

## **Administrative Staff Training and Development Policy Implementation**

**Aniah Baharom**

*Faculty of Economics and Administration  
University of Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur  
aniah@salam.uitm.edu.my*

### **Abstract**

*It has been emphasised by HRD advocates that an organisation's human resource is no more only a resource, but a capital with the potential to determine the success and development of the organisation. This claim is further supported by numerous research carried out in the HRD field. The realisation of the importance of human resource or human capital on nation building and organisational development has prompted the conception of various national and organisational mechanisms designed to develop human capital in the country for the public and private sectors. In the wake of the approaching deadline for the realisation of Vision 2020 and the rolling out of the Ninth Malaysian Plan, the public service delivery at the state and federal government has again been subjected to public scrutiny. Hence, this study was conducted as an attempt to contribute and shed some light on efforts made by public universities in Malaysia to develop their administrative staff with the assurance that this will result in better service delivery.*

*This study investigated the current state of implementing administrative staff training and development policies in Malaysian Public Universities. 232 university administrators from 14 public universities were surveyed on issues related to the implementation of training and development policy for administrative staff within the university population. The factors included in the study were the availability of resources needed for implementation, environmental conditions surrounding implementation and the dispositions of implementers. Significant findings related to policy performance at the departmental and staff level are also reported.*

**Keywords:** *Human resource development, public universities, policy implementation*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Training and development has always been and will always continue to be one of the focus areas for nation building and organisational development. Malaysia, a nation aspiring to be a developed country by the year 2020 has put an emphasis on education, training and development of its people and workforce via various mechanisms and policies at the organisational, state and national level.

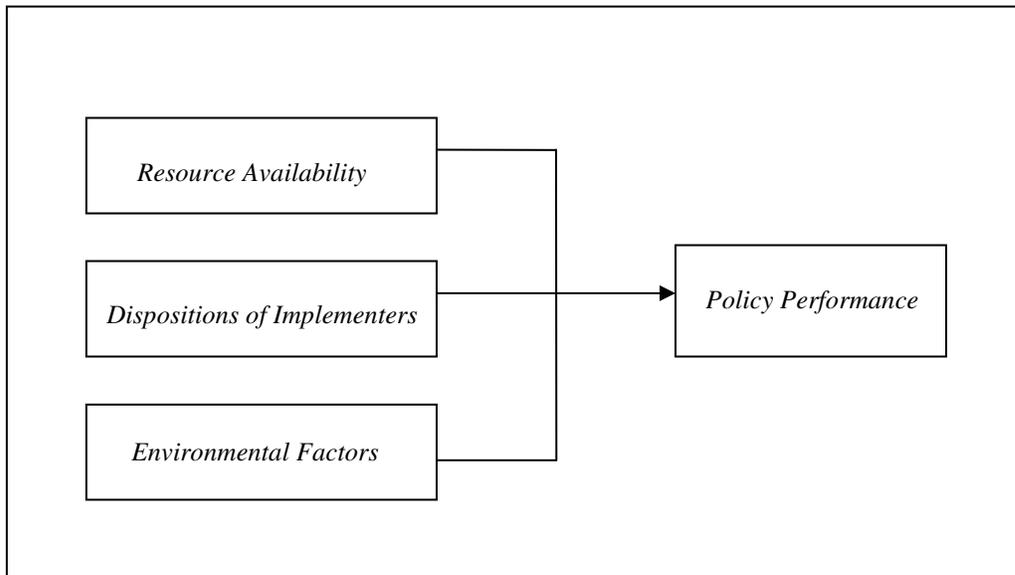
This concentration on training and development has been made more critical by a recent public outcry for a more effective public service delivery system and public personnel who are more knowledgeable, efficient and less bureaucratic (Chen & Pan, 2008; Damodaran, 2006; Nurris & Pakiam, 2007). It is in the wake of these current scenarios and the approaching deadline for the accomplishment of Vision 2020 that the public service delivery system has come under public scrutiny again. Hence, this study was conducted as an attempt to contribute and shed some light on efforts made by the public universities in Malaysia to train and develop their administrative staff with the assurance that this will result in better service delivery.

The above situation has had a 'wake-up call' effect on government agencies resulting in the public services department assembling taskforces and policies to ensure improvements in its delivery system (Chen & Pan, 2008; Sidek, 2008). Malaysia is set to start the journey into the second phase towards realising Vision 2020 and its aspirations to be a developed nation. As the nation embarks into its final lap towards vision 2020, it is faced with a world of rapid changes in technology, values, attitudes and the working environment. The Ninth Malaysia Plan (9MP) will act as the mission's blueprint outlining policies and activities to ensure the culmination of the national mission. The National Mission aims to 'concentrate the

country's efforts on priority areas encompassing the nation's global competitiveness, human capital development, national integration, ethnic relations, distribution of income and wealth and the quality of life' (Abdullah, 2006). The 9MP is the first of three Malaysia Plans encompassed in the period of the National Mission in the nation's passage towards achieving Vision 2020. The 9MP states that the most precious assets of a nation are its people. Thus, development of the nation's human capital by upgrading the cognitive and intellectual capabilities will be one of the biggest challenges in implementing activities for the 9MP. The plan goes on to stress that to be a developed nation, development of its human capital must be a priority and is indeed a necessity rather than a luxury (NST, 2006). Aspects of concentration in the second thrust of Malaysia's National Mission includes improving access to education and knowledge, making national schools the 'School of Choice', increasing the level of vocational and technical skills, producing Institutions of Higher Learning of international standard, strengthening research and development capacity, fostering a cultured society with strong moral values and empowering women and youth (Abdullah, 2006; EPU, 2006).

However, a point to note here is that policies, plans and blue prints are of no use to the nation, organisation or department if they are not implemented properly and produce the results for the benefit of the nation and to fulfil aspirations, objectives and aims previously decided and agreed upon. Manifestoes, policy documents and policy making without sound implementation are only futile efforts and waste valuable resources such as time, personnel, energy and money.

This study thus, endeavors to provide some empirical evidence on certain factors related to policy implementation. These factors include the availability of resources to implement policies, the environmental conditions surrounding implementation, and the dispositions of the implementers leading to policy performance. Although these factors are by no means exhaustive, they act as a catalyst to promote more research on this important area of policy implementation and human resource development focusing on the effectiveness of both fields in the public sector with Malaysia acting as the context of the research. A graphic visual of the objectives of this paper is portrayed in Figure 1 below.



**Figure 1: Policy Implementation**

## **PAST STUDIES**

Writers and scholars of policy implementation have claimed that there is a deficiency in studies conducted on policy implementation (Jeffrey L. Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973). However, contrary to the belief that there is a lack of research on policy implementation, (J. L. Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984), literature showed policy implementation being studied in many different context such as, school reforms and

education policy (Matland, 1995; Elmore, 1987), welfare reforms (Palumbo and Calista, 1990), social policy (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1984; Elmore, 1987; Hill and Hupe, 2002), gender or race equality (Matland 2000), the medical and nursing field (Deane, Crowe, King, Kavanagh, & Oades, 2006; Exworthy, Blane, & Marmot, 2003; Friedman, 2003) curriculum and education reform (Alashloo, Castka, & Sharp, 2005; Clayton, 1994; Velazquez, Munguia, & Sanchez, 2005) quality management (Heide, Gronhaug, & Johannessen, 2002), public works and utilities (Drezner & Bradley, 1998), information and communications technology (Haque, 2005; Solano, Villar, & Garcia-Verdu, 2006), family and work life balance (Nord, Fox, Phoenix, & Viano, 2002), environmental (Daley & Layton, 2004; Deyle, 1994; Zetter, 2005), employee rewards system (Shea, Lewko, & Lees, 1994/95), financial control and budgeting system (GAO, 2006), welfare and reform (Ewalt & Jennings Jr., 2004), weapons and nuclear arms (Vizzard, 1995), government and politics (Berry, Berry, & Foster, 1998; Giacchino & Kakabadse, 2003; Triandafyllidou, 2003), international relations (Dimitrakopoulos & Richardson, 2001) and management (L. J. O'Toole, 1995). Although it is a fact that researchers tend to focus on the more glamorous and high flying areas of policy making and governance, the above list confirms the notion that policy implementation has gained footage in the research arena.

The abundance of policy implementation researches in a multitude of context testifies to the reality that policy implementation is an important facet of policy studies. However, although human resources has been lauded globally as an asset and capital for organisational development and a proven catalyst for nation building, research on the training and development of human resource has been lacking. The magnitude of organisational and national resources pumped into training and development initiatives would naturally warrant significant interest in its return on investment. Conversely, many writers have discovered that data and research on the benefits and effectiveness of those programmes are skeletal (Gilmore, 2002; Price, 2004; Schuler, 1987). It is due to this gap and the current interest in this area that this study is very timely.

## **POLICY IMPLEMENTATION**

As mentioned earlier, policy implementation as a field of research has been studied in tandem with a multitude of other areas. Since Pressman and Wildavsky's (1973, 1984) milestone publication on the study of implementation, numerous scholars have done further analytic work on policy implementation. First generation implementation research work concentrated pre-dominantly on case studies and pessimistically came to the conclusion about the ability of Government to effectively implement public policy. Although first generation implementation studies covered many aspects of public policy, there was skeletal attempt to differentiate between failures of the implementation process and failures that may be attributed to the policy making stage (Linder & Peters, 1987). Drawing from the limitations and lessons from the first generation, researchers then went on into the second generation identified by Goggin et al (1990) as the era of theory building. Researchers in this generation succeeded in developing conceptual frameworks and identified numerous variables associated with effective implementation (Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1983; L.J. O'Toole, 1997; Palumbo & Calista, 1990; Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975).

It was in this era and the inclination to better understand the concept of policy implementation, that several models have been developed to investigate and explain the intricacies of policy implementation. A few of these models will be discussed briefly in this paper to provide an overview of the policy implementation field.

Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) in their contention about the lack of a theoretical foundation in Pressman and Wildavsky's implementation approach, offered an analytical model of the implementation process. They profess to have been guided by the organisation theory, the study of the impact of judicial decisions and inter-governmental relations in the development of their theoretical framework. In their top-down framework, Van Meter and Van Horn identified six factors affecting the performance of an implementation process. The Van Meter and Van Horn model is by far the more comprehensive policy implementation model to date (Hill & Hupe, 2002). Three other models discussing policy implementation are listed below.

The Nakamura and Smallwood (1980) model rests on a number of pre-conceptions about both policy making and policy implementation. First, it assumes that policy making and implementation although

bounded, are separate and sequential. The model further presupposes that since policy makers and implementers accept these boundaries, implementation becomes a sequential process where policy making precedes policy implementation. This model divides the policy process into three distinct clusters: policy formation cluster which includes actors like policy makers and other actors that can influence policy makers; policy implementation cluster with varying actors, structures and procedures depending on the policy type. Policy implementation according to Nakamura and Smallwood includes formal implementers, policy recipients or target groups and the organisational and environmental environment. The third significant cluster identified by Nakamura and Smallwood is the policy evaluation cluster which in the model will determine the effective implementation of a policy and if ineffective, to develop other policy alternatives.

The Mazmanian and Sabatier (1983) model on the other hand, states that the crucial role of implementation analysis is to identify variables which affect the achievement of legal objectives stipulated in the policy statement. In their model, Mazmanian and Sabatier (1983) offer three sub-dimensions of variables. These sub-dimensions are; variables involved in the tractability of the problem which is determined by the ease in which the identified problems can be amassed into a simple solvable case; those that deal with the ability of the policy to provide guidelines for implementation; and non-statutory variables that have an impact on implementation. This model argued that the effectiveness of implementation efforts may be a function of the policy problem's intractability more so than any other variables.

One of the later models of policy implementation by Soren Winter was constructed in 1992, a model along similar lines with Mazmanian and Sabatier, where he too identified factors influencing implementation outcome. Winter hypothesised that the above three factors in his model will have an impact on implementation outputs and outcomes. This observation is in agreement with several other implementation studies (L.J. O'Toole, 1997; Palumbo & Calista, 1990) where there is an acknowledgement that for implementation to be effective, there has to be participation from one or more departments within and organisation or among several relevant organisations.

It is worthwhile to note that all models discussed above had at least one similar variable used in this study. Most of the models above however, were developed based on a predominantly qualitative research approach. Although it has been proven that qualitative approach may provide a more comprehensive input in an exploratory study, Sekaran (2005) nevertheless argued that, a quantitative cross-sectional approach provides the researcher with the opportunity to analyse relationships among a bigger number of variables and a wider range of respondents in a single study compared to a longitudinal or a case study method.

## **METHOD**

This paper is part of a cross-sectional study using a quantitative approach carried out to determine factors affecting policy implementation. The respondents of the study comprised 232 university career administrators, defined as non-teaching staff doing administrative work in the university (Szekeres, 2004), from departments including faculties, academic centres, and administrative departments within the 14 public universities established before the year 2005 in Malaysia. The unit of analysis for this study is individuals within the public universities performing administrative tasks and implementation duties. They are employed as career administrators and do not have teaching duties in the universities.

The respondents produced a mean of about 10 years working experience in the university with a minimum of two months and a maximum of thirty five years serving in the university environment. All participating respondents had staff under their supervision with a minimum of one staff and a maximum of seventy staff yielding a mean score of fourteen (14) staff and a standard deviation of 12.39. Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics for the sample.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Respondents**

Demographic Variables	Category	Frequencies	Percentage	
Gender	Male	102	44%	
	Female	130	56%	
Educational Qualifications	Certificate/Diploma	4	1.7%	
	Bachelors Degree	158	68.1%	
	Masters Degree	69	29.7%	
	PhD	1	0.4%	
Department Attached To	Faculty	58	25%	
	Branch Campus	19	8.2%	
	Admin Dept	22	9.5%	
	Centre of Excellence	133	57.3%	
Demographic Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.	Minimum	Maximum
Years in university	9.95	9.04	2 months	34 yrs 8 mths
Number of staff	14.73	12.39	1 staff	70 staff

Note: N = 323

Data collection for this study commenced in November 2007 and ended in February 2008. Implementers of the 'Public Sector Human Resource Training and Development Policy', namely the career administrators of the universities, completed a self-reported questionnaire designed to gather information on variables associated with policy implementation. The questionnaire was divided into several sections that tapped input on policy implementation from the perspectives of resource availability, environmental conditions and the dispositions of implementers resulting in policy performance.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

All variables in the study were tapped on a 7-point Likert scale. On a 7-point scale, the following criteria to indicate a low or high mean score is used: a score of 2.99 or less indicated a "low" mean; a score of 3.00 to 4.99 was categorised as a "moderate" mean; while a score of 5.00 to 7.00 was termed a "high" mean score (Pallant, 2005).

### Resource availability

How accessible to the implementers are the resources needed for policy implementation? Most implementation models reviewed has listed resources as the main criteria for implementation success. Resources range from financial resources to a range of requirements the implementation process and initiative need. One of the best indicators of the department's commitment towards implementation of any initiative is the availability of resources to be utilized on demand. The respondents of this survey were asked whether their department had access to resources needed to train their staff. They were also required to answer questions pertaining to the availability of additional resources like funds, time and personnel when needed. Questions on the availability of competent staff were also posted to the university administrators. As reported in Table 2, resource availability reported a mean score of 4.84 (S.D.=1.05) yielding a score of slightly higher than the midpoint of its scale and categorised as a high mean score. Although the mean score is on the high side, comparatively administrators are of the opinion that out of the other three clusters of variables, resources were more difficult to obtain when implementing the administrative staff training policy.

**Table 2: Mean Scores and Standard Deviation for Variables Used in the Study**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Mean (M)</b>	<b>Std Dev. (SD)</b>
Resource_Availability	4.84	1.05
Environmental_Factors	5.53	0.91
Dispositions of Implementers:		
Job Involvement	5.09	1.00
Self Efficacy	5.70	0.80
Job Commitment	5.23	1.16
Confidence of Authority	5.40	0.83
Clarity of Role	5.78	0.75
Clarity of the Job	5.13	1.44
Policy Performance:		
Departmental Performance	4.55	1.24
Staff Performance	5.02	1.11

### **Environmental Factors**

Is the environment conducive for the implementation of training and development policy? Many studies have proven that the environment surrounding an implementation initiative plays a crucial role in determining the performance of the policy outcome (Lally, 2000; Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1981; Van Horn & Van Meter, 1977). Thus, this study posits that environmental factor is one of the contributing factors to policy implementation. Responses pertaining to the environmental conditions in terms of the economic, social and political climate of the department and university as a whole were solicited from the university administrators. Responses obtained yielded a high mean score of 5.53 with standard deviation of .91. These results indicate that administrators implementing the training and development policy for university administrative staff were highly satisfied with the surrounding environment including their department's relationship with the university and their university's political relationship with policy makers at the federal government. The environmental factors surrounding the implementation of administrative staff training and development policy were deemed very satisfactory and do not pose as a hindrance in policy implementation.

### **Dispositions of Implementers**

Are the university administrators equipped with the competencies and confidence to perform policy implementation activities at their respective departments? In the Van Meter and Van Horn 1975 policy implementation model (Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975), dispositions of the implementers play a fundamental role in determining the performance of the policy in question. This study divided the variable into six corresponding dimensions namely job involvement (Mean = 5.09; SD=1.00), Self-efficacy (Mean = 5.70; SD=0.80), Commitment (Mean = 5.23; SD=1.16), Confidence of authority (Mean = 5.40; SD=0.83), Clarity of role (Mean = 5.78; SD=0.75), Clarity of job (Mean = 5.13; SD=1.44).

From the available results on dispositions of implementers, all six dimensions yielded comparatively high mean scores. This goes on to indicate that implementers within the departments in the Malaysian public universities felt that they were well equipped and were very confident of carrying out their implementation responsibilities. It is however interesting to note that, self-efficacy and clarity of role had the highest mean of 5.70 and 5.78 respectively. It can thus be concluded that the administrators were confident they had the competencies and were highly efficient in their implementation duties. They also felt that their role as implementers was spelt out very clearly by the management. In this study, the dispositions of implementers had an overall mean of more than 5.00 indicating high mean scores for all its dimensions. Thus, it is safe to assume that administrators in Malaysian public universities are of the opinion that they are fully equipped with the competencies required to perform the task and have been given clear instructions and guide to enable them to fulfill their responsibilities.

## Policy Performance

The final question to ask in the policy implementation process is; how are the department and staff performing after policy implementation? Calculations of the mean scores for Policy Performance show that respondents felt that after implementing the staff training and development policy, staff showed high improvements in terms of their work competencies, productivity and an awareness about their career development plans (Mean = 5.02; SD=1.11). Conversely, from the available mean score, departmental performance was deemed moderate at best with a score of 4.55 (SD = 1.24). Calculations of mean scores were made from the perspective of whether the department was clear about policy objectives and strategies, the availability of training intervention for implementers and budget allocation for the implementation of the human resource policy. These figures are in line with the moderate mean score of 4.84 obtained for the availability of resources to implement the policy. It may be prudent at this point of the study to state that resource availability is a crucial element in implementation activities and resources must be managed and utilised appropriately to ensure beneficial policy implementation results. Hence, implementation activities and resources used must be monitored and documented.

It can thus be concluded that this study provided some evidence that while implementers play an important role in ensuring policies are implemented (Lipsky, 1980), the environment is one of the crucial factor for successful implementation. In addition to the above statement, this study revealed that staff performance was more responsive to implementation initiatives compared with departmental performance.

## CONCLUSION

Human resources within an organisation, private or public, has been lauded as its most valuable asset and human resource development activities acknowledged as one of the critical functions within an organisation. However, the effectiveness of development efforts have yet to be carefully monitored (Price, 2004; Schuler, 1987). Gilmore (2002) goes on to stress that organisations are fairly assiduous about determining training needs of staff and designing development policies and initiatives, but few systematic effort are made to look at the implementation of those efforts. This is where implementation studies as a general field can be linked to the area of human resource development.

Nevertheless, before a full scale examination can be performed on implementation initiatives, factors contributing to the effectiveness of implementation need to be identified. The variables posited by this paper are but a tip of the iceberg and is intended to trigger more in-depth investigation on other factors affecting policy implementation activities especially pertaining to the training and development of human assets, human resources and human capital.

This paper has proven that although implementers and their dispositions have a great impact on policy performance and implementation outcomes, other variables such as available resources, and the environment surrounding implementation activities affect implementation outcomes just as much. Hence, in conclusion, as O'Toole (1997) aptly puts it, implementation as a process is fully networked with a range of inter-connected links. Successful implementation is dependent upon a multitude of factors and may vary in different context and situation (Hill & Hupe, 2002; Palumbo & Calista, 1990). Availability of resources and competent implementers may not necessarily result in successful policy implementation. Thus, policy implementation is an on-going process and adjustments made along the process to ensure efficiency and effectiveness and the fulfilment of objectives set. Organisations need to constantly ask fundamental questions pertaining to the implementation process to ascertain that improvements are made at any point in the process to optimise individual and departmental performance.

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