SOCIAL SECURITY MANAGEMENT JOURNAL
https://e-journal.uum.edu.my/index.php/ssmj

How to cite this article:
Faizuniah Pangil & Munzir Musa. (2024). Acquiring technical competency certification for enhanced social security in organizations: the influencing factors. *Social Security Management Journal,* 1, 33-41. https://doi.org/10.32890/ssmj2024.1.1.3

ACQUIRING TECHNICAL COMPETENCY CERTIFICATION FOR ENHANCED SOCIAL SECURITY IN ORGANIZATIONS: THE INFLUENCING FACTORS

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Received: 31/03/2024 Revised: 18/04/2024 Accepted: 21/04/2024 Published: 30/05/2024

ABSTRACT

Technically competent employees are important to ensure social security issues in organizations can be addressed effectively. However, motivating employees to acquire technical certification is not easy. This study examines the financial gains, job security, status, and opportunities to advance, advisory received and financial assistance, age, position category and income level factors on technical employees' intention to acquire technical certification. A survey was conducted among TNB Genco Technical Service staff, involving a sample of 215 respondents. The findings indicated that only age and position category affect employees' intention to acquire technical certification. Thus, organizations should take note of these factors when revising career development policies.

Keywords: financial gains, job security, status, and opportunities to advance, advisory received and financial assistance, age, position category, income level, technical competency certification.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of social security has gained lots of attention recently. The concept of social security itself has evolved over time and can be understood in different ways. Some studies viewed social security narrowly as social protection, while others perceive it more broadly as social welfare, encompassing social protection and social security (Naik, 2016). Currently, most social security studies have mainly focus on the social welfare policies which could benefit the public (Hiraoka, 2021; Pustovalova et al., 2021). Nonetheless, the issue of social security is also being discussed in the context of organizations under the topic of employees' well-being.

Ensuring the well-being of employees plays a crucial role in enhancing the social security within organizations and contributes to broader social welfare. The workplace consumes a major part of society's daily life (Giattino et al., 2020), and thus organizations should take part in ensuring the

nations (i.e. the employees) welfare is well-cared for. The integration of social security measures in organizational practices can lead to enhance job security, positively impacting employee performance and loyalty (Eizenberg & Jabareen, 2017).

In essence, social security plays a crucial role in promoting social justice, equity, and basic livelihood standards for all individuals. It includes policies and programs that address issues such as food security, health care, social work services, and income protection (Kalita, 2016). In the context of organizations, providing social security refers to the protection provided by the organization to its employees against providential crisis such as financial, physical, and mental health, accidents, natural disasters, and other types of crises that most of the time a person has no control. Indeed, some organizations do help their employees in preparing for various crises by providing an array of insurance such as medical, property, and accident-related insurance. Despite the importance of these insurances, ensuring that the employees have the right skills and competencies to perform their job safely and efficiently, which could reduce the number of crises occurring, is also an important form of social security provision.

However, the situation in most organizations today needs further discussion and analysis. Although learning and development (L&D) professionals from various organizations reported that their L&D budget continues to rise in 2020 (LinkedIn Workplace Learning Report, 2020), it was also reported that only 61 percent of employees seek career development opportunities (Lorman Education Services, 2021). Hence, there is a need to analyze the dynamics of employees L&D intentions, so that proper management policies can be developed to encourage employees to continuously upgrade their knowledge and skills for the betterment of social well-being in organizations. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to discuss the findings of research related to employees' skills upgrading intention; specifically, their intention to acquire technical certification.

INTENTION TO ACQUIRE TECHNICAL COMPETENCIES

Technical competency plays an important role in ensuring that social security in organizations issues can be dealt with more effectively. Many studies have been conducted to highlight the importance of technical competencies in the context of organizational social security and their impact on various aspects of work and performance. Studies have shown that competent employees are more capable of preventing the occurrences of various work-related crises. For example, studies by Bedi et al. (2021), and Okun et al. (2016) have confirmed that acquiring the right competencies, especially technical competencies can significantly reduce the number work-related accidents. In a study among parole officers, it was found that officers who feel educationally under-prepared are likely to experience higher levels of occupational stress and more likely to have negative manifestations of stress than those officers who feel well-prepared (Pitts, 2007). Hence, these studies also emphasize the importance of acquiring technical certification to ensure future organizational social security.

When someone aspires to acquire or achieve a professional certification, they are pursuing an intention. The word "intention" indicates anything that a person intends to do or has planned to accomplish. Studies have shown that behavioral intention is affected by one's attitude towards the behavior, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control (i.e., Theory of Planned Behavior). However, there are other factors that could also affect behavioral intention. Hence, this study mainly examines organizational factors (i.e., financial gains, job security, status, and opportunities to advance, advisory received and financial assistance), and several demographics (i.e., age, job position and household income) that could affect employees' intention to acquire technical certification.

Organizational Factors and Intention to Acquire Technical Certification

Up until now, not many research has been conducted in terms of acquiring technical competencies. Of the few that have been identified (Breen & Iohom, 2013; Francis et al., 2012; Wilbanks et al., 2021), none of them investigated organizational factors that could contribute to employees' intention to

acquire technical certification. Hence, based on Herzberg Two-Factor theory, two motivating factors (i.e. status, and opportunities for advancement) and four hygiene factors (i.e. financial gains, job security, advisory received and financial assistance) were selected to be examined.

For some people, achieving a high level of status and prestige can be a driving force in their careers or personal lives. Status refers to the position or standing of an individual within a particular context, often indicating their rank, role, or level of authority. In the realm of employment, job status specifically pertains to an individual's position within an organization, encompassing factors such as job title, responsibilities, and seniority. A study by Williams (2007) indicated that acquiring certain kind of competence, specifically language competence, can help one realize higher status employment and earnings. Based on these findings, it is assumed that the lure of higher status can motivate employees to acquire technical competency.

In addition, individuals with higher competencies and qualifications are often associated with higher job positions. In fact, several studies (Camuffo et al., 2009; Choi, 2023) have highlighted the vital role competencies play in career progression across various fields. Thus, opportunities for career advancement should also be a motivation for individuals to acquire technical competencies.

This situation is also true with regards to other variables, specifically financial gains, job security, advisory received and financial assistance. In essence, studies that relate these variables to intention to acquire technical competencies are hardly available. Nonetheless, these variables are often linked to various positive organizational attitudes and behaviors. For example, the expectation of financial reward or gains usually motivates people to engage in a certain behavior, and indeed it was found that financial rewards positively affect organizational commitment (Korir & Kipkebut, 2016; Kristanti et al., 2021). Moreover, job security was found to affect organizational citizenship behavior (Lu et al., 2021), advisory received from superiors and colleagues leads to more rational decision-making and improved startup performance (Chatterji et al., 2019; Sapulete et al., 2014), and financial assistance have a positive impact on various aspects related to continue education (Graves, 2023; Muhammad et al., 2023). Hence, all these findings provide some support to the hypothesis that:

H1: *Organizational factors (i.e. status, opportunities for advancement, financial gains, job security, advisory received and financial assistance) have a significant relationship with intention to acquire technical knowledge.*

Demographic Factors and Intention to Acquire Technical Certification

Similarly, not many studies have specifically addressed the relationship between various demographic factors on any kind of behavioral intention. Nonetheless, some studies do provide some data relating to these relationships. For example, in relating the age factor to intention to upgrade skills and knowledge (i.e. acquire technical certification), the study by Mohamed Mokmin & Neoh (2023) indicated that older employees are motivated to engage in skill development only when they perceive the training tools as user-friendly, beneficial, and when they believe in their ability to succeed. Nonetheless, most studies agreed that age affects behavioral intention (e.g., Montepare, 2020; Schaffer et al., 2012).

Similarly, studies that focus on the effect of job position on behavioral intentions is scarce. However, in organizations, different job positions are related to different levels of employment, roles and responsibilities, and expectations (Wong, 2012). Due to this, the behavior of individuals in different position are expected to be different (Shen et al., 2023). Hence, it is implied that job positions can affect individual behavior.

However, the effect of income on behaviors is often considered like a double-edged sword. In one aspect, low household income could lead to higher intention to acquire technical certification, because higher qualifications provide better opportunities for promotions (Palaščáková & Palaščáková, 2020). On the other hand, low household income, means the individual need to focus more on earning money for the family, and thus acquiring certifications becomes less important. Nonetheless, for the purpose

of current research, it is posited that:

H2: *There is a significant difference in terms of intention to acquire technical certification between employees of different demographic (i.e., age, job positions and household income) category.*

RESEARCH METHODS

This study was conducted in a power generation company in Malaysia, where technical competencies is very important. Initial study indicates that only 14 percent of its employees hold critical technical competency certification. There are 445 employees in total working at this company and a sample of 212 respondents were selected for the purpose of this research. Majority of the respondents were male and from the 31 to 40 years age group. Table 1 provide further demographic information regarding the sample.

Table 1
Demographics Profile of the Respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Age:	31 years - 40 years	122	57.5	57.5	57.5
	41 years - 50 years	54	25.5	25.5	83.0
	Less than 30 years	20	9.4	9.4	92.5
	More than 50 years	16	7.5	7.5	100.0
	Total	212	100.0	100.0	
Gender:	Female	8	3.8	3.8	3.8
	Male	204	96.2	96.2	100.0
	Total	212	100.0	100.0	
Position Level:	Assistant Technician	19	9.0	9.0	9.0
	Chief Engineer/Head of Unit	2	.9	.9	9.9
	Head of Department	1	.5	.5	10.4
	Principle Engineer/Senior Manager	13	6.1	6.1	16.5
	Senior Assistant Technician	12	5.7	5.7	22.2
	Senior Engineer/Manager	50	23.6	23.6	45.8
	Senior Technician	19	9.0	9.0	54.7
	Technical Executive/Engineer	47	22.2	22.2	76.9
	Technician	35	16.5	16.5	93.4
	Technician Foreman	14	6.6	6.6	100.0
	Total	212	100.0	100.0	
Position Category:	Executive	110	51.9	51.9	51.9
	Management	3	1.4	1.4	53.3
	Non-Executive	99	46.7	46.7	100.0
	Total	212	100.0	100.0	
Household Income Level:	Less than RM 4,850	78	36.8	36.8	36.8
	More than RM 10,959	44	20.8	20.8	57.5
	RM 4,850 - RM 10,959	90	42.5	42.5	100.0
	Total	212	100.0	100.0	
Years of service in TNB:	11 years - 15 years	73	34.4	34.4	34.4
	16 years - 20 years	32	15.1	15.1	49.5
	6 years - 10 years	67	31.6	31.6	81.1
	Less than 5 years	8	3.8	3.8	84.9
	More than 20 years	32	15.1	15.1	100.0
	Total	212	100.0	100.0	

Data on intention to acquire technical competency certification is collected using a scale that is modified from a study conducted by Chi et al. (2022). All the independent variables were adapted from instruments used by Abdul Aziz et al. (2017). The number of items and the reliability of the instruments are as indicated in Table 2. Except for Financial Assistance, the Cronbach Alpha value for all variables is above 0.7.

Table 2

Results of Reliability Analysis

Variables	Alpha	Item
Financial Gains	0.836	4
Job Security	0.753	4
Status	0.846	3
Opportunities to Advance	0.814	3
Advisory Received	0.816	3
Financial Assistance	0.602	3
Intention to Pursue Technical Competency Certification	0.917	4

To test the hypothesis, a linear regression was performed on the six organizational variables and analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed on the demographic variables, whereby age, position category and income level factors are analysed as the independent variables and intention to acquire technical certification is the dependent variable.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The regression analysis findings are presented in Table 3 and the ANOVA results are presented in Table 4. As indicated in Table 3, of the six variables tested, only opportunities to advance and advisory received has the capacity to affect individuals' intention to acquire technical certification.

Table 3

Regression Model Coefficients and Significance

Coefficients[a]					
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	1.407	.292		4.815	<.001
Financial Gains	.025	.067	.028	.369	.713
Job Security	.069	.075	.072	.921	.358
Status	.017	.056	.020	.298	.766
Opportunities to Advance	.321	.078	.349	4.106	<.001
Advisory Received	.215	.058	.246	3.728	<.001
Financial Assistance	.068	.064	.063	1.056	.292

Note. a. Dependent Variable: IPC

With regards to the demographic variables, results indicated that there are statistically significant interactions between the position category and intention to acquire technical certification, and age groups and intention to acquire technical certification. About household income, the interaction is not statistically significant.

Table 4

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for Position Level, Age, and Household Income

		ANOVA Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Position Category and IPC	Between Groups	3.365	2	1.683	3.391	.036
	Within Groups	103.715	209	.496		
	Total	107.080	211			
Age and IPC	Between Groups	5.088	3	1.696	3.459	.017
	Within Groups	101.992	208	.490		
	Total	107.080	211			
Household Income and IPC	Between Groups	2.825	2	1.413	2.832	.061
	Within Groups	104.255	209	.499		
	Total	107.080	211			

Table 5

Multiple Comparison between Position Category

Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable: All_IPC
Tukey HSD

(I) POS	(J) POS	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval Lower Bound	95% Confidence Interval Upper Bound
1.00	2.00	.23864*	.09759	.040	.0083	.4690
	3.00	.49242	.41283	.459	-.4821	1.4669
2.00	1.00	-.23864*	.09759	.040	-.4690	-.0083
	3.00	.25379	.41222	.812	-.7193	1.2268
3.00	1.00	-.49242	.41283	.459	-1.4669	.4821
	2.00	-.25379	.41222	.812	-1.2268	

**Note.* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.
Position Category 1: Non-Executive, Position Category 2: Executive, Position Category 3: Top Management

Analyzing position category in further detail (Table 3) showed that there is a significant difference in the intention to acquire technical certification between non-executive employees and management, indicating compared to top managers, non-executive have higher intention to acquire technical certification. However, there are no significant differences when comparing non-executive and executive employees, and between executive and management employees. This essentially means that employees in the non-executive position category are more likely to pursue technical certification as compared to employees in the management position category. One explanation to this is that management employees could possibly regard technical certifications is not important in the performance of their jobs. Based on the expectation and requirements of their jobs, they might also perceive that it is not important for their career advancement.

With regards to age, the findings are presented in Table 4. The findings indicated that there are significant different between the interaction of more than 50 years old and the other 3 age groups (i.e., 1: less than 30 years, 2: 31 years - 40 years, 3: 41 years - 50 years). In addition, these 3 groups are not significantly different from each other. Employee more than 50 years old has less in intention acquire technical competency certification, and this is probably because most of them believe that they are at

the end of their career, and thus there is no need for them to acquire further certification.

Table 6

Multiple Comparison between Age Group

Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable: All_IPC

Tukey HSD

(I) AGE	(J) AGE	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval Lower Bound	95% Confidence Interval Upper Bound
1.00	2.00	.05348	.16893	.989	-.3840	.4910
	3.00	.11898	.18330	.916	-.3557	.5937
	4.00	.63750*	.23487	.036	.0292	1.2458
2.00	1.00	-.05348	.16893	.989	-.4910	.3840
	3.00	.06550	.11445	.940	-.2309	.3619
	4.00	.58402*	.18619	.010	.1018	1.0662
3.00	1.00	-.11898	.18330	.916	-.5937	.3557
	2.00	-.06550	.11445	.940	-.3619	.2309
	4.00	.51852*	.19932	.049	.0023	1.0347
4.00	1.00	-.63750*	.23487	.036	-1.2458	-.0292
	2.00	-.58402*	.18619	.010	-1.0662	-.1018
	3.00	-.51852*	.19932	.049	-1.0347	-.0023

Note:* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

**Age Group 1: Less than 30 years, Age Group 2: 31 years - 40 years, Age Group 3: 41 years - 50 years, and Age Group 4: More than 50 years

CONCLUSION

At this point, it is important to highlight that to enhance organizational social security, it is important to encourage the organizational members (i.e. the employees) to continue increasing their technical competency through certifications. Technically competent employees not only contribute to the performance of the organization more effectively, but also could significantly increase their physical and mental safety (Bedi et al., 2021; Okun et al., 2016). Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded it is quite difficult to urge the employees to acquire technical certifications. It seemed that they would be motivated to acquire technical certifications only if with that certification they can advance their career, or in other words get promoted. Furthermore, the advice from supervisors and peers also plays an important in encouraging employees to acquire technical certifications. This study also found that age and job positions category do affect employees' intention to acquire technical certifications, but income level does not. It was found that younger employees are more motivated compared to the seniors, and the non-executive employees are more motivated compared to the executives. Hence, policies need to be developed to address this issue. Organizations need to utilize their supervisors and managers to promote the importance of technical certifications especially among the non-executive young employees.

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