

Human Factors Practice in Malaysia: Professional Liability, Accountability and Ethics

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In Malaysia, practicing human factors and ergonomics (<http://jobs.gecareers.com/key/human-factors-usability-job-malaysia.html>) has been significantly increased to the design and improvements of all kinds of work systems. Human Factors (HFs) experts and ergonomists are employed in various companies including oil and gas industries (www.oilandgaspeople.com/oil-and-gas-jobs-search/s/malaysia/kuala-lumpur/engineering/jobs/human-factors-engineer-773722258.asp). However, it is a great challenge how these professionals contribute their skills to the design of products and systems that are ethically standard. There is also a need to ensure that the workers are safe and healthy in a productive environment. The choices of individuals practicing HFs should thus be encouraged through the concept of professional liability, accountability and ethics that tell about the best practice we must do things as an ergonomist or behave properly to be HFs expert. It is about how our practices impact our society, and how we should be liable to our work. In terms of professional accountability and liability, we are facing tremendous challenges in our profession. As HFs experts, we are practicing to deal with usability or design issues lacking behind of efficacy and transparency of our profession. Our job is not only the design of job-tasks and maximizes work efficiency. Liability and trust issues in our profession means how we maintain us, how we recognize and treat us, how we ethically behave as a professional through the quality of our work, not the quantity of our work. Hence, our professionalism is question and perhaps critical in the way we do things. HFs as the subject of our profession focuses interactions amongst people, tasks, or system environment (Figure 1). It is often viewed as workplace health, safety and ergonomics with its own specific research methods [1,2] to improve productivity, efficiency, wellbeing and quality of life. In the coming days, HFs continues to be a major issue for industries and companies as a key element of improving usability and issues. And, therefore, our abilities to proper use of HFs expertise need clarification in terms professional accountability, liability and ethics.

HFs professionals come from various disciplines. People educated

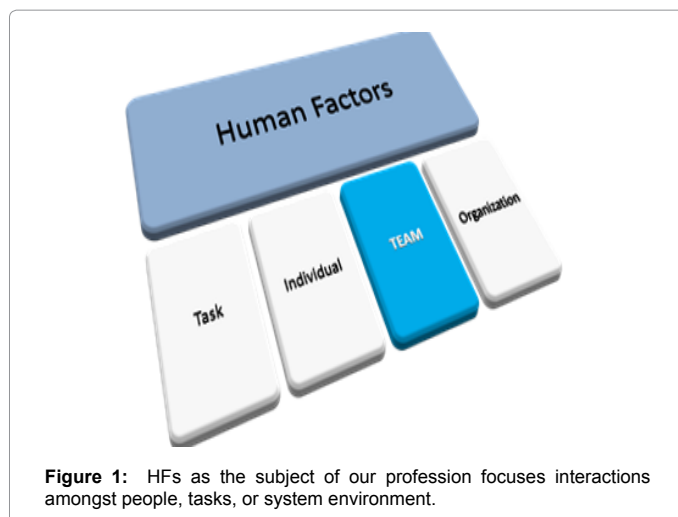


Figure 1: HFs as the subject of our profession focuses interactions amongst people, tasks, or system environment.

and trained in cognitive engineering, psychology, human-computer interaction or usability issues are also practicing in HFs. HFs practitioners often encounter difficulties with their professional identity. It is perhaps due to their insufficient training on professional liability and ethics, and because HFs expertise is multidisciplinary. It is obvious that we get very little knowledge about accountability in support of our work and profession. Not much training and education we have had on such issues as it relate to the factors that influence our name and fame as ergonomists or HFs experts. Therefore, it is important to explore how our members should continue to demonstrate HFs expertise or ergonomics professionals in terms of liability and accountability to the tasks of, and responsible to their stakeholders.

In Malaysia, engineers, physicians, nurses are regulated by their respective societies or associations. These professionals can not overlook their responsibility of job-tasks because they are legally responsible to the concerned government departments, ministry, or association. The Malaysian Board of Engineering Society (www.bem.org.my), for example, would look into the practice of an enlisted engineer (www.mset.org.my), if a building is collapsed due to his/her negligence or overlooking of building codes. Similarly, registered nurses are registered in the National Nursing Council (www.mna.org.my) and kinesiologists in the Sports Institute of Malaysia (www.isn.gov.my). All of these professionals are properly regulated and thus they are responsible to their work. On the contrary, HFs experts, ergonomists, industrial hygienist, occupational health and safety officers are not legally regulated in Malaysia. Large organizations and companies usually monitor their work process through the industry standards (www.mtuc.org.my/osh_act.htm). Small and medium sized industries and companies may not have any HFs experts or ergonomists to look after work-related problems and such issues. Whatever the case, we should oblige and maintain our work ethically standard as high as possible. We must be the part of, and help Malaysian economy with the influx of foreign investments in the country. It does not matter that we are not regulated or not, but our job is for industries and companies, those are legally required to comply with work-related acts and regulations [3]. Similarly, professionals practicing occupational safety and ergonomics must be aware of, and responsible in their work. The members of the Malaysian Society of Human Factors & Ergonomics (HFEM) must have good skills to deal with work-related matters in the extent that HFEM (www.hfem.org) cannot deal much with the legal issues.

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Enforcing individuals to maintain professional liability and accountability and keep their professionalism ethically standard is difficult for the management of HFEM. However, there are defined guidelines [4] that our members should know in to do maintain, and get things right, good, and accurate. There are individuals who themselves claim as an ergonomists even with insufficient skills and do things without BCPE affiliation [4]. These people are also in the members' list. Some people do not bother the terms of what accountability is, and what professional liability and ethics are. Of course, HFEM is aware of such matters and concerns; and periodically the society reviews those issues, if any, in its annual meetings. There are executive members in the association (www.hfem.org) assigned for working as watchdogs. They are also responsible for advising society members in these issues and concerns. Cook and Gorman [5] illustrated several examples that our society members need to know about professional liability and accountability of their service. BCPE [4] also illustrates many examples that can help us to know about professional liability. Once we seriously acknowledge the importance of accountability and professional liability, only then our skills and practices will truly be implemented for sustainable outcomes in our career (www.hfes.org/web/students/career.html). In lieu thereof, HF's expertise and ergonomics professionals should be identified through the development of wide-based training that include strong technical skill and research competencies. As our accountability continues to implement in our practice, we will be able to add more values in our profession. This would require holistic approaches for successful outcomes of our profession.

What HF's expertise is, and what ergonomists should do for our community, should be clear. The tasks of individuals practicing in this area of expertise must clearly be defined and outlined. We must be accountable to our work at any costs, and we should not overlook any of the issues and matters related to our profession. For our name

and fame, we should provide clear information about what HF's skills are, and what HF's/E is for. It is also important to aid in gauging the confusion and conjectures of HF's expertise. Our professionals must have to conduct repeated tests or evaluation to do things correct. Our members must also have a great deal of ergonomic skills in order to get a good idea of accountability in practicing HF's. Every ergonomists or HF's experts should be dedicated to the perfectness of their work. All HFEM members should apply technical and managerial skills so that our work is professionally done. All of our members must understand that our profession has some accountability and we are liable to our work. Nevertheless, many of our members have good skills and knowledge on the subject they are practicing for the community. As such, ErgoWorks (www.my-ergoworks.com/), Damai Sciences (www.damai-sciences.com), ErgoVenture (www.ergoventure.com.my/about-us.html), ASL Solutions (www.asl-solutions.com/training/) and MIMOS (www.mimos.my/) are providing consultancy services to various workplaces. They should be also aware of their professional role and responsibility so that there are no complaints against their consultancy job (joboolo.net/my/jobs-Ergonomics+Consultant-Malaysia).

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