

Framing Programme Planning Practices in Continuing Professional Education in Professional Associations in Malaysia

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to describe the programme-planning practices in continuing professional education (CPE) in three professional associations in Malaysia. A qualitative multiple-case method was employed and data were collected through in-depth interviews. A constant comparative method was used in the within-case and cross-case analysis. The findings of the study suggested that CPE programme planning consists of eight types of activities carried out by the planners in planning CPE programmes for professionals, namely, (1) Initiation of Ideas, (2) Selection of Topic, (3) Identification of Resource Speaker, (4) Development of Content, (5) Arrangement of Facilities, (6) Marketing, (7) Conducting the Programme, and (8) Evaluation of Programme. The study of programme-planning practices in continuing professional education in selected professional associations in Malaysia not only adds to the programme planning knowledge base but also provides insight into the ways in which planners plan their programmes. It has implications for both the theory and the practice of programme planning, especially in the field of adult and continuing professional education in general and more specifically in the Malaysian context.

Keywords: Programme planning practices, continuing professional education, Malaysia.

1.0. Introduction

The 21st century has brought with it a rapid evolution in the global economy and the emergence worldwide of new patterns of work and learning. In our modern-day climate of seemingly endless innovation and change, it is more important than ever for people in all fields to commit themselves to continuing professional education (Gracy & Croft, 2007). In Malaysia, there is an increased recognition that updating existing knowledge and skills and the development of new knowledge and skills are key aspects of professional life (Ministry of Human Resource, 2008). The changing demands now being placed upon professionals have led to a recognition of the need for a planned and structured approach to learning for work. Individual practitioners, their employers, the professional bodies and the teaching institutions are increasingly aware that continuing professional education is a joint responsibility requiring shared commitment and action (Gracy & Croft, 2007; Sobiechowska & Maisch, 2007; Lehman & Fryd, 2008).

Indeed, a majority of the programme-planning literature prescribes what planners “ought” to do in their planning practice while ignoring the reality of what programme planners actually do (Van Loo & Rocco, 2006; Clardy, 2008). Most of the programme-planning models assume an ideal world in which planners face well-defined problems and have a full array of alternatives, complete information about context, and unlimited resources to solve these problems, when in fact problems are ill-defined, resources are limited, and time limits are unrealistic. In addition, it has been argued that practitioners find that application of these models is virtually impossible (Brookfield, 1986; Sork & Caffarella, 1989). These shortcomings in the planning literature need to be addressed, using an approach that takes into account the exigencies of day-to-day responsibilities of practitioners, if planning practices and theories are to be viewed seriously (Sork & Caffarella, 1989). Cervero and Wilson (1994) contend that planning practice is a social activity that requires planners to negotiate personal and institutional interests when developing programmes. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to describe the programme-planning practices in a selection of continuing professional education providers in Malaysia. Specifically, the aim of this paper is to frame programme-planning practices in continuing professional education in selected professional associations in Malaysia.

2.0. Review of Related Literature

2.1. Continuing Professional Education

Continuing professional education (CPE) is a field of practice and study that is directed towards the on-going needs of professionals (Cervero, 2001). The purpose of CPE is to certify and improve professional knowledge and practice (Loo & Rocco, 2008). CPE is termed ‘continuing’ because learning never ceases, regardless of age or seniority. It is professional because it focuses on personal competence in a professional role; and it is concerned with education because its goal is to improve personal performance and enhance career progression. Many aspects of CPE are not new, as most professionals have always recognized the need to update their skills and knowledge, but CPE’s emphasis on systematic development and the comprehensive identification of learning opportunities now provides a framework within which formal and informal learning activities can be set. Indeed, it has been extended such that learning and development becomes a planned, rather than accidental, activity (Cervero, 2001; Haslinda et al, 2007a).

In contrast to the developed countries in the West, the development of continuing education in Malaysia is not well established. It is still in its rudimentary stage and very limited systematic inquiry has been carried out in this field. According to Maznah (2001), adult and continuing education has been practised for six centuries in Malaysia. However, the subject is not well established as a field of study. Very limited systematic inquiry has been carried out in the area. Neither is there any specified professional association or independent body that links all stakeholders in the field. To meet the needs of both the individual and the country, there is a dire need for the field to be well established.

Balan (2005) found that CPE in the providers studied is still managed in a very rudimentary way. The management of CPE by these providers is generally yet to be recognized as an activity worthy of management time. There is frequently an absence of coherent CPE policy that reflects business-driven needs. CPE is perceived as a special type of development activity. Thus, there is little attempt to relate professional development activities to strategic business objectives.

2.2. Adult and Continuing Professional Education

Continuing professional education practice is influenced by the fact that the participants are adults who work in a particular setting. Thus, many of the educational processes used in the continuing education of professionals are the same as those used in adult and continuing education and in human resource development and training. The theory and research in these two areas can do much to inform continuing professional educators (Cervero, 1998). Given the centrality of programme planning

practices to the work of adult educators, this attention is clearly understandable. Indeed, programme planning in adult and continuing education always has been, and always will be, an inherently ideological practice with high stakes for all involved (Mabry, 2000).

In the Malaysian context, however, the issue encountered most frequently by continuing education providers is programme planning: most educational programmes planned do not meet the learners' needs, programmes are planned on an *ad hoc* basis (Haslinda et al, 2007b), and there is a lack of follow-up after the programmes (Maznah, 2001; Junaidah, 2001). If Malaysia is to rely on continuing education to improve professional competence and implement policies, in order for her to achieve developed nation status by the year 2020, then planning will have to play an important role. In fact, continuing education planning shapes programmes; these programmes will shape professional practice (Umble, 1998). In short, the way in which continuing education programmes are planned will greatly influence the nature and quality of programmes delivered, which will in turn shape professional practice and policy implementation.

2.3. Perspectives on Programme Planning

The literature on planning educational activities in the field of adult education may be viewed from three broad genres: the technical, the naturalistic and the critical perspectives (Cervero and Wilson, 1997). The technical perspective is the area in which the most has been written (Tyler, 1949; Knowles, 1980; Boyle, 1981; Boone, 1985; Sork & Buskey, 1986; Sork & Cafferella, 1989) and addresses the technical “how to” and it has usually advocated a version of the “classical” viewpoint on curriculum planning. This model advises planners to complete several basic technical steps, which include how to write objectives, how to conduct needs assessments, how to create optimal conditions that are conducive to learning, how to plan sequences of experiences that will produce the desired learning, how to select the most effective methods and the techniques to produce this learning, and how to measure and evaluate the outcomes of the learning experiences (Cervero & Wilson, 1994). The general continuing education literature too contains much guidance on how to conduct each of these steps (Queeny, 1993; Cafferella, 1994; Goody & Kozoll, 1995). Most models in this perspective have defined in theory what effective adult and continuing education should be, but have ignored the realities of programme-planning practice as it actually occurs (Cafferella, 1994; Cervero & Wilson, 1996). This has given rise to disagreement among these theorists and practitioners on how programmes should be planned and organized (Sork & Buskey, 1986; Brookfield, 1986).

In response to the recognition that early prescriptive models of programme planning did not address what occurs in the actual practice of adult education programme planning, several adult educators in developed countries in the West set out to describe the nature of adult education programme-planning practice and base models on what actually occurs. The naturalistic models described the work of programme planners holistically. The critical models (such as Cervero and Wilson's 1994 model) incorporated a description of what occurs in the politics of planning practice with a decidedly ethical stance regarding what the ethical programme planner ought to do or consider. Planners can make the best judgment in everyday practice, the theory of critical viewpoint argues, only if they clearly understand that education is a political and ideological activity, intimately connected with social inequalities within society as a whole. Because the judgments are made in a world of unequal and shifting relationships of power, they are inherently ethical and political, not technical (Cervero & Wilson, 1994).

3.0. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The research approach for this study was a qualitative multiple-case study that provided an in-depth description of the programme planning practices in the selected CPE providers. Data were collected

using in-depth personal interviews with the help of a semi-structured interview guide. The questions served as a guide, but allowed respondents freedom and flexibility in their answers.

3.2. Sample

This study employed a purposive sampling technique to select the organizations. Two levels of sampling were carried out: the first level entails the case to be selected, and the second level constitutes the participants to be interviewed. In this study, three professional associations were purposefully sampled out of the twenty registered under the Malaysian Professional Centre, which is the umbrella body for all professional associations in Malaysia (MPC, 1996). These three professional associations were from the Accountants' Professional Association (Provider A), the Medical Specialists' Professional Association (Provide B), and the Architects' Professional Association (Provider C). They were selected on the basis of their policies (mandatory, obligatory, and voluntary) on the regulation of members' continuing professional education. The second level of sampling involved the selection of continuing professional education programme planners from each of the association: a total of six planners were selected.

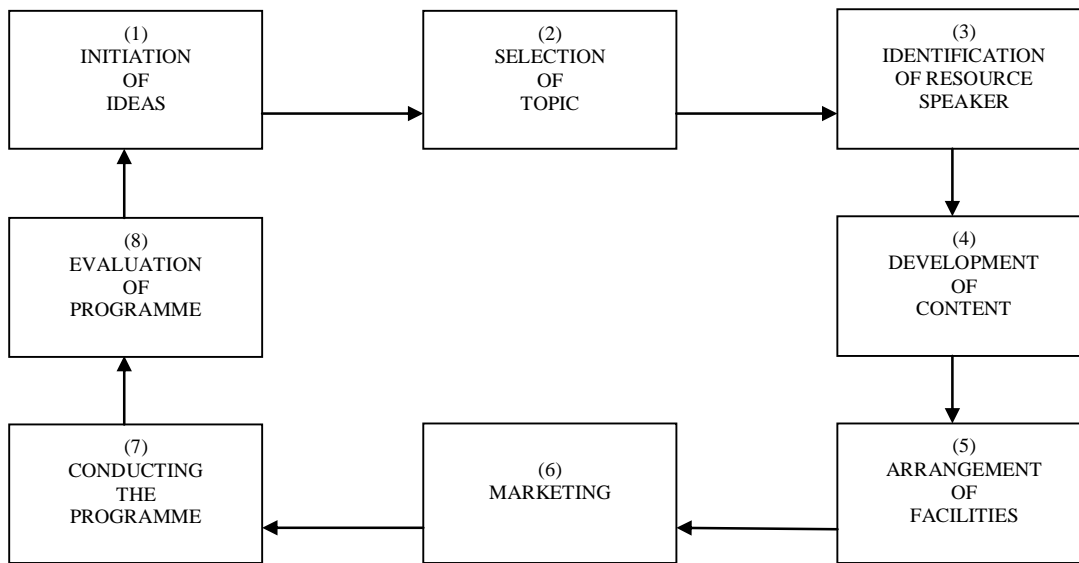
3.3. Data Analysis

Data from interviews were transcribed verbatim and subsequently analysed by identifying similar and consistent themes. Two stages of data analysis were carried out, a within-case analysis and a cross-case analysis, and a constant comparative method was employed in both type of analysis. Apart from interviews, data were also obtained from documents gathered from the organizations.

4.0. Results

Themes that emerged during the interviews were expanded upon or dropped. A flow chart was prepared that portrayed the programme-planning processes of each association. Data were then combined and flow charts prepared to depict relationships among the various themes for each of the professional fields. These three programme-planning process were merged into one common framework. The findings were compared and contrasted with individual associations' findings and with the framework prepared for each profession. Comparisons were made using descriptive data to identify similarities and differences in planning processes within and across the three professions. Results supported the idea that the planning process comprised a series of tasks and decisions that could be grouped into eight activities, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Framework of Programme-Planning Practices in Continuing Professional Education in Selected Professional Associations in Malaysia



4.1. Programme-Planning Practices in Continuing Professional Education

This study found that the framework for programme-planning practices in continuing professional education in the three selected professional associations consists of eight activities, namely: (1) Initiation of Ideas, (2) Selection of Topic, (3) Identification of Resource Speaker, (4) Development of Content, Arrangement of Facilities, (5) Marketing, (6) Conducting the Programme, and (8) Evaluation of Programme.

4.1.1. Activity 1: Initiation of Ideas

The initiation of ideas could come in various ways, such as: (1) Developments in the professions or current issues which the committee or council deem fit to be delivered; (2) Feedback from members through dialogues from the various committees in the associations or direct suggestions to the secretariat verbally or in writing; (3) Evaluation of past programmes; (4) Suggestions from the pool of speakers who propose topics in their niche areas, and (5) When a well-known high-profile speaker who specializes in the topics of the respective fields is available.

Recent developments in the professions or current issues that the committee or council deem fit to be disseminated to the members are the main ideas for topics in all the three providers, as reiterated by the programme planners interviewed:

Comment from provider A:

“We will closely follow developments in the profession, like changes in company laws, changes in related laws/rules and regulations such as the Stock Exchange listing requirements; we monitor them, because all these developments will come through us. We will get to know them very early, so the moment it comes in, even sometimes before the law becomes law, we’ll know it already, because the bills will come to us for comments.... The various committees in the association will filter to me, we get suggestions from staff managing other committees, so this is another way, or feedback through members’ dialogues from various committees...Current issues which the committee or council deem fit to be delivered.... Suggestions could also come in from evaluation of past programmes.... We give out an evaluation form at the end of the day for the participants to fill in and to suggest more topics and things like that.... Ideas could come from the pool of resource speakers who will propose topics in their niche areas.... Whenever a well-known high-profile foreign speaker who specializes in the

topics of his/her respective field is available in town, arrangements will be made for him to conduct a programme”.

Comment from provider B:

“The latest directive from the Ministry of Health on the activities that they want us to disseminate to members...These ideas could come from suggestions from members or we normally “play it by ear”, by asking the members about the topics that they want the committee to organize”.

Comment from provider C:

“Recent development in the profession that we have to let the members know about... We do have proposals or suggestions from the CPE committee members, or members can even go straight to the secretariat to forward suggestions...In some programmes where we have the evaluations, we’ll open up these evaluation forms in our committee meetings and take note of their suggestions for future courses...When we have a situation whereby we know that a particular practitioner from overseas is in the city, we’ll approach the person to present a talk as one of the CPE programmes”.

There was no indication of any needs assessment being carried out by any of the three providers. Needs assessment was not carried out in any of the three professions, as it was felt to be time-consuming. For example, as admitted by one programme planner:

“At one time, we did carry out needs assessment, but we have stopped it, as we found that it did not serve any purpose, as it was the same old thing, time consuming and cumbersome”.

Even though they do not carry out formal needs assessment, they try to get feedback from members about the need for programmes to be implemented in various ways, as mentioned above, such as dialogues from various committees or direct suggestions from members to the secretariat. All three providers are running their CPE committees as profit-making ventures, trying to serve the needs of their customers, and at the same time, they will have a surplus and make a profit at the end of the day.

4.1.2. Activity 2: Selection of Topic

After requests or ideas for topics have been received, these ideas will be brought to the attention of the planners. The planners and the CPE committee will explore the degree of interest in the topics suggested and the expected responses by the members through literature reviews, reference to resource persons in the field, or by asking around to establish the relevance of the idea to the members. The topics chosen will be the latest developments in the particular field related to the profession and must be relevant to the members in order to elicit a good response, as mentioned by the programme planners from the three providers:

Remark by Planner 1 from Provider A:

“Once we have the suggestions, there are two ways of doing it; either we come up with a topic, which means we have to conduct a literature review on the topic, in the library or through the internet, or we refer to some resource persons in the field.... After conducting the search, our staff will get back to the head of department, who will decide on next course of action, whether to run the programme or not.... For most of the courses, we only need the CPE head of department’s approval, but for courses which involve a little bit of politics in the sense that we need to get consent from the council, then we’d have to write a proposal and table it at the council meeting. However, I would say that about 90% of the courses that we do are at the CPE head’s level.... The more popular topics are the technical topics, regular, timeless or evergreen topics, while the soft skills like image enhancement, negotiating skills and interpersonal skills are not so popular among the members”.

Remark by Planner 1 from Provider B:

“When ideas for topics are received, the committee will explore the interest in the idea and the expected response by the members by asking around to find out the relevance of the ideas to the members...The topics conducted must be on current issues, activities being carried out by the Ministry of Health, and topics that are relevant to the doctors, otherwise they won’t attend”.

Remark by Planner 1 from Provider C:

“After the initiation of ideas, the CPE committee will select the types of topic to be delivered. The topics chosen will usually be the latest developments in the field related to the profession or changes in the by-laws, which we have to disseminate to the members...The popular topics are those to do with practice, like legal matters, contractual matters, arbitration matters and all that: anything on the aspects of day-t-day practice of an architect. The younger members would like to attend courses on technical matters”.

Based on the feedback received, the CPE committee or CPE department will reach a consensus or decision to drop topics or take them up for further development. This step is important in ensuring that the interests of all the people involved are represented in developing programmes that are well received by the members and that will not only pay for themselves but will also bring in profits for the associations. Hence, the topics selected have to be popular issues that are evergreen or hot topics among the members, which will satisfy their mandatory compliance and also be of great relevance in updating their knowledge, otherwise there will be a poor response and the associations will run at a loss. Therefore, the CPE committees and departments have to select these topics with a customer service mentality in order to return a profit for the associations.

4.1.3. Activity 3: Identification of Resource Speakers

Once a topic has been chosen, the next step in CPE planning is the identification of resource speakers. The resource speaker (content expert) is the most important resource here, in that he or she determines the implementation of a chosen topic: the topic will only work if a speaker can be found; otherwise, it has to be dropped. Having identified the speaker, the programme planner will negotiate with the speaker on the content, formulation of course objectives, course evaluation, course materials, design of brochures, and other facilities and equipment needed to implement the programmes. There is also another way to identify speakers: in some instances, speakers will approach the department or secretariat with the necessary information on topics that they present for other providers, complete with the objectives, course outline and the target audience, and sell them to the association. After going through the content and if they are found to be suitable, then the speaker will be engaged to conduct the programme. There is a great reliance on the resource speakers here, as without them, the programmes cannot be implemented. This is evident from the interview excerpts below by Planner 1 from Provider A:

“After having decided on a topic/idea, it will only work if I can find a speaker; otherwise, I’ll have to drop it. If I get a speaker, then I will discuss with him what I want him to cover... We have to rely on outside speakers to prepare the course content, as the staff in the CPE Department do not have the expertise to plan the course content, because they are not from an accounting background”.

A similar situation occurred in Provider B as remarked by Planner 1:

“...after we have decided on the topics, the next step is to look for people who are credible in that field... we’ll discuss with them what we expect them to talk about, and we’ll give them a few points on the topics that we want them to touch on. We’ll formulate the objectives with the speakers...”.

Similarly, in Provider C, Planner 1 said:

“There are two ways of identifying speakers; one method is that we may have a particular request from members. Now, there may be many members who may be

facing, say, the interpretation of a particular clause in the building contract for example: then we'll say yes, it seems to warrant CPE on that particular topic. Then we'll approach several people to ask about their particular experience, we'll seek legal opinions and all that; and if we can gather enough answers, then we'll put the people together and we'll arrange CPE on that basis. The other method is where some topics arise out of us first identifying the speakers. Now, we may have a situation whereby we know of a particular person who is very vocal on a particular topic or area of research or a particular area of practice. We'll approach the person and ask whether he'd like to present a talk as one of our CPE programmes. We'll usually guide the speakers, for example, if we have identified the speaker first, then we'll of course find out exactly what are the most current developments that the particular person may have to talk about and that could be actually useful to our members. However, there is also another way of running it, which is where the speaker will come up with the necessary information ...complete with the objectives, the course outline and the target audience, everything nicely done..."

From here, it is evident that there is a great reliance on the resource speakers in all the three providers, as without them, the programmes cannot be implemented.

4.1.4. Activity 4: Development of Content

As for the development of content, in Provider A, the head of the CPE department will be the one negotiating with the resource speaker, as explained in the following quote:

"I would discuss with the speaker what is expected to be covered and he will come up with me the course outline. I'll look at the outline and if it is exactly consistent with the topic, then I will spend a bit of time fine-tuning it for marketability. If it is necessary, I help him with the course objectives. After fine-tuning the topic, I will pass it to my manager and my staff to do the rest".

Similarly, in Provider B:

"We don't just give out the topics, we'll describe to the speakers what we expect them to talk about. We'll give them a few points on the topics that we want them to touch on. We'll formulate the objectives with the speakers. If we have a local speaker, we'll normally interact with them before the programmes. However, we haven't really got to the stage where we ask them to provide the materials beforehand. They will provide at least an abstract of what they are going to talk about".

In Provider C, the CPE committee chairperson will discuss and develop the course content with the speakers, as noted by Planner 1:

"We'll develop the content and objectives for the particular course with the speaker. We'll discuss the topics and the content that we expect the speaker to cover."

The programme planners will negotiate with the speakers with regard to the course outline and content that they want the speakers to cover on the topics, and if necessary, fine-tune the topic for marketability. In most instances, the programme planners will only give a brief description of the course outline and what is expected to be covered on a topic, and the speaker will have to come up with the whole course content, complete with the objectives of the course, evaluation and course materials, as well as the brochures for programme promotion. There might be some interaction on the content between the planners and the speakers, in which the speakers will then provide an abstract or outline of the content. Occasionally, in some of the associations, the programme planners will fine-tune the topics and brochures for marketability. Instructional strategies are usually left to the speakers to determine, and all of them use the common group lecture method.

The objectives of the programmes here are not systematically formulated: they are developed either as diversions from the actual programme or as an appendix, and not an integral part of it.

4.1.5. Activity 5: Arrangement of Facilities

Having decided to run a course, the next step in CPE programme planning is the arrangement of facilities, and this is the responsibility of the planners involved. Facilities such as the booking of venues, arrangements for food and other logistics are considered. For instance, according to Planner 2 in Provider C:

“After the topics have been decided and the dates set by the committee and the speakers, then the secretariat will take over, to contact the speakers, book venues, arrange for food and do the marketing”.

Indeed, it has been suggested by Cervero (2001) that the arrangement of facilities for CPE is an important aspect of planning, even though it may seem to be insignificant. However, if these logistical issues are not taken seriously, CPE programme planning can fail as a result.

4.1.6. Activity 6: Marketing

Having set the date and venue, the next stage is to market the programmes, as described by Planner 2 in Provider A:

“After setting the date and booking the venue, I will give it to the designer to design the brochure/flyer with the help of the speaker. It will be approved by the CPE head before printing. The brochures are then mailed to members. By the third and fourth week, we will have responses coming in, especially if the course is popular or a seller. We’ll usually wait for two months for responses to come in. Each course will be assigned to one training coordinator who will be in charge of the responses coming in and registration, coordinating with members on payment, the course schedule and so on”.

The course will be conducted only if a substantial number of candidates register. Only then will confirmation letters be sent to the members. In the event that the number of registrations received is low, the course will be aborted, as confirmed by Planner 2 in Provider A:

“...we will go ahead with the course only if we reach the break-even number of 15 registrations... If we do not reach the break-even number, we’ll hire telemarketers to call the targeted members, and if there is still no response, we’ll abort the course...”

In Provider B, marketing is carried out differently for large-scale and regular programmes, as explained by Planner 2:

“...we promote those large-scale programmes like conferences, seminars, scientific meetings, and congresses through brochures / flyers. We design the brochures with the help of the specialists and speakers. We give out brochures to members and non-members for large-scale meetings only, as this can be very costly. For regular courses, we’ll post advertisements on the website or inform the members by e-mail. We communicate a lot by e-mail to promote our programmes to our members...”

After setting the date and venue, the programme planners, with the help of the speakers, will design the brochures or flyers to promote or sell the programme. These brochures will be mailed to members. As well as brochures, other ways of promoting or marketing the programmes include e-mail, fax, telemarketing and posting advertisements on websites. More aggressive marketing would have to be carried out for programmes that do not sell well.

4.1.7. Activity 7: Conducting the Programme

On the day of the programme, the planner and the CPE staff ensure that any last-minute arrangements are in place, liaising with the hotel and the speakers on the set-up of equipment, food, training materials and the registration of participants. When everything is ready, the planner will then introduce the speaker to the audience and the speaker will then take full charge of conducting the course. All the courses are conducted in the group lecture format.

The events on the day of the course, as described by Planner 2 from Provider A, are as follows:

“On the particular day, I will be there with my training coordinator early in the morning to set up a counter. The training coordinator will be in charge of registration and I will have to look into the last minute preparation, the training equipment, food, training materials, and entertaining and introducing the speaker”.

In Provider C, the secretariat will handle all the activities involved in conducting the programme, before and on the actual day, as affirmed by Planner 2.

“After the specialists/committee have decided on the topics, speakers and dates, then we’ll take it from there, liaising with the speakers and arranging the logistics. We’ll see to everything to do with the implementation of the programme, from the registration to the booking of the venue, making sure that food, course materials etc. are ready and in place for the programmes”.

The planners here play the roles of coordinating and ensuring that the logistics are carried out as planned to ensure the success of the programmes conducted.

4.1.8. Activity 8: Evaluation of Programme

Evaluation is carried out at the end of the course in Provider A, whereby the participants fill in reaction sheets given out during registration. According to Planner 2:

“Evaluation is carried out at the end of a course. We will put a standard evaluation sheet in the folder of every participant. The evaluation sheet will consist of evaluation of the speaker, evaluation of the logistics side, there is a portion where you evaluate the course content, the training materials, overall evaluation of the course, and we have a portion for other comments”

However, Providers B and C only carry out evaluation in large-scale conferences where evaluation sheets are given out at the end of the programme. Evaluation is not carried out on regular / *ad hoc* courses, as both Planners 2 from Providers B and C pointed out:

“We don’t really do evaluation in small and ad hoc courses, but in large-scale conferences we do give out evaluation sheets at the end of the programme.... For ad hoc courses, feedback is obtained from observation and orally from members through question and answer sessions”

Evaluation is carried out at the end of programmes, with participants being asked to fill in reaction sheets. Written evaluation is carried out for all programmes in Provider A, which gives out a standard evaluation sheet asking attendees to evaluate the speaker, course content, training materials and facilities. In the other two providers, however, written evaluations are only carried out for large-scale programmes such as seminars or conferences, whilst the *ad hoc* and regular programmes are evaluated through observations and verbal feedback from the members. This is unsurprising, as prior studies have found that the evaluation of programmes is regarded as relatively non-significant (Junaidah, 2001; Haslinda, 2007).

5.0. Conclusion

The framework developed from the description of the programme-planning practices in the three selected professional education providers resembles that of the classical model but is very simplistic and not systematic in nature. Planners used the language of the classical model to label their planning actions. However, as they describe their planning actions, it becomes clear that personal values, environmental constraints, available resource alternatives and other factors impinge on the programme-planning process. These aspects have received little attention in the literature.

Planners in this study appeared to be playing the role of linkage agents, bringing together resources through the programme development process. Programme planners in these providers seem to be engaging in mass administrative decision-making in profit-venture enterprises, rather than taking the clear sequential steps that should be taken to bring about effective programmes.

This study has illuminated four discrepancies between the programme-planning models found within the literature and in actual practice in the three continuing professional education providers under study. Firstly, needs assessment was not carried out in any of the three professions, as it was regarded as time-consuming and cumbersome and they reported that they did not have the resources and expertise to carry out such analysis. Secondly, the systematic formulation of objectives was not carried out, due to a lack of expertise. Thirdly, the development of content, instructional techniques and materials are left for the resource speakers to plan; and finally, systematic evaluation as advocated by models of programme planning was not carried out in most of the programmes conducted by these providers.

6.0. Implications, Limitations and Recommendations For Further Research

The study of programme-planning practices in continuing professional education in selected professional associations in Malaysia has not only added to the programme planning knowledge base but also provided insight into how planners plan their programmes. It has implications for both the theory and practice of programme planning, especially in the field of adult and continuing professional education .in general and more specifically in the Malaysian context.

The study is significant at the theoretical level because the findings provide a holistic understanding of how programme planners design continuing professional education programmes. The findings of the study corroborate and expand the programme-planning literature related to the design and planning of continuing professional education programmes. First, this study provides an empirical insight into the programme-planning framework practised by the planners in the study, which is slightly different from the literature. The planning framework is based on the planning context in each of the providers. Hence, there is a disjuncture between the programme-planning framework in this study and the models in the literature.

The planners in this study play the role of linkage agents in bringing resources together through the programme development process. CPE in these providers is run as a profit-making venture, bringing in considerable income to the associations.

In terms of practical implications, this study provides valuable information, especially to the local CPE programme planners. In order for Malaysia to be able to compete in the global market, its human resources must be competitive, and for that, all professional associations must be in the position to provide well-planned programmes to keep their members up-to-date and have a competitive edge. To provide well-planned programmes, providers must employ highly skilled and knowledgeable planners who have the expertise to guide the process.

Finally, as this study is a qualitative multi-case study of selected professional associations in Malaysia, it is limited in terms of its generalisability and the rigour of the quantitative survey data. The present study encompasses only three selected professional associations. A quantitative survey is thus recommended, with a larger sample size, targeting all the professional associations in Malaysia. It is hoped that such a study will provide more rigorous and comprehensive findings, which will support and complement the qualitative data and also allow the generalization of findings to the wider context of CPE planning in Malaysia.

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