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Investigating the Effectiveness of Management Trainee Programs in the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods Industry in China

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Abstract: The research examines the factors influencing the overall effectiveness of management trainee (MT) programs in the career progress of trainees and evaluates the suitability of MT programs for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) within the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) industry in China. The study identifies perceived leadership training, perceived mentor support and perceived job rotation as the key variables affecting overall program effectiveness. Using a sample of 400 FMCG employees who have participated in MT programs and data collected via online questionnaires, the study conducted a comprehensive analysis employing correlation and regression techniques to determine the significance and impact of the key variables. The results revealed that, perceived leadership training, perceived mentors support and perceived job rotation all have positive and significant impacts on overall program effectiveness. Furthermore, the positive coefficient levels and strong statistical significance indicated that, the key variables, considerably enhances career progression of trainees and also make MT programs suitable and beneficial for SMEs in the Chinese FMCG industry.

Keywords: management trainee programs, fast-moving consumer goods industry, career progression, program effectiveness, China.

1. Introduction

The Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) industry in China has experienced significant growth over the years, driven by the rising middle-class [1], urbanization [2], population growth [3] and changing consumer tastes and preferences [3]. The massive population growth and burgeoning middle-class of China, has led to an increased appetite for diverse and high-quality consumer products. With a vast array of products encompassing food and beverages, over-the-counter pharmaceuticals, household goods and personal care items, the FMCG market in China has been characterized by high volume sales, rapid inventory turnover, low contribution margins and intense competition [3]. The FMCG sector of China plays an important role in the national economy, serving as a key indicator for employment and economic growth in the nation. Major players in the industry employ extensive distribution networks to ensure products are readily available, accessible and replenished [4]. Small and Medium-Enterprises (SMEs) form an integral part of the FMCG sector in China, contributing to the dynamism and diversity of the country [5]. SMEs foster innovation within

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the FMCG industry by introducing novel products and disruptive business models that challenge established norms [3]. Due to the relatively small size, SMEs are often more agile and adaptable than larger companies, enabling the former to meet increasing localized demands of the Chinese market. By leveraging the deep understanding of local consumer behavior, preferences and niche market, SME companies in the FMCG market of China can offer more specialized and tailored products to consumers.

Human resources play an essential role in ensuring the long-term sustainability of Small and Medium-Enterprises in the Chinese FMCG industry [6]. The success of SMEs largely depends on its ability to attract, develop and retain skilled employees to drive innovation, maintain operational efficiency and adapt to the ever-changing FMCG market environment [6]. In an industry characterized by rapid changes in consumer behavior, fierce competition and technological advancements, having capable, motivated and skilled employees is vital [3]. In that regard, human resources play critical roles in many ways. First, skilled employees often bring new ideas and approaches to differentiate products, enabling SME companies carve out unique niches within the FMCG market [7]. Second, implementing employee development programs and career advancement opportunities for the SME workforce can lead to increased productivity and efficiency [7].

SMEs in China, focus on enhancing labor efficiency, by enticing and retaining skilled employees through competitive salary packages, career advancement opportunities and a positive working environment [8]. To further support employee growth, many SMEs invest in continuous development through training programs that enhance skills and knowledge aiding employees to adapt to new market trends [9]. A significant element of employee development initiatives that SMEs in the Chinese FMCG industry undertake is Management Trainee Programs (MT program) [10]. The trainee program is designed to cultivate and groom future leaders by providing structured training and development opportunities [10]. The training, usually a program up to three years, typically entails quarterly rotations through various departments, on-the-job-training projects and mentorship from senior management allowing trainees to gain a comprehensive understanding of the company and make informed decisions to achieve its objectives [11]. By nurturing talent through MT programs, SMEs aim to broaden the understanding of trainees of the business, build a pipeline of proficient future leaders and enhance trainees' problem-solving skills ultimately contributing to the success of the company. In providing practical experiences for employees and/or trainees, MT programs also encourage career growth and self-awareness [11]. Through MT program evaluation, feedback, and real-world business scenarios, trainees are able to understand and identify their strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement [11]. The trainee program provides employees the chance to develop professionally, connect and network with experts within the company and the FMCG industry giving opportunities for career advancements, collaborations and future references [11].

Although existing research has shed light on Management Trainee Programs in Small and Medium-sized Enterprises within the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods industry of China, the effectiveness of such trainee programs remains largely unexplored [12]. As such, the study seeks to address three significant research questions that have not been critically investigated by current literature. First, can management trainee programs provide better career progress for recent graduates? The question seeks to explore whether MT programs are beneficial for recent graduates entering the Chinese FMCG industry. While MT programs are generally intended to foster career development of graduates and employees by providing in-depth training and practical experiences, there is limited empirical evidence on trainees' actual impact on career paths within SMEs in the Chinese FMCG industry. The question will investigate whether graduates who partake in MT programs experience faster promotions, higher job satisfaction and significant professional growth as compared to other counterparts that forgo the training program. Second, what factors influence the effectiveness of management trainee programs in the career progress of trainees? Ascertaining whether the major

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factors that drive the effectiveness of MT programs is optimal for its design and implementation. The research question aims to examine whether the determinants that contribute to the effectiveness of MT programs actually progresses the careers of trainees. Factors such as leadership training, mentor support and job rotation will be investigated to understand its impacts on trainee outcomes. Lastly, how can management trainee program practices be improved in small and medium-sized enterprises? The research question aims to find the best practices and actionable strategies that can improve the design and implementation of MT programs within SMEs in the FMCG industry of China. By unearthing areas of improvement, the research can maximize the benefits of training programs for both trainees and employers.

The main objective of the research paper is to investigate whether the Management Trainee Program is suitable for SME companies in the FMCG industry in China. The research objective contributes in providing a foundational assessment in addressing the research questions posed. By determining the suitability of MT programs within SME companies in the FMCG industry of China, the research will offer specific insights as to whether management trainee programs can indeed facilitate better career progressions for recent graduates, examine the various factors that drive the effectiveness of MT programs and highlight the best practices to improve MT programs. The significance of the research paper lies in its potential to provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of management trainee programs for SMEs within the FMCG industry of China. The findings of the research will guide SME leaders and policymakers in designing and implementing more effective MT programs ultimately promoting a more skilled and capable workforce. By addressing the major factors that influence MT programs, the research will enhance strategic capabilities of SMEs, drive innovation, improve competition and promote sustainable growth within the FMCG market.

The research paper is organized as follows: the introduction, outlining the overview of SMEs in the FMCG industry in China, the importance of management trainee programs and the research gap, questions and objectives. The section 2, i.e., literature review, covers presentation and examination of key theories and previous studies. The materials and methodology in section 3 details the research design, including sample selection, data collection methods and data analysis techniques. Section 4 covers the empirical results and presents the findings, interpretation and statistical analysis of the study. The discussion section interprets the results in the context of the research questions and existing literature. The theoretical and policy implications, limitations and future research are also provided in section 5. The conclusion section (i.e., section 6) summarizes key findings and practical implications.

2. Literature Review

Management trainee program, prevalent in China, is a widely utilized tool in organizations to nurture the skills and development of its workforce [11]. As organizations seek to enhance its talent pool, evaluating the impact and usefulness of training programs becomes paramount [13], which is covered in existing literature. For instance, Kunche et al. [13], emphasizes the importance of examining the effectiveness of trainee programs after completion, providing an in-depth understanding of the benefits and the impact of the program on participants. According to Latif [14], evaluating the effectiveness of trainee programs involves several indicators, three of such indicators as highlighted by the authors are career progression, skill development and program satisfaction. Career progression, a primary indicator and measurement of MT program effectiveness, provides valuable insights into how well training programs prepare participants for higher leadership roles and responsibilities [14]. Added, a study by Howard and Gutworth [15], highlights the importance of skill development as an essential indicator of program effectiveness demonstrating that the perceived value of training is closely tied to enhancing the skill-set, technical knowledge and problem-solving abilities of trainees.

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Furthermore, research by Latif [14], emphasizes that program satisfaction is a key measure of program effectiveness reflecting the perceived value and quality of training received. According to Latif [14], the degree of satisfaction determines the effectiveness, impact and structure of the training program.

Irrespective of the indicators used to measure program effectiveness, it is imperative to incorporate predictors or independent variables to understand the underlying factors that contribute to the effectiveness of management trainee programs. Though there are many predictors of program effectiveness in literature Tai [16], this study adopts three namely mentor support, job rotation and leadership training. Research by Roger et al. [17], identifies mentor support as one of the key predictors of program effectiveness, highlighting the importance of mentor-trainee relationship in shaping trainee experiences and outcomes, thus influencing the effectiveness of trainee programs. Although several variables serve as key indicators for measuring mentor support according to Roger et al. [17], this research will investigate three specific variables: willingness to support, work professionalism, and mentoring experience. A study by Ouedraogo et al. [18] emphasizes the significance of mentors' willingness to invest time and effort in supporting and guiding trainees, which fundamentally influences mentorship quality and trainees' overall development. Ritchie et al. [19] also elucidated work professionalism exhibited by mentors as a noteworthy indicator of mentor support. The adherence of mentors to ethical standards, comportment, reliability and engagement with trainees reflects the level of commitment towards professionalism and mentor-trainee relationship [20]. Additionally, research by Heirdsfield et al. [21] explains the importance of mentoring experience as a measure of mentor support, demonstrating that the wealth of expertise and insights of mentors substantially impact trainee development, by offering support, guidance and advice to mentees.

According to Kunche et al. [13], job rotation is a predictor of management trainee program effectiveness, as it systematically moves trainees within the organizational structure. The movement prepares trainees for future leadership roles by providing a comprehensive understanding of the organization, acquiring knowledge, skills and experiences in different aspects of the business. Al-Romeedy [22] identifies several indicators in measuring job rotation, and two will be adopted in the research; diversity of experience and career goal consistency. According to Dwianto et al. [23], diversity of experience serves as an indicator of job rotation, ensuring employees gain extensive exposure of the operations, processes and challenges of the business. The experiences gained helps trainees in improving technical know-how, problem-solving and decision-making abilities within the organization [23]. Likewise, research by Zin [24] suggests career goal consistency as an indicator for measuring job rotation, as rotational assignments meaningfully contribute to the long-term career objectives of employees. Zin [24] further indicated that some organizations strategically match rotational assignments with trainees career goals to enhance motivation and productivity.

In addition to job rotation, research by Dinh et al. [25] highlights leadership training as a predictor to measure program effectiveness of management trainee outcomes. Dinh et al. [25], explains that inculcating leadership training into management trainee initiatives, builds strategic and mental skills enabling robust decision-making, team management, and preparation for future leadership positions thereby determining the effectiveness of trainee programs. Although several variables can be used to measure leadership training outcomes [26], this research explores two: professionalism of trainers and training adequacy. A study by Ras et al. [27] demonstrates how the level of professionalism trainers portrays influences leadership training outcomes. The degree of knowledge, expertise, communication skills and feedback quality that trainers possess, determines the entire learning experience for trainees [27]. Existing literature by Fiedler [28] suggests adequate and well-structured management trainee programs effectively meet leadership goals and career expectations by offering

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trainees a blend of theoretical knowledge and practical insights, thus, serving as a noteworthy indicator for measuring leadership training outcomes.

To measure the relationship between program effectiveness, and the three predictors, namely, mentor support, job rotation and leadership training, the research permits for moderation effect. Research by Shankar et al. [29] suggests company size as a significant moderator variable for program effectiveness attributing it to the varying availability and quality of resources organizations possess and allocate to trainee programs. Examining the relationship between company size and the three predictors in the research can yield valuable insights into how organizational structure affects the overall effectiveness of management trainee outcomes.

3. Methodology

The research focuses on the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods industry in China, where Management Trainee programs were pioneered by foreign companies like Unilever, Procter & Gamble and L'Oréal, significantly influencing the sector [30]. The FMCG industry in China has evolved into one of the most mature and longest-standing sectors for management trainee programs [3], generating a considerable number of graduate trainees, making it an ideal industry for the research. Another reason is that the FMCG in China has readily accessible data. The target population for the research is employees in the Chinese FMCG industry who have participated in management trainee programs. Focus on employees in the Chinese FMCG industry enables the study to investigate the experiences, perceptions and the influence of MT programs on trainees.

This study is particularly interested in MT programs from the perspective of participants. The participants are employees in the Chinese FMCG industry who have participated in management trainee programs, and such groups were contacted through dissemination of questionnaires for their insights. Questionnaires were employed for the research due to its efficacy in gathering data from large sample sizes within a limited timeframe. Questionnaires enable uniform data collection, ensuring that questions remain the same for all respondents, which is vital for study reliability and validity [31]. Additionally, questionnaires are cost-effective and provide anonymity for respondents, encouraging honest and unbiased responses [31]. The questionnaire was designed by reviewing existing literature on measuring the effectiveness of management trainee programs. The personal experiences of the researcher as a management trainee, also informed the inclusion of relevant questions that aligns with the objectives of the study. Furthermore, expert input was sought from a program designer, with vast experiences in human resources and MT program design across the FMCG, finance and software industries.

The total population of employees in the Chinese FMCG industry who have participated in management trainee programs is a figure that is either unknown or incredibly hard to estimate. Due to the unavailability of figures to support the size of the population, the sample size for the study was determined using Sample Size Calculator available at Calculator.net. Setting a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, a sample size of 385 respondents were derived. The sample size was rounded up to 400 to account for potential non-responses. The study sample consisted of 53.75% females and 46.25% males. Approximately 97.5% of respondents were within the 20-29 and 30-39 age brackets. Regarding educational qualifications, 53.75% of the respondents held bachelor's degrees, 26.25% master's degree (non-MBA), 14.5% held MBA degrees and 5.50% held doctorate degrees. A significant portion of the respondents were situated in the Guangdong province, representing 12.25% of the sample. A total of 83.75% of respondents had been employed for 1-5 years, 10.25% had been working for 5-10 years, and 6% had 10-15 years' work experience. All respondents had participated in management trainee programs. Specifically, 97.75% had participated in one program, 0.75% in more than two programs and 1.5% in two programs.

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The 400 participants were randomly selected to represent the larger populace of FMCG employees who have undergone management trainee programs, minimized selection bias, and enabled generalization of the findings. The survey was distributed online, due to the efficiency of such a medium. The online medium also allowed for quick and effective data collection from a geographically dispersed sample, which is essential given the vast distribution of FMCG companies across China. Thus, the online data collection provided participants the opportunity to complete the questionnaires at a convenient pace and time, potentially increasing response rates. Moreover, online surveys are cost-effective and permit for easy data management and analysis.

3.1. Measures

The modeling of the research objectives utilized four main variables: program effectiveness, mentors support, job rotation and perceived leadership training. The variables were quantified using responses respondents provided to specific questionnaire items. Each response to the statements pertaining to the variables in question was scored on a five-point Likert scale that measured the respondents' level of agreement or disagreement. The scale ranged from 1 (i.e., strongly disagree) to 5 (i.e., strongly agree). The responses to the statements that are relevant to the principal variables were consolidated through principal composite analysis and averaging resulting in the creation of composite variables. The variables are overall perceived program effectiveness, perceived mentors support, perceived job rotation and perceived leadership training.

The items used to construct the scales are summarized in Figure 1.

3.2. Model

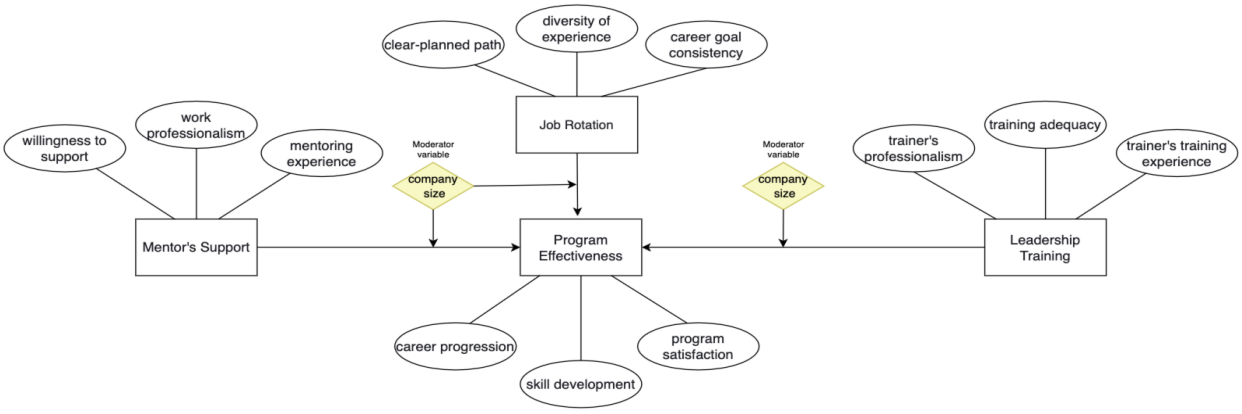

Figure 1: Model for estimating effectiveness of management trainee programs.

From the figure, the dependent variable [effectiveness of management trainee programs] is predicted by leadership training, mentor support, and job rotation, company size moderates the inherent relationships.

3.2.1. Dependent Variable

From Figure 1, the dependent variable, namely, overall program effectiveness was measured using a set of questionnaire items designed to assess the effectiveness of the training received by participants. The items were carefully crafted to capture various aspects of the impact and utility of the training as perceived by the participants.

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3.2.2. Independent Variables

As depicted in Figure 1, perceived job rotation, mentor support and leadership training are considered as predictors of the effectiveness of MT programs. Perceived job rotation was measured with three questionnaire items. The items involved were designed to gauge participants' perceptions regarding the planning of job rotations, the extent to which job rotation provided opportunities for gaining diverse experiences in different roles and the alignment of participants' career goals with the job rotation program. Similarly, perceived mentor support was measured using a set of three questionnaire items, the extensive mentoring experience the mentor had, the high level of professionalism demonstrated by the mentor and the accessibility and responsiveness in providing support and guidance when needed. Perceived leadership training was measured with three items, namely, the professionalism trainers exhibited during leadership training sessions and lectures, the adequacy, appropriateness and relevance of the training sessions in enabling trainees to apply new leadership knowledge and skills, and the extent of training experience possessed by trainers in the field of leadership training.

Table 1: Factor analysis results

Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Perceived Job Rotation (PJR)			
1. Job rotation path clearly planned			0.8095
2. Job rotation to gain diverse experiences			0.8464
3. Job rotation aligns with career goals			0.8022
Perceived Mentors Support (PMS)			
1. Mentor's experience		0.8203	
2. Mentor's professionalism in the field		0.7981	
3. Mentor's accessibility and responses		0.8232	
Perceived Leadership Training (PLT)			
1. Trainer's professionalism	0.8492		
2. Training sessions and adequacy	0.8257		
3. Trainer's extensive training experience	0.8327		

Note: Only factor loadings above .80 are reported in the table. KMO = .82.

As shown in Table 1, the preliminary results of the factor analysis reveal three distinct factors that correspond to perceived job rotation, perceived mentor support and perceived leadership training. With parameters above 0.80, the analysis illustrates that each of the items presented in the table showcases substantial factor loadings, demonstrating that the items reliably measure its respective constructs. Factor 1 captures and represents the construct of perceived leadership training items, factor 2 captures mentors support, specifically highlighting mentors experience, professionalism and accessibility as key components of perceived mentors support and finally, and factor 3 captures perceived job rotation with items, job rotation path, opportunities to gain diverse experiences and alignment with career goals as crucial elements of effective job rotation programs. It is evident that the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure is 0.82, indicating that the sample size was adequate for factor analysis.

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Table 2: Internal validity results

Variables	Scale reliability coefficient
Perceived job rotation (PJR)	0.8035
Perceived mentors support (PMS)	0.8080
Perceived leadership training (PLT)	0.8271

As recommended by Nunnally (1970), an alpha score or value of 0.7 and above is considered a good and acceptable indicator for reliability.

In support of the factor analysis, the internal validity of the variables was checked. As shown in Table 2, the internal validity results show 0.8035, 0.8080 and 0.8271 as the scale reliability coefficients (i.e., Cronbach's alpha) of perceived job rotation, perceived mentors support and perceived leadership training, respectively. According to Nunnally (1970), a Cronbach's alpha score of 0.7 or above is considered a good and an acceptable indicator of reliability. With each of the variables in the study exceeding the threshold, it suggests that the scales used to measure the variables are reliable. Hence, the variables and data are used for empirical analysis by applying appropriate regression techniques.

3.2.3. Control Variables

As part of the study, demographic data such as gender, age, educational qualifications, etc., were collected from respondents. To guarantee the anonymity of participants, the study does not focus on matching the demographic data to individual questionnaire responses. As a result, the study does not account for personal demographic details in the regression analysis. Instead, the main focus of the study was on the variables that influence the overall effectiveness of management trainee programs.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptives and Correlation

Table 3 reports the mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum scores of the key variables in the study, namely, overall program effectiveness (OPE), perceived leadership training (PLT), perceived mentors support (PMS), perceived job rotation (PJR) and company size. Overall program effectiveness had a mean score of 3.33, which means, on average, respondents rated the program effectiveness slightly above the midpoint of the scale. The standard deviation of 0.99 suggests a moderate level of variability in the responses. Also, the minimum and maximum scores of 1.625 and 5 respectively, shows a wide range of perceptions about the effectiveness of trainee programs. Perceived leadership training, had a mean score of 3.28 and standard deviation of 0.99 indicating that the leadership training was moderately effective. The minimum and maximum score of 1 and 5, further explains that the perceptions of leadership training varies among respondents. With the highest mean score of 3.47, the descriptive statistic indicated that perceived support of mentors was rated positively by respondents. The standard deviation of 0.98 suggests moderate variability in responses and the minimum and maximum score of 1.333 and 5, respectively, reflects a wide range of perceptions about mentor support. As shown in Table 3, perceived job rotation had a mean score of 3.31, suggesting that respondents viewed job rotation as moderately beneficial. The standard deviation of 0.96 also indicated a moderate variability in responses. The minimum score of 1.33 and the maximum score of 5 indicated a broad range of perceptions by respondents on job rotation. Company size had a mean score of 2.30, suggesting that most of the respondents originated from small to medium-sized companies. The standard deviation of 1.08 indicates higher variability in the sizes of the companies that respondents are from. The minimum and maximum score of 1 and 4, respectively, reveals the range from very small to larger companies in the sample. Results from the

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descriptive statistics indicated that respondents generally have a moderately positive view of program effectiveness, leadership training, mentor support and job rotation, with mentor support as the highest average rating. Additionally, there exists a moderate level of variability in all responses across all variables, indicating different perceptions among respondents. With greater variability, company size reflects the diverse range of company sizes included in the research.

Table 3: The mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum scores.

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Overall program effectiveness (OPE)	3.327	0.993	1.625	5
Perceived leadership training (PLT)	3.284	0.989	1.000	5
Perceived mentors support (PMS)	3.466	0.978	1.333	5
Perceived job rotation (PJR)	3.309	0.963	1.333	5
Company size	2.304	1.080	1.000	4

Note: mean, standard deviation and minimum values are rounded to three decimal places.

In addition to the descriptive statistics, the partial correlations between and among the key variables were estimated. The correlation coefficients between the key variables in the study, namely, overall program effectiveness (OPE), perceived leadership training (PLT), perceived mentors support (PMS), perceived job rotation (PJR) and company size are presented in Table 4. The results from Table 4 indicate that overall program effectiveness (OPE) is positively correlated with all the variables, although to varying degrees. With perceived mentors support having the strongest correlation of 0.3897 with OPE. This is followed closely by perceived job rotation with correlation of 0.3877, and perceived leadership training 0.3738. The correlation coefficient results indicate that the three factors are positively associated with how effective the overall program is perceived. It must be noted that although the correlation coefficients are low, all the parameters linear correlation parameters are statistically significant at 5% level of significance. Company size is found to have a weak correlation of 0.0177 with OPE, suggesting it has little positive impact on the perceived effectiveness of trainee programs. Perceived leadership training (PLT) also had a positive correlation with perceived mentor support 0.4065, perceived job rotation 0.3338 and company size 0.0909. Perceived mentors support (PMS) showed a positive correlation with perceived job rotation 0.4138 but a negative correlation with company size -0.0088, indicating that company size has no effect on perceived mentors support. The correlation results further suggested that perceived job rotation (PJR) has a positive correlation with company size 0.0415, although the impact was minimal.

Table 4: Correlation coefficients

Variable	OPE	PLT	PMS	PJR	Company size
Overall program effectiveness (OPE)	1.0000				
Perceived leadership training (PLT)	0.3738	1.0000			
Perceived mentors support (PMS)	0.3897	0.4065	1.0000		
Perceived job rotation (PJR)	0.3877	0.3338	0.4138	1.0000	
Company size	0.0177	0.0909	-0.0088	0.0415	1.0000

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4.2. Regression Results

4.2.1. Case 1: Regression analysis of factors influencing the effectiveness of management trainee programs in the career progress of trainees

Table 5: Regression results for Case 1

	Model 1 b/se	Model 2 b/se	Model 3 b/se	Model 4 b/se
Perceived leadership training (PLT)	0.375*** (0.05)			0.213*** (0.05)
Perceived mentors support (PMS)		0.395*** (0.05)		0.211*** (0.05)
Perceived job rotation (PJR)			0.400*** (0.05)	0.238*** (0.05)
Constant	2.095*** (0.16)	1.956*** (0.17)	2.005*** (0.16)	1.109*** (0.20)
r^2	0.140	0.152	0.150	0.250
Chi^2				
N	355.000	355.000	355.000	355.000
N_g				
jp				

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001.

Table 5, presents the regression coefficients (b), standard errors (se) and significance levels for the predictors of overall program effectiveness in the career progress of trainees across four models. In Model 1, perceived leadership training (PLT) exhibits a considerable and positive prediction of overall program effectiveness (OPE) with a coefficient level of 0.375 and a p-value less than 0.001. The regression indicates a significant positive relationship between perceived leadership training and overall program effectiveness, suggesting a strong association between higher ratings of leadership training and higher perceptions of overall program effectiveness. The significant constant term, with a p-value of less than 0.001 represents the baseline of overall program effectiveness. Similarly, in Model 2, the regression indicates that perceived mentor support (PMS) has a significant and positive relationship with overall program effectiveness (OPE), with a coefficient level of 0.395 and a p-value of less than 0.001, also suggesting a strong statistical significance. The results show a significant association between higher ratings of perceived mentor support and higher ratings of overall program effectiveness. The constant term is also significant at a p-value of less than 0.001. In Model 3, the results showed that perceived job rotation (PJR) has a coefficient level of 0.400 indicating a positive relationship and significant prediction of overall program effectiveness (OPE). With a p-value of less than 0.001, the 0.400 suggests strong statistical significance indicating that better job rotation experiences are significantly associated with higher program effectiveness. The constant term of Model 3 is also significant at a p-value of less than 0.001. In Model 4, which entails all three predictors, each variable (i.e., PLT, PMS, PJR) remains a significant predictor of overall program effectiveness with p-values less than 0.001. The positive coefficients of the variables indicate that higher ratings in perceived leadership training, perceived mentors support and perceived job rotation are significantly associated with higher overall program effectiveness. The constant term for the model is also

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significant at a p-value of less than 0.001. The R-square value of 0.250 indicates that 25% of the variance in overall program effectiveness (OPE) is explained by the combined effect of perceived leadership training (PLT), perceived mentor support (PMS), perceived job rotation (PJR).

The positive and significant coefficients levels of perceived leadership training (PLT), perceived mentors support (PMS), perceived job rotation (PJR) in Model 4, highlight the critical roles the predictors play in enhancing the overall effectiveness of management trainee programs in providing a better career progress for trainees and/or recent graduates. Effective leadership training prepares trainees to become well equipped with essential skills, instilling trainees with competence and confidence to undertake future leadership roles, thus advancing the career opportunities and trainees readiness for higher responsibilities. Additionally, strong mentor support offers trainees valuable guidance, professional advice and feedback which is essential for trainee development, thus, accelerating learning and improving job performance of trainees, all of which are essential for career progression. Comprehensive job rotation programs also expose trainees to various roles and functions within the organization, thereby broadening trainees' skills and understanding within different facets of the business. With the exposure, trainees gain access to aids in increasing trainees' versatility and marketability of chosen career paths.

The combined impact of perceived leadership training (PLT), perceived mentor support (PMS), perceived job rotation (PJR) significantly enhances overall program effectiveness. The empirical results show that the factors are crucial in providing trainees and recent graduates with the skillset, experiences, knowledge and support to progress effectively in trainees chosen career paths. The high R-square value in Model 4 elucidates the importance of the combined factors in explaining the variance of overall program effectiveness, thus emphasizing its critical role in the career progression and development of trainees. The strong and statistically significant levels (i.e., p-value less than 0.001) recorded for all the predictors further reinforces the relevance and impact of program effectiveness on career progress of trainees.

4.2.2. Case 2: Modeling with other relevant factors

Table 6: Regression results for Case 2

	Model 1 b/se	Model 2 b/se	Model 3 b/se	Model 4 b/se
Perceived leadership training (PLT)	0.384*** (0.05)			0.221*** (0.05)
Perceived mentors support (PMS)		0.403*** (0.05)		0.221*** (0.06)
Perceived job rotation (PJR)			0.396*** (0.05)	0.225*** (0.05)
Male	0.212* (0.10)	0.175 (0.10)	0.105 (0.10)	0.179 (0.09)
Age: 30-39	0.031 (0.14)	-0.015 (0.14)	0.038 (0.14)	0.043 (0.13)
Age: 40-49	0.340 (0.34)	0.362 (0.33)	0.101 (0.35)	0.220 (0.35)
Doctorate	-0.220 (0.22)	-0.282 (0.23)	-0.316 (0.22)	-0.338 (0.19)
Masters (MBA)	-0.336* (0.17)	-0.232 (0.17)	-0.290 (0.17)	-0.268 (0.16)
Masters (non-MBA)	-0.229	-0.200	-0.214	-0.221

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Table 6: (continued).

	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.11)
Years working: 10-15 years	-0.188	-0.046	-0.227	-0.049
	(0.31)	(0.31)	(0.31)	(0.30)
Years working: 5-10 years	0.133	0.218	0.093	0.177
	(0.17)	(0.18)	(0.19)	(0.16)
Number_MTprog: One program	-0.381	-0.345	-0.480	-0.227
	(0.53)	(0.52)	(0.49)	(0.55)
Number_MTprog: Two programs	-0.058	-0.183	-0.285	-0.175
	(0.68)	(0.64)	(0.56)	(0.63)
Firsttime_MTexp: Yes	0.205	0.290	0.170	0.291
	(0.39)	(0.41)	(0.45)	(0.41)
Medium (300-1000 employees)	0.069	0.044	-0.029	-0.022
	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.12)
Micro (Less than 20 employees)	0.299	0.547	0.629	0.365
	(0.35)	(0.44)	(0.49)	(0.46)
Small (20-300 employees)	-0.043	0.031	-0.034	-0.055
	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.15)
2 years< Planned duration ≤ 3 years	-0.142	-0.112	-0.097	-0.115
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.10)
Not specified	-0.291	-0.567	-0.148	-0.266
	(0.63)	(0.66)	(0.53)	(0.63)
Planned duration > 3 years	-0.063	-0.207	-0.098	-0.136
	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.25)	(0.23)
Constant	2.300**	2.025**	2.460***	1.130
	(0.70)	(0.73)	(0.70)	(0.74)
r2	0.172	0.183	0.172	0.275
chi2				
N	355.000	355.000	355.000	355.000
N_g				
jp				

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Table 6 presents the results of the regression modeling that analyze the factors influencing overall program effectiveness in the career progress of trainees. The models consider perceived leadership training (PLT), perceived mentor support (PMS), perceived job rotation (PJR) as the major variables alongside several control variables. The coefficient (b), standard errors (se), and significance levels are reported for each variable across all four models. In Model 1, the results indicated that perceived leadership training (PLT) is a significant predictor and has a positive relationship with overall program effectiveness (OPE). The positive coefficient level of 0.384 suggests that higher ratings of perceived leadership training are associated with higher perceptions of overall program effectiveness. The p-value of less than 0.001, suggests a strong statistical significance, meaning there is a less than 0.1% chance of the result being a random variation. In Model 2, perceived mentor support (PMS), exhibits a considerable and positive prediction of overall program effectiveness (OPE). With a positive coefficient level of 0.403, the model suggests that perceived mentor support is associated with higher program effectiveness. The p-value of the finding exhibits a score of 0.001 confirming a

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high statistical significance of the results. In Model 3, the results indicated that perceived job rotation (PJR) is a significant predictor and also has a positive relationship with overall program effectiveness (OPE). The positive coefficient level of 0.396 explains that effective job rotation experiences lead to higher overall program effectiveness of training. With a p-value of less than 0.001, the results indicate a strong statistical significance. Model 4 includes all three predictors, and it reveals that, perceived leadership training (PLT), perceived mentors support (PMS) and perceived job rotation (PJR) are all significant and positive predictors of overall program effectiveness (OPE) with coefficient levels of 0.221, 0.221, and 0.225, respectively. All the p-values of the variables are less than 0.001 highlighting the statistical significance of the findings.

The gender male, as a control variable in the analysis, had a positive coefficient in all models but only significant in Model 1 (0.212, $p<0.05$), indicating a slight gender effect on overall program effectiveness. Age, however, had no significance in any of the models, signifying that it has no influence on overall program effectiveness. The coefficients of educational qualifications were generally negative, with Masters (MBA) being significant in Model 1 (-0.336, $p<0.05$) demonstrating that trainees with MBAs might rate program effectiveness lower. The coefficients of years of experience were not significant, suggesting that years of experience do not have any impact on overall program effectiveness. Similarly, the coefficients of the number of management trainee programs, trainees participated in, were not significant, indicating that, it has no statistically significant influence on overall program effectiveness. Likewise, the coefficients of first-time management trainee experience were also not significant, demonstrating that the variable does not influence program effectiveness. The results show that the coefficients of company size (i.e., medium, micro and small) are not significant, thus have no influence on overall program effectiveness. Likewise, the coefficients of the planned duration of the program were not significant, indicating that planned duration does not affect overall program effectiveness. The regression model signifies that, perceived leadership training (PLT), perceived mentors support (PMS), perceived job rotation (PJR) are critical predictors in influencing the overall effectiveness of management trainee programs. The predictors in the analysis are statistically significant at 1% level of significance indicating the relevance and strong impact of such variables on MT program effectiveness. The control variables, however, show limited influence with most being statistically insignificant. The regression analysis underscores the importance of well-designed leadership training modules, supportive mentorship and effective job rotation drills in enhancing program effectiveness, ultimately contributing to the career progress of trainees and/or recent graduates.

4.2.3. Case 3: Improving the management trainee program practice

Improving management trainee programs in small and medium-sized enterprises can considerably enhance program effectiveness, consequently fostering the career growth of trainees. Based on results of the regression analysis and models, focusing on the factors that significantly influences program effectiveness, namely, perceived leadership training (PLT), perceived mentors support (PMS), perceived job rotation (PJR) can improve management trainee programs. In Model 4 of the Case 2 regression, the results show that perceived leadership training has a significant and positive impact on overall program effectiveness, thus improving management trainee programs. Based on the findings, this study suggests SMEs channel resources into developing comprehensive leadership training modules that cover essential leadership skills, such as strategic and logical thinking, refined decision-making, communication and conflict resolution. Additionally, utilizing trainers with extensive experience and proven track record in leadership development can ensure high quality management training sessions. Also, establishing a continuous feedback loop where trainees can receive constructive criticisms and feedback in leadership skills, can significantly improve trainee programs. Tailoring leadership development programs to individual trainee needs and aspirations can

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as well ensure trainees receive applicable and impactful training. The results from the analysis also implied that perceived mentor support had a significant and positive impact on overall program effectiveness of training. In that instance, to considerably improve management training outcomes, the results from the regression advises SMEs to place more emphasis in choosing the right mentors for management training. Mentors should have vast experiences and knowledge in the FMCG industry and also possess strong interpersonal skills to effectively guide trainees. In addition to strong interpersonal skills, developing structured mentorship programs, clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of mentors, and providing mentors with the necessary training in communicating with trainees can substantially improve management training initiatives. Furthermore, based on the significant and positive impact perceived mentors support have [according to the empirical results] on program effectiveness of training in the regression, the results suggests that, scheduling consistent meetings between mentors and trainees, and ensuring mentors are readily accessible and responsive to discuss the progress, challenges and career development of trainees can significantly enhance management trainee programs. The regression analysis indicated that perceived job rotation has a significant and positive impact on overall program effectiveness in management trainee outcomes. As such, designing a clear job rotation path and outlining the different roles and departments trainees will be exposed to, can aid trainees gain vast experiences, all the while ensuring the strategic objectives of the company are met and trainee career goals align with the rotation, can greatly improve management training initiatives. Implementing regular feedback and assessment mechanisms to evaluate trainees' performance in each rotation can also help identify strengths and areas for improvement. By focusing on enhancing leadership training, strengthening mentor support and improving job rotation programs, SMEs can substantially improve the effectiveness of management trainee programs, thus advancing the career progress of trainees and contributing to the growth and success of the company.

4.2.4. Case 4: Ascertaining the suitability of management trainee program for SME companies in the FMCG industry in China

Based on the results from the regression analysis in Case 2, the study recommends that management trainee programs are suitable for SME companies in the FMCG industry. The regression analysis evaluates the suitability of management trainee programs based on the significant factors that underpins overall program effectiveness. The factors considered in the modeling are: perceived leadership training (PLT), perceived mentor support (PMS), perceived job rotation (PJR). From the analysis, the empirical results show that perceived leadership training significantly influences overall program effectiveness, making it a crucial component of management trainee programs. Leadership skills are termed to be vital for SME companies to successfully navigate the fast-paced and competitive FMCG market environment. SMEs can benefit from the strategic thinking, team management and decision-making skills and knowledge trainees acquire during management trainee sessions; thus, aiding the company drive growth and innovation. Perceived mentor support, which has a positive significant impact on overall program effectiveness, serves as one of the key measures of management trainee initiatives. As such, the support and guidance mentors render to trainees can equip trainees with the necessary mindset to provide valuable insights into market trends, customer preferences and operational challenges of the company and the FMCG industry as a whole. Mentors support, stemming from management trainee programs, can furnish SMEs with networking opportunities, which can also be crucial for the long-term sustainability of the company. The analysis also shows perceived job rotation significantly influences overall program effectiveness. By rotating trainees across various departments, the company exposes trainees to various aspects of the business, such as production, sales, finance, marketing and distribution. The rounded exposure helps trainees develop a versatile skill set to understand the interdependencies within the company, which becomes

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essential in making informed decisions and driving business growth and success. In all, the findings of the study indicates that leadership training, mentor support and job rotation render management trainee initiatives suitable for SMEs in the FMCG industry in China.

5. Discussion

The findings of the research highlight the importance of structured management trainee programs in promoting career advancement within the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods industry in China. The study partially aligns with literature that emphasized the role of training programs in employee development. For instance, Latif [14], identifies career progression, skill development and program satisfaction as key indicators for measuring training program effectiveness while the present study focuses on perceived leadership training, perceived mentors support and perceived job rotation. This study and existing literature by Dinh et al. [25] underline the significance of leadership training in enhancing trainee outcomes. Kunche et al. [13] also emphasize the role of job rotation in preparing trainees for diverse experiences across various business functions. While some existing literature such as Latif [14] utilize other indicators on training effectiveness, this research emphasized on traditional yet comprehensive factors, namely, perceived leadership training, perceived mentors support and perceived job rotation as predictors to understand program effectiveness. Additionally, unlike other previous studies, this study specifically addresses the context of SMEs in the Chinese FMCG industry, which has not been extensively covered in earlier literature.

Findings from the present study identify that there exists a significant positive relationship between perceived leadership training, perceived mentors support, perceived job rotation and overall program effectiveness signifying that the factors are both individually as well as jointly critical in shaping a successful training program. With leadership training equipping trainees with essential managerial and leadership skills, mentor support, providing personalized guidance, and job rotation broadening perspectives and skills among trainees, the three statistically significant factors collectively enhance the overall effectiveness of management trainee programs, thereby fostering career progression.

5.1. Theoretical and Policy Implications

Theoretically, the study contributes to the understanding of management trainee programs by emphasizing the specific elements that influence its effectiveness. The study provides empirical evidence that supports the integration of leadership training, mentor support and job rotation in management trainee programs, strengthening theories related to practical learning and developmental relationships. From a policy standpoint, the findings suggest that organizations, particularly SMEs in the Chinese FMCG industry, should channel and invest a considerable number of resources into the factors, namely, leadership training, mentor support and job rotation to maximize the benefits of management trainee programs. Policymakers and leaders of various organizations can utilize the findings provided in this study to design and refine management trainee programs, ensuring the program includes comprehensive leadership modules, structured mentorship and diverse rotational responsibilities to develop well-rounded future leaders.

5.2. Limitations of the Study and Future Research

While the study offers valuable insights into management trainee outcomes, a few limitations are observed. The reliance of the research on self-reported data by trainees may introduce bias, as participants might overstate or understate experiences and perceptions. Additionally, the cross-sectional nature of the study, capturing data at a single point in time, limits its ability to critically assess and evaluate changes over time. To address the limitations, future research should consider longitudinal studies to track the development and significance of management trainee programs over

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time. Furthermore, it would also be beneficial to explore the role of organizational culture and external economic factors in influencing the effectiveness of management trainee programs. Future research should also consider expanding the research to other industries and countries to provide a more comprehensive understanding of MT programs, its universal applicability and effectiveness.

6. Conclusion

The research sought to investigate the factors influencing the effectiveness of management trainee programs in the career progress of trainees as well as to explore ways to improve MT programs and its suitability for SMEs in the FMCG industry in China. Through comprehensive analysis, the study revealed that perceived leadership training, perceived mentors support and perceived job rotation significantly and positively impacts overall program effectiveness. The variables were found to be the cornerstone of effective management trainee programs. Given the positive coefficient levels and strong statistical significance of the three variables, the results indicated that, the factors, (i.e., perceived leadership training, perceived mentors support and perceived job rotation) not only enhance the career progression of trainees but also render MT programs suitable and beneficial for SMEs in the Chinese Fast-Moving Consumer Goods industry.

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