

# EFFECTS OF INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS ON LEARNING THROUGH HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT (HRD) IN CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR) ACTIVITY

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## ABSTRACT

Learning through Human Resource Development (HRD) in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities is useful in the development of ethical behaviour of employees through the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. This study aimed to investigate the relationships between individual characteristics and learning through HRD in CSR activities. The participants in this study were 178 employees in four Thai firms that had been involved in developmental HRD in CSR activities. Data were collected through the use of a questionnaire on individual characteristics and evaluation of knowledge, skills, attitude changes (KSA changes) that consisted of ethical behaviour aspects such as discipline, sacrifice, harmony, morality, and gratitude. The results of the study found that there were statistically-significant relationships between age, years of work experience with the current firm and years of work experience with other firms, and KSA changes. The findings suggested that these variables could affect learning through HRD in CSR activities.

**Keywords:** Human Resource Development, Corporate Social Responsibility, Influential Factors, Learning

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The general purpose of Human Resource Development (HRD) is to improve individual performances involved with knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Swanson & Arnold, 1996; Mathis & Jackson, 2003; Yamnill & Mclean, 2005). HRD has been recognised as a vital component of the successful operation and performance of many institutions (Holton, 1996). Most research has regarded employees as organisations' most valuable assets and that there must be policies and activities to ensure a good working environment and to encourage employees to be open-minded, creative, assertive, adventurous, and eager to learn.

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Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a well-known and popular topic in business (Co'rdoba & Campbell, 2008). Welford (2005) believed that CSR was an important business concept in a world of increasing globalization and was to be found in large companies in most countries around the world. By using CSR, companies are made aware of social and environmental issues (Nielsen & Thomsen, 2009). These issues include ethics requirements and stakeholders' accountability (Welford, 2002), and awareness of industrial pollutants and global warming (Gordon, 2006). Companies motivated to use CSR are stronger in terms of profits and long-term value maximization (Adam & Shavit, 2008; Lougee & Wallace, 2008) and can bring about positive changes in employees (Vasiljeviene & Vasiljevas, 2006).

Research found that HRD had a definite role in the implementation of CSR through the provision of opportunities for employees to participate in and learn from associated activities (Chalofsky, 1991; Fenwick & Bierema, 2008). Sharma et al. (2009) believed that the combination of HRD and CSR could make a major contribution in creating long-term success in organizations.

HRD is necessary for the success of sustainable CSR, in turn leading to benefits to society and the environment through the development of employees' ethics, standards of conduct that guide people's decisions and behaviour. Greenberg (2008) stated that behaving ethically was highly desirable for two reasons. Firstly, in the long run, good ethics is good business and profitable. Secondly, behaving ethically is consistent with many legal requirements. Organisations in which ethical behaviour prevailed tended to be active in promoting CSR. HRD in CSR activity is defined as activities held at an out-of-office location without certain instructors or trainers and uncontrollable incidents with goals to increase knowledge, skills, attitudes, and to construct 'ethical behaviour' (Prachachatdurakit, 2006).

Benefits of learning through HRD in CSR activities include the enhancement of employees' ethical behaviour (Hatcher, 2000; Bansal & Kandola, 2003; Prachachatdurakit, 2006) as well as attributes useful in their jobs, such as positive thinking and the development of skills in problem-solving, leadership, and communication (Prachachatdurakit, 2006).

A number of influential factors on trainees' learning have been the focus of research. Bandura (1986) considered individual characteristics, such as gender, age, education, and work experience, as influential factors on learning. Lim and Johnson (2002) focused on age, education, and work experience, and Otomo and Ogawa (2003) used gender to study attitudes and learning behaviour. However, most of the literature focused on general training and little empirical research has been done in HRD for CSR (Fenwick and Bierema, 2008), particularly in Thailand. This study aimed to examine the effects of individual characteristics on learning through HRD in CSR activity in Thailand.

## **2. RELATED LITERATURE AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES**

### ***2.1. Effects of Individual Characteristics on Learning***

The study aimed to investigate individual characteristics as main influential factors of learning through HRD for CSR. These characteristics were gender, age, education level, years of work

experience with the current firm, and years of work experience with other firms. While most of the literature did not specifically deal with HRD for CSR, there was research relevant to these characteristics.

### **2.1.1 Gender**

Severiens and Dam (1994) investigated gender differences in learning. The findings revealed that men were more likely than women to prefer an abstract conceptualization mode of learning. Later, the same authors (1998) looked at gender differences on reproduction orientation and non-academic orientation. They found that women produced a high score on reproduction orientation while men scored highly on non-academic orientation. Riding and Grimley (1999) investigated cognitive theory and disclosed that females remembered pictures and sounds and males recalled pictures and text. However, there were no differences in remembering pictures, text, and sounds. Patrick et al. (2009) found no gender differences in the motivation for learning science subjects particularly on special projects but instead found differences in learning in regular classrooms.

Gender is likely to be a predictor of learning. Based on the preceding discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**Hypothesis 1:** *Gender significantly affects learning through HRD in CSR activity.*

### **2.1.2 Age**

Age can be a factor that affects the amount and types of interaction desired. Kearsley (1995) pointed out that older people preferred less interaction while young people desired more. Vampola (2001) conducted a study of learners' preferences for various adult training activities in a corporate training setting. Based on a sample of 281 adults with a mean age of 40, he found that older trainees preferred private implementation activities such as individual learning time and did not prefer co-active analysis activities such as small group discussions. Brown (2001) stated that age of employee could be a predictor of employee learning during training.

Therefore, it is possible that age has a relationship with preferences for learners for HRD for CSR. The hypothesis concerning age is:

**Hypothesis 2:** *Age significantly affects learning through HRD in CSR activity.*

### **2.1.3 Education**

Some studies found that education affected a learner's perceived understanding of the way in which ethical knowledge and skills were learnt (Krongchan, 2003). Gow and Kamber (1990) and Nakayama et al. (2007) stated that the benefits of individual characteristics, particularly education, could be an important key for promoting student success in learning. Brown (2001) stated that education of employees could predict knowledge gained (learning) in training.

Following the above previous studies, the author believed that education was a significant factor that affects learning. The hypothesis related to education is:

**Hypothesis 3:** *Education significantly affects learning through HRD in CSR activity.*

### **2.1.4 Years of work experience with the current firm and years of work experience with other firms**

Kuh (1995) emphasized out-of-class experience supported students in learning to apply knowledge gained in the classroom to other areas. In the same way, Bukszar and Connolly (1988), Lim and Johnson (2002) and Riedmiller (2005) mentioned the amount of experience required for learning successfully. Furthermore, Foley (1995) and Andresen et al. (2000) stated that all learning necessarily involved experience of some sort, prior and/or current. Work experience was classified into years of work experience with the current firm and years of work experience with other firms.

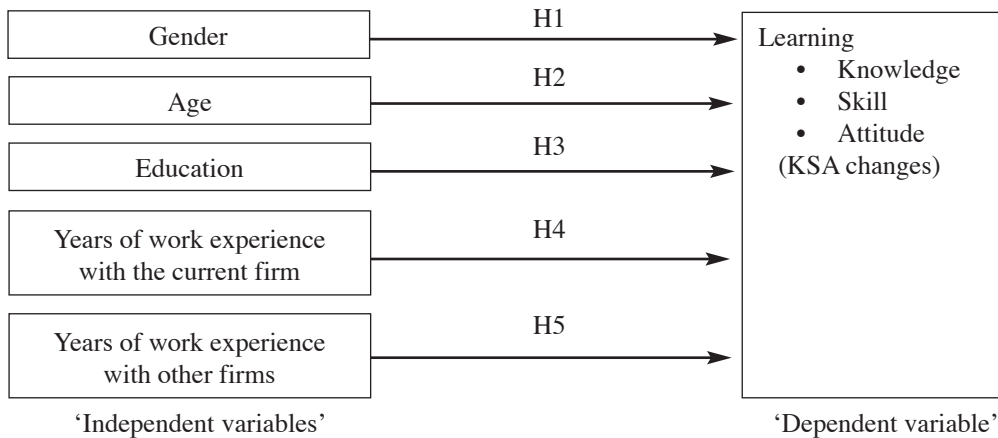
The hypotheses of this study related to this characteristic are:

**Hypothesis 4:** *Years of work experience with the current firm significantly affects learning through HRD in CSR activity.*

**Hypothesis 5:** *Years of work experience with other firms significantly affects learning through HRD in CSR activity.*

To make this study clearly understood, the authors would like to provide the framework that consists of independent and dependent variables as outlined below (see figure 1):

**Figure 1:** Conceptual Framework



## **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1. Sample and Procedures**

Four Thai companies were selected for participation in the study. The firms were locally owned ones in Thailand and fulfilled the conditions that they emphasized HRD in CSR activities/programs, were nationally recognized in CSR, and had won awards for CSR and/or

Good Governance at national and/or international levels. The firms were Asia Precision (AP), Baan Celedon (BC), Chumphon Cabana Resort (CPC), and Xongdur Thai Organic Food (XD).

The empirical analysis in this study was based on primary data obtained through a questionnaire survey. The questionnaire items were originally created in English on the basis of the literature. As the data for this study was collected in Thailand the questionnaire was translated into Thai. The questionnaire was then piloted with ten Thai employees at the target firms to observe their understanding of the questions. The wording, question order, format, and overall appropriateness of the survey were then refined accordingly. Respondents in the target firms were selected by the convenience sampling technique.

The first part of the questionnaire involved the collection of general information about the respondents and their participation in HRD in CSR activities/programs from December 2008 until November 2009. In the subsequent sections, the respondents were required to self-assess their cognitive understanding and behaviour changes before and after participation in terms of discipline, sacrifice, harmony, morality, and gratitude.

Two hundred and seventy-five questionnaires were distributed to employees at the four companies by the researcher (275 represented 37.41% of the total workforce of the 4 firms). At AP, 100 employees were involved (20% of the workforce); BC 50 (62.50%); CPC 90 (75%), and XD 35 (100%). A total of 178 questionnaires (64.73%) were returned [(AP 89 (89%); BC 37 (74%); CPC 25 (27.78%); and XD 27 (77.14%)].

The demographic characteristics of the respondents from the four firms are shown in Table 1. It was found that females were the main respondents (64.00%) and the age range was between 26 to 30 years (25 < to ≤ 30 years) (30.90%). Almost one-third (32.60%) of the respondents finished the highest level of high school (grade 12) or vocational certificate, 44.90% had an average of 0 to 5 years (≤ 5 years) of work experience with the current firm and 56.20% had an average of 0 to 5 years (≤ 5 years) of work experience with other firms.

**Table 1:** Respondents' Demographic Characteristics

Variables	Frequency	Percent
<b>(1) Gender</b>		
- Male	56	31.50
- Female	114	64.00
- Not clarified	8	4.50
<b>(2) Age</b>		
- ≤ 20 years	7	3.93
- 20 < to ≤ 25 years	29	16.29
- 25 < to ≤ 30 years	55	30.90
- 30 < to ≤ 35 years	16	8.99
- 35 < to ≤ 40 years	21	11.80
- 40 < to ≤ 45 years	17	9.55

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
- 45 < to ≤ 50 years	11	6.18
- 50 < to ≤ 55 years	7	3.93
- 55 < to ≤ 60 years	3	1.69
- 60 < to ≤ 65 years	1	0.56
- Not clarified	11	6.18
<b>(3) Education</b>		
- Grade 4	5	2.80
- Grade 5	1	0.60
- Grade 6	26	14.60
- Grade 9	17	9.60
- Grade 12 or vocational certificate	58	32.60
- Pre-bachelor or high vocational certificate	41	23.00
- Bachelor	16	9.00
- Not clarified	14	7.90
<b>(4) Years of Work Experience with Current Firm</b>		
- ≤ 5 years	80	44.90
- 5 < to ≤ 10 years	45	25.30
- 10 < to ≤ 15 years	30	16.90
- 15 < to ≤ 20 years	13	7.30
- 20 < to ≤ 25 years	1	0.60
- Not clarified	9	5.10
<b>(5) Years of Work Experience with Other Firms</b>		
- ≤ 5 years	100	56.20
- 5 < to ≤ 10 years	33	18.50
- 10 < to ≤ 15 years	13	7.30
- 15 < to ≤ 20 years	5	2.80
- 20 < to ≤ 25 years	1	0.60
- Not clarified	26	14.60

In terms of HRD in CSR activities, this study was categorized according to the concepts of Phillip Kotler and Nancy Lees (2005 and 2009) and it was found that there were two features of HRD in CSR activities that were distinguished from general HRD training. These were:

- (1) Corporate philanthropy is a dimension of social responsibility that includes charitable donations
- (2) Community volunteering is a dimension of sacrifice and participants are willing to do it without being obliged.

Furthermore, participants who wanted to join these activities/programs must have a 'public consciousness' and not expect to receive any privileges and/or benefits from recipients as participants voluntarily helped them. Table 2 shows the number of HRD in CSR activities in the four Thai local firms.

**Table 2:** Number of HRD in CSR Activity of Four Thai Local

Firms	Corporate philanthropy	Community volunteering
AP (20)	12	14
BC (3)	2	1
CPC (3)	1	2
XD (3)	3	2

*Notes:* (1) Some activities were counted more than once as they covered more than one area.  
 (2) Numbers in parentheses are the actual number of HRD in CSR activities in each firm.

### 3.2. Development of Learning in HRD in CSR Activity Measurement Scale

This study constructed a measurement scale by using Kirkpatrick's learning and training evaluation theory – the four levels of learning evaluation (Kirkpatrick, 1959). However, this study concentrated on level 1 to level 2 only.

A 5-point semantic differential scale was adopted because it allowed neutrality and had enough gradations to allow for meaningful data and was not too tiresome for respondents. The ratings 1-2 represented negative perceptions towards learning, 3 represented neutral perceptions, and 4-5 represented positive perceptions. A 5-point Likert scale was adopted with 1 representing 'strongly disagree' and 5 'strongly agree.' Additionally, the questionnaire asked the participants their perceptions in terms of 'before' and 'after' participation in HRD in CSR activities.

In the analysis, the study used the change in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes by using the different scores of before and after collectively called 'KSA changes'. KSA changes consisted of different aspects of ethical behaviour such as discipline, sacrifice, harmony, morality, and gratitude. The study set individual characteristics such as gender, age, education, years of work experience with the current firm, and years of work experience with other firms as independent variables, and frequency of participation as a control variable. Reliability was checked by the use of Alpha Cronbach.

### 3.3. Control Variable

As frequency of participation was likely to influence KSA changes, it was held constant to assess and/or clarify the relationship between independent and dependent variables. Research relevant to participation included Xiao and Tsang (2004) who emphasized the participation of learners. Their results mentioned that participation of employees in education and training reflected on their workplace and the economic attributes of their firm through learning. Twemlow et al. (2008) also found that learner participation influenced acquisition of learning. They found that frequency of participation in the program affected aggression diminution. Xu and Lin (2010) and Budd et al. (2010) studied learning participation in organisations and found that it led to changes in technological innovation and behaviour of employees.

According to previous studies, participation in training played a significant role in bringing about some changes in employees. Table 3 is a classification of employees based on the number of activities participated in. Group 1 consisted of employees who participated in one activity, group 2 in two activities, and group 3 in three or more activities.

**Table 3:** Information of Control Variable (Participation)

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Number of activities/programs	1 activity	2 activities	3 activities
Number of participants	56 (31.46 %)	28 (15.73 %)	94 (52.81 %)

#### 4. RESULTS

The data were analyzed by the use of PSAW Statistic 18 version 18.0.0. The results of the study are reported with regard to the research objective and the five hypotheses.

To test all the hypotheses, regression analysis was performed with the dependent variable (KSA changes), independent variables (gender, age, education, years of work experience with the current firm, years of work experience with other firms), and the control variable (participation). The results of the regression analysis are shown in table 4.

**Table 4:** Results of Regression Analysis for Influential Factors of Learning Through HRD in CSR Activities

Variables	KSA Changes				
	B	SE B	$\beta$	Sig.	VIF
(Constant)	.491	.216	-	.025	-
1. Gender	-.086	.070	-.110	.223	1.134
2. Age	-.013	.006	-.301	<b>.049**</b>	3.207
3. Education	.033	.022	.132	.139	1.097
4. Years of work experience with current firm	.002	.001	.362	<b>.005**</b>	2.249
5. Years of work experience with other firms	.001	.001	.182	<b>.090†</b>	1.586
6. Participation	.013	.039	.030	.751	1.257
F	2.199				
R <sup>2</sup>	.095				
Adjust R <sup>2</sup>	.052				

*Notes:* †p<0.1, \*\*p<0.05



The findings suggested that there were relationships between some individual characteristics and KSA changes, plus participation and KSA changes. Specifically, three individual characteristics were related with KSA changes. These were age ( $\beta = -.301, t = -1.984, p < 0.05$ ), years of work experience in the current firm ( $\beta = .362, t = 2.844, p < 0.05$ ), and years of work experience with other firms ( $\beta = .182, t = 1.710, p < 0.1$ ). This implies that the impact on KSA changes was affected by age, years of work experience in the current firm, and years of work experience with other firms. Thus, *Hypothesis 2, Hypothesis 4 and Hypothesis 5* were supported. In terms of age, hypothesis 2 did not set the sign condition therefore either positive or negative is accepted. In the case of the control variable, participation had no relationship with KSA changes.

Other individual characteristics such as gender and education had no relationship with KSA changes. This meant they did not affect learning in HRD for CSR. Table 5 states the results of this study in terms of the hypotheses.

**Table 5:** Conclusion of Hypothesis

Hypotheses	Results
<i>Hypothesis 1</i>	Rejected
<i>Hypothesis 2</i>	Supported
<i>Hypothesis 3</i>	Rejected
<i>Hypothesis 4</i>	Supported
<i>Hypothesis 5</i>	Supported

It is important to address the relatively low  $R^2$  values generated from the regression models in this study. The study stated that age, years of work experience with the current firm, and years of work experience with other firms were able to explain KSA changes only at the five percent level. The remaining ninety-five percent was used to explain other factors that affect KAS changes.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The objective of this study was to examine the effect of individual characteristics on learning in HRD for CSR in Thailand.

The results of this empirical study which focused on learning in terms of KSA changes at the individual level have important implications for the development of employees by the application of CSR concepts.

The regression result of age was significant and the coefficient was negative meaning that younger employees might acquire more knowledge, skills, and attitudes than older employees. Moreover, results suggested that the more years of work experience with the current firm plus with other firms influences the learning results of employees. Other individual characteristics such as gender, age, education, and number of dependent family members were not considered to have the same importance.

More years of work experience with the current firm and with other firms are useful for learning. Many years of dedicated employment in the same workplace encourage the employee to learn more things that can be easily applied to their jobs and lives. The employee who has less years of work experience in the firm or with other firms might be encouraged by the supervision of other colleagues to achieve employment goals. Even though more years of work experience may have a negative impact on learning, as an employee may believe that he/she already has lots of experience and cannot learn anything new, the positive impacts outweighed the negative ones in this study.

Results showed that age, years of work experience with the current firm and other firms were important and more emphasis on these than on gender and education may be more effective in the consideration of staff training.

The study found that other variables, such as gender and education, were not significantly associated with learning in training through voluntary activities not directly related to regular work.

Participation was used as a control variable and was found to be insignificant. Results suggested that the frequency of participation was not significant and that one participation was often sufficient to learn through HRD in CSR activities.

It was found that in Thai firms, employees needed years of work experience with the current firm and other firms to support their learning. At the same time, firms must pay attention to the support and motivation of older employees to learn. Insignificant results might have arisen due to the different contexts of the study, such as different sample size, firm size, characteristics of respondents, and culture of the study areas.

## 6. CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

This study focused on the relationships between individual characteristics and learning through HRD in CSR activities in four Thai firms. Five hypotheses were created to explore the influential factors on learning in HRD for CSR. Data were collected from the respondents who participated in HRD in CSR activities organized by the firms. Changes in knowledge, skills, and attitudes consisting of five aspects of ethical behaviour (a dependent variable), gender, age, education, years of work experience with the current firm, and years of work experience with other firms, were analyzed as the influential factors (independent variables) with participation as the control variable.

The findings revealed that there were relationships between some independent variables such as age, years of work experience with the current firm, years of work experience with other firms, and KSA changes. Other individual characteristics, such as gender and education, were not found to be related to KSA changes. Consequently, the results were able to respond to the objective of this study that individual characteristics of employees, such as age, years of work experience with the current firm, and years of work experience with other firms may affect learning (KSA changes) through HRD in CSR activity.

The study had a number of limitations. Firstly, data were collected after the respondents had already participated in HRD in CSR activities, casting some doubt on the answers to questions to situations related to before participation in activities. Secondly, data based on self-evaluation may be biased. Thirdly, Welford (2005) stated that organisations should be aware of local issues and cultural traditions at national levels. This consideration of local issues is significant but is sometimes difficult to measure and evaluate. The study involved four Thai firms operating in specific settings in Thai culture. Finally, there was little evidence of research in similar areas, making it difficult to find relevant research and to complete an extensive literature review.

More detailed research of each individual characteristic for HRD for CSR is required. This future research should be designed to explore the theoretical links between the implementation of CSR and workplace learning and the practical links between CSR and HRD activities (Fenwick & Bierema, 2008).

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