appraisal and pay</i>			
When I do a good job, my performance is noticed and rewarded.	.77	.10	.27
I receive adequate recognition for my contributions.	.74	.22	.16
Career advancement or promotion criteria are clear.	.73	.21	.30
Performance feedback on how I am doing on my job is regularly provided.	.68	.26	.15
Criteria used to evaluate my performance are clear.	.67	.30	.28
Emphasis on personal development in the performance discussion.	.67	.31	.15
Compensations are linked to levels of skills/knowledge acquired.	.64	.13	.42
Innovative ideas that work are rewarded.	.61	.17	.36

<b>Factors</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
Compensations are closely tied to performance results.	<b>.60</b>	.09	.44
Performance appraisal focus on getting result, rather than procedure.	<b>.55</b>	.33	-.01
I have a clear understanding of how my work contributes to the goals.	<b>.35</b>	.37	.20
<i>Training and development (T&amp;D)</i>			
T&D is encouraged to develop skill/knowledge needed for advancement.	.22	<b>.81</b>	.27
Management in my organisation stresses the importance of T&D.	.22	<b>.78</b>	.30
I am provided with sufficient opportunities for T&D.	.21	<b>.78</b>	.20
T&D programs run by my organisation are of high quality.	.27	<b>.77</b>	.19
T&D broaden knowledge into the area not directly related to present work.	.17	<b>.77</b>	.36
T&D are constantly revised and upgraded to fit the changing environment.	.23	<b>.75</b>	.05
<i>Staffing</i>			
The importance of staffing people to appropriately fit the jobs is stressed.	.28	.36	<b>.69</b>
Staffing process in my organisation is rigid.	.27	.36	<b>.66</b>
When filling vacant positions, people from within are promoted.	.18	.08	<b>.66</b>
My organisation tries to make the jobs more interesting as possible.	.27	.33	<b>.59</b>
My current roles and responsibilities are clearly defined.	.29	.24	<b>.46</b>

Table 5 shows the results of the hierarchical regression analysis that was performed to assess the influence of the assessed HRM practices (i.e., staffing, training and development as well as performance appraisal and pay) on learning work behaviour. Initially, the control variables were regressed on the dependent variable, and then the three measures of HRM practices. The amount of variance explained in the dependent variable by the predictors was 64 per cent. Each of the assessed HRM practices, staffing, training and development, and performance appraisal and pay, was found to be significantly associated with learning work behaviour. The results of Table 5 suggest performance appraisal and pay had the largest effect on learning work behaviour. Overall, the results highlight the important role of HRM practices in facilitating and enabling learning behaviour in the workplace, a finding which is consistent with the argument that motivational factors and accountability enable people's ability to learn (Watkins & Marsick 1993, Pfeffer 1998).

It is also shown in Table 5 two of the control variables were predictors of learning work behaviour. First, respondents' age had significant relationship with learning work behaviour ( $p < .001$ ) indicating that the junior people appear to exert themselves to learn more than the senior staff. Second, work experience with other organisation(s) before joining the current organisation also had significant relationship with learning work behaviour ( $p < .05$ ). This finding suggests that experience in different work environments had an influence on learning work behaviour.

Table 5 Regression Results of HRM Practices on Learning Work Behaviour



Variables	Learning Work Behaviour	
	$\beta$	(t-value)
D R <sup>2</sup>	0.57	
Total R <sup>2</sup>	0.65	
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.64	
F Value	88.43 ***	
N	483	
<i>Control</i>		
Team Size	-.04	(-1.44)
Job level	-.05	(-1.76)
Educational level	-.03	(-1.17)
Tenure	.05	(1.29)
First and only one organisation?	-.06	(-2.15) **
Age	-.16	(-4.02) ***
Gender	-.03	(-1.01)
<i>Independent</i>		
Performance appraisal and pay	.44	(11.03) ***
Training and development	.20	(5.48) ***
Staffing	.24	(5.76) ***
Constant	1.78	(6.02) ***

Notes: a. \*\*\*p < 0.001 and \*\* p < 0.05 (two-tailed test). b. T-value is in parentheses. c. Reliability estimates; performance appraisal and pay = 0.91, training and development = 0.92, and staffing = 0.79.

## CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The objective of this research is to determine practical HRM approaches to enable learning behaviour in the workplace from individual responses. The results based on the questionnaire survey of twelve large organisations in Thailand provide empirical evidences that merit further discussion in at least three areas. First, individuals within organisations who felt their performance objectives were clear and their work was rewarded for taking chances, were appreciated by superiors, seldom punished for mistakes, and had a performance related pay system were more likely to demonstrate learning work behaviour. This empirical finding supports propositions made by Watkins and Marsick (1993), and Pfeffer (1998) regarding the relationship between accountability, motivational factors and learning efforts. The findings also support the point that learning process begins when people know their goals as well as their current situation. If people understand their goals and are aware of their efforts and contributions toward the goals, there is a higher probability that they will begin to realise why they need to change the way they work and to learn more. Monetary rewards are also found to be significant to motivate people toward goal

achievement and learning. This finding confirms that people will perform and behave in a way that will enable them to obtain such rewards. In addition to the extrinsic rewards, intrinsic rewards are also significant motivation to enhance the climate of learning. People's esteem and performance are boosted when their contributions, experimentation and knowledge sharing behaviours are appreciated or recognised by either superiors or their peers (Hansen, et al. 1999, Nelson 1996).

A second salient finding was the construct of training and development was a predictor of learning behaviour in the workplace. This result indicates that the well developed skills and competencies act as a fundamental mechanism for reducing ambiguity in new learning, and add support to the notion of Appelbaum and Goransson (1997) that training and development acts as a stepping stone to establish organisational learning practice. Moreover, the finding also reflects the proposition made by Goh (2002) that the appropriate training and educational programs support the learners' ability and lay an appropriate foundation to be able to absorb new knowledge, in turn to lubricate the continuous learning wheel. In other words, this practice provides the learners a necessary ground for acquiring the new knowledge more effectively.

A third observation was the way organisations recruit and select people with required knowledge and competencies to perform particular jobs influenced learning work behaviour. This finding supports the idea that people who are deliberately recruited and selected to match business direction and organisational requirements can bring in different knowledge and experiences to expand their learning capability, as well as receptiveness to new ways of looking at problems, and a willingness to share knowledge and ideas more effectively (Soliman & Spooner 2000, Gardiner, et al. 2001). Thus, the ability to staff people with the right competencies and attitudes has the potential to continuously develop human resources more effectively. Through strategic initiatives corporations can leverage knowledge (by changing the mix of staff) and programs that encourage individuals to release their embedded routine and align themselves with desirable organisational goals.

Overall, the findings from this study demonstrate that intervention intended to enable learning work behaviour highlights initially three configurations of HRM practices. These enablers are related to staffing, training and development as well as performance appraisal and pay. Of particular interest is the value of pay for performance system and recognition, yet recognition, which is relatively inexpensive to achieve and easy to implement can powerfully drive people's morale and support their learning activities. Another crucial enabler suggested by this study is training and development. Individuals view training and development opportunity as a fundamental mechanism to broaden their existing skills and knowledge to be able to absorb and apply the new learning in the future. The third observed enabler was staffing. This feature of HRM practices involves job design, developing a multi skilled workforce and comprehensive staffing process to help organisations prepare the right human resources whose competencies and attitudes will be needed to fulfil the organisational requirements to support business objectives.

Arguably, organisations need to manage their HRM practices with a considerable attention from top management during the organisational change journey to embrace and enable learning behaviour in the workplace. In today's globalisation and ICT era the role of HR practitioners becomes more crucial in facilitating organisational changes. Such changes demand that HR practitioners move from an administrative role to become a strategic business function. To perform this role better, HR practitioners may need to clearly understand the business strategy and the resources necessary to best achieve the organisational objectives. To recruit and select people with required knowledge and competencies challenges line managers to identify skills and knowledge needed for each role to fulfil the task requirements. Acting as learning champions, HR practitioners can provide supports in terms of design and facilitation to the training and development programs that equip people with necessary skills and knowledge to enhance their continuous learning capability. HR practitioners can also play an active role in facilitating and enabling the entire performance management process in order to ensure that performance objectives are in line with the business strategies and that the desired outcomes are clearly communicated to the relevant staff. Within this process it is advocated performance measures, corporate goals and rewards are closely assimilated, With an understanding of business objectives, what needs to be done and performance feedback, people may then begin to better appreciate why they need to change and realise why learning matters.

There are several directions for an extension of this research. For instance, it would be interesting and significant to assess the impact of culture and ethnicity on learning work behaviour. According to Sackmann (1992), culture influences current thinking and behaviour. Culture is a critical factor resulting in learning characteristic differences. Drawing from the notion of the cultural impact, future research can examine people from different consortia of learners or a group of professions (e.g., scientists, accountants, attorneys, physicians rather than individual organisational lines). Expansion of the sampling frame to cover more diverse business sectors might also be considered, for the value of organisational learning may well be dependent on context (Baldwin & Danielson 2002). There is no one best way to implement this practice. Indeed, people from different consortia or professions may have different learning styles. Today there is considerable dialogue about the relationship between organisational learning practice and performance outcomes, and further research should attempt to test in a more refined way, additional factors that can shape organisational learning process and the impact of its implementation on various kinds of performance measures.

In conclusion, this research investigated the impact of HRM practices on learning work behaviour. The

contribution of this study includes the empirical evidence that supports the notion of organisational practices in term of HRM as the enabling factors that induce learning behaviour in the workplace particularly during the time of change. The managerial implications that stemmed from the empirical results suggest that organisations need to redefine the role of their HR practitioners to be more business oriented. Also they need to manage their HRM practices to align with today's dynamic conditions and the atmosphere of people participation to shape the desired learning work behaviour in order to successfully bring the concept of the organisational learning into the achievable practice.

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