Continuous Learning In Professional Development

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Abstract

In this conceptual paper, continuous learning in professional development and several factors influence the continuous learning in professional development have been considered for this study. These factors would comprise of; working environment, attitudes, employee motivation and job satisfaction. Current status of continuous learning in professional development from various literatures have been studied. Also analyzed the relations between the above specified significant variables related to this study.

1.0 Introduction

Activities in the work place and requirements of a job can have a profound impact on the professional development of an employee. Employees can obtain new skills from several sources such as; education, training and communication (Alipour & Salehi, 2009).

Organizations and individuals can achieve short-term as well as long-term success on the basis of continuous learning. Continuous learning is an aspect that promises several advantages, some of which would relate to improved skill sets, an augmented capability to realize organizational objectives and more importantly it facilitates individuals to maintain a competitive edge in the present highly competitive labour market and rapidly expanding world economy. When individuals engage in continuous learning, it directly spells success for the organization. Any new learning that they derive is utilized to improve and enhance operational procedures, increase efficiency, reduce waste and bring down costs (Nafei, 2015). Thus, acquiring continuous learning has the scope of amplifying productivity and allows organizations to maintain their dominance within the market. The environment at the workplace is quite dynamic with different employees having distinct attributes. Therefore, learning that is continuous is made up of an amalgamation of several components and different people perceive continuous learning differently (Imamoglu et al., 2011).

The capability for developing skills and to continuously learn has now emerged as a core competency for a successful career (Imran et al., 2011). Each individual is now deemed responsible for the course they chart for their own career for which they need to have multiple knowledge bases and diverse skill sets. The process of learning has been radically altered by this shift and the capability to consistently develop new skills while honing existing skills has proved to be a key ingredient in individual and organizational success (Maurer & Weiss, 2010).

The key objective with which continuous learning is facilitated is to foster the professional development of employees that enables them to execute their responsibilities within an organization to the best of their capabilities (Vinesh, 2014). Continuous learning can be act as a source that provides an organization with a competitive edge and at the same time employees are presented with an opportunity to develop innovative skills and acquire new knowledge (Towler, 2009).

Nonetheless, just providing continuous learning may not necessarily guarantee professional development of employees (Jehanzeb & Bashir, 2013). Continuous learning needs to be supplemented by several other steps. First and foremost, it is imperative that the opportunities for continuous learning are supported with appropriate content and the manner in which learning is delivered (Alliger et al., 1997). This will ensure a value addition to the professional development process and for the organization on the whole (David et al., 2012). Another necessary factor that needs to be taken into consideration is the delivery of the learning content. The delivery of the content should be such that it practical advantages to the organizational environment can be perceived and to facilitate employees to
transfer the learning that they obtain in a manner that is beneficial to all relevant stakeholders (Head et al., 2015).

Considering the significance of continuous learning for professional development, the topic is of much interest. This paper highlights the significance of professional development while outlining the factors that influence professional development in an organizational setting.

Several organizations deem it as appropriate for each employee to be responsible for acquiring new learning. This is what they essentially expect from their employees. Organizations desire that employees should be accountable for taking individual action towards their own learning and development. Nonetheless, employees also have to face managers who make the decision about the kind of training they are supposed to receive or are entitled to. There is a mismatch here. Learning that managers deem to be important and what employees actually receive may not necessarily be one and the same (van Breda-Verduijn & Heijboer, 2016). However, Schein (1999) believes that such kind of mismatch can enable in shedding light on the beliefs of people, the fundamental assumptions that exist within an organizational culture, how such assumptions impact learning and whether employees actually capable of being accountable for their own learning.

A learning culture that is robust provides the perfect setting that facilitates continuous learning. This is what the focus of this paper is on; an analysis of continuous learning and its impact on professional development. This brings us forth to the following research objectives:-

- To study how continuous learning will contribute to professional development at the individual level
- To establish how continuous learning enhances employee productivity
- To study how continuous learning will enhance employee morale

A key goal of a review paper is to recognize all of the researches that have been published in the past with regards to and in tandem with the objectives of the research. However, the process of creating a review paper is constantly confronted with alteration from the aspect of how an existing research is published and how various components of the research is outlined within the literature or classified by organizations.

2.0 Continuous Learning in Professional Development – Status from Literatures

The learning organization strategy model is adopted in this paper which takes into its ambit individuals, teams, organization as well as the society into account. The radical theory inspires an interaction and involvement between organization, teams, individuals and society with a view to progress enthusiastically to make sure that the process of continuous learning occurs within organizations (Lewicka, 2011). This enables employees to alter and enhance their behaviour and attitudes to achieve results that are high performance oriented through initiatives designed for continuous learning. Moreover, Yang et al. (2004) indicated that there were seven dimensions that were intrinsic in comprehending how continuous learning is deployed by organizations with a view to professional development of employees. The first dimension would pertain to continuous learning which refers to initiatives by an organization to facilitate opportunities of continuous learning for every employee. The second dimension refers to dialogue and inquiry which embodies an organization’s initiatives towards establishing a culture of questioning, experimentation and feedback. The third dimension would relate to team learning which considers spirit that binds them together in an attempt to resolve issues that frequently crop up within an organization (Kim et al., 2015). The fourth dimension concerns empowerment which requires an organization to build a shared vision amongst leaders as well as employees. This dimension is akin to The Fifth Discipline (Senge, 2006) which pertains to shared vision.

The fifth dimension pertains to embedded system which highlights efforts of an organization to facilitate employees who are establish to seize and share learning procedures. The sixth dimension relates to establishing connect between the organization and its external and internal environment. Finally, the seventh dimension would refer to strategic leadership where organizations are expected to display leadership capabilities like thinking strategically and manipulating continuous learning to alter and propel the organization to new frontiers or markets (Kim et al., 2015).
3.0 Significant Variables leading to Professional Development

There are several factors at play that influence continuous learning for professional development. These factors would comprise of; working environment, attitudes, employee motivation and job satisfaction.

3.1 Working Environment

Several supervisors and managers function under the erroneous belief that the degree of an employee’s performance with regards to their organizational commitment is directly proportional to the kind of remuneration that employees draw in lieu of their services (Brekelmans et al., 2013). While this can be considered to be a fact in some instances, surveys conducted amongst several employees have indicated that this is largely a wrong notion (Hossain & Hossain, 2012). The truth of the matter is that the quantum of the remuneration and the added emoluments such as bonus that employees receive do not make an impact on learning in the long-run. The size of the pay packet or any additional monetary emoluments that employees receive is eventually perceived as entitlement rather than an incentive. In a factual sense what impacts continuous learning is the quality of the working environment. The working environment quality makes a tremendous impact on the degree of motivation of employees which ultimately leads to performance (Mathews & Khann, 2016). The manner in which employees engage with their organization, particularly with regards to their immediate working environment makes a large difference on how it influences their rate of error, innovation levels, teamwork with their colleagues and co-workers, the number of days they stay off work and the duration for which they remain in a particular organization (Naharuddin & Sadegi, 2013). Several studies Arokiasamy (2013) and Ongori (2007) have indicated that a large number of employees opt to quit their employment due to the relationship they share with their immediate manager or supervisor, which essentially constitutes a poor work environment.

According to Hanaysha (2016) work environment on the whole is made up of three key sub environments which would include; organizational environment, human environment and technical environment. Organizational environment in this context would refer to philosophies, values, practices, rules and systems that the management of an organization controls (Eruemegbe, 2015). The human environment embodies colleagues, work groups, departments, others whom the employees relate to, management in an organization, interactional issues and leadership styles. The human environment within an organization is structured such that it facilitates communication that is informal within the organization which in turn presents the scope for sharing ideas, knowledge and deriving continuous learning (Biggio & Cortese, 2013). The technical environment on the other hand comprises of the equipment, tools, infrastructure that is techno-based and several other technical components. All the three sub environments collectively make up the working environment which impacts the way employees within an organization learn, develop professionally and eventually facilitates organizational enhancement Hanaysha (2016).

For organizations to function within their demand for learning, it is essential to establish a favourable working environment. The fact of the matter is that each organization has diverse working environments which need to be customized (Joseph & Dai, 2009). It has been indicated by Chandrasekar (2011) that working environment can impact continuous learning, morale of the employees, engagement, productivity. In case the working environment is positive, it would not only boost the morale of the employees but it would also impact continuous learning that in turn leads to professional development. Lack of a positive working environment would not only impact the attitude of the employees but it would also impact employee motivation and job satisfaction (Naharuddin & Sadegi, 2013).

If the working environment within an organization is positive and is focused on continuous learning, the structure of the organization would be such that it facilitates employees with opportunities for learning and exchange of knowledge thereby providing employees with a platform for professional development (Joseph & Dai, 2009). Hence it is imperative that organizations create a working environment that is positive and focused on continuous learning.

We have seen the relations between work environment and professional development. Now, let us see about Attitudes.
3.2 Attitudes

With rapid advances in global competition and technology, Eisele et al. (2013), Mpofu and Hlatywayo (2015), Eddy et al. (2015) and Thomas et al. (2016) amongst several other authors accept the significance and necessity for professional development simply because it enables organizations to maintain a competitive edge. Continuous learning when facilitated through regular training and development activities allow an organization to function effectively. In order for improvement to occur within organizations and to facilitate professional development, there is a need to provide employees with continuous learning (Lammintakanen & Kivinen, 2012). Continuous learning empowers employees with better administration capabilities and motivates employees to adopt an active and progressive approach towards work (Johnson & Beehr, 2014).

By investing in developing employees through continuous learning can significantly influence the attitude of employees within the organization. According to Cooke (2012) knowledge and skills required for performing competently within the competitive market is not only reinforced through continuous learning but it also facilitates an enhancement in attitudes and values that are essential to be service oriented within a profession. Continuous learning is instrumental in enabling an alteration in encouragement, confidence and knowledge of an attitude (Ankli & Palliam, 2012). Alteration in the attitudes of employees can be an additional advantage as it enables employees to surpass common benchmarks allowing them to accept strategic responsibility to realize organizational goals and objectives while managing quality (Beausaert et al., 2013; Pinnington, 2011).

Attitudes of employees can be perceived as diverse series of actions that could either be positive or negative which is executed by employees in an organization. Attitudes of employees have the propensity to either reinforce or break a work environment that is productive (CABI, 2017). When employees harbour negative attitudes they are bound to generate stress which could also lead to depression (Limpanitgul et al., 2013). Employees with negative attitudes can also transfer their attitudes to other employees too which can prove to be detrimental to organizational performance and might also hamper employees’ professional development (CABI, 2017). Inculcating a positive attitude amongst employees would hinge on several factors which would comprise of working environment, performance appraisal, rewards, job satisfaction and employee motivation (Omoruyi & Chinomona, 2016). In the absence of a favourable working environment, employees are bound to be disgruntled which gives rise to negative attitudes, imped ing them from being satisfied with their jobs or being motivated enough to engage in continuous learning for professional development (Bartel et al., 2011). From an organizational perspective, employees having a positive attitude can prove to be an asset to the organization on the whole as positive attitudes can influence the relation between professional development and organizational performance (McCarthy et al., 2010).

We discussed about the relations between Attitudes and professional development. Employee motivation also plays the vital role in the professional development. Let us see this in next paragraph.

3.3 Employee Motivation

All employees aspire to receive remuneration that are reasonable simply because monetary emoluments come across as an incentive that holds most significance especially considering the influential value that it holds (Parkin et al., 2004). Emoluments that are financial in nature have the propensity to sustain and encourage individuals to boost their performance, particularly in organizations that are involved in production of goods. Monetary emoluments are used by employees to satiate their requirements. Hence, it can be considered that monetary emoluments can substantially influence when it comes to establishing the commitment and diligence of employees. However, several studies have indicated that it is not possible to advance productivity in the long run on the basis of monetary rewards alone neither will it sizably augment individual performance (Whitley, 2013). Deterioration in the attitude of the employee can occur if the focus is exclusively on monetary emoluments as the employee will only be driven towards financial enhancement. Nonetheless, several factors that are non-financial in nature are also available that can be leveraged by organizations with a view to motivate employees towards professional development thereby enhancing organizational performance. These factors would include; performance feedbacks, non-monetary rewards and social recognition (Rani & Srivastava, 2015).
Research conducted by Ali (2016) has indicated that employees are satisfied with their jobs when they are rewarded and job satisfaction can have a positive and direct impact on the overall employee performance. Further, it has also been said that rewards happen to be one amongst the many tools that is most efficient from a management context when the focus is on influencing behaviours of individuals or groups at large, with a view to enhance organizational performance (Indermun & Bayat, 2013). A large number of organizations today are known to foster motivation amongst employees through remuneration that is at par with the industry, bonuses, promotion and several other kinds of rewards to enhance employee performance and thus improve organizational performance (Dobre, 2013). Though there have been rapid technological advancements, organizations can only realize high organizational performance when the employees are sufficiently motivated. Hence, Dobre (2013) states that it is imperative to facilitate continuous learning of employees through frequent training programmes which could be a strategy that is effective in motivating employees.

Organizations are known to gain a competitive edge when their employees are motivated to perform (Abbah, 2014). There are several ways through which employees can be motivated which would include rewards, remuneration, career growth, working environment, job satisfaction, continuous learning and attitudes (Akafo & Boateng, 2015). Motivation amongst employees is impacted by individual traits and also through their immediate working environment (Ahmad et al., 2012). With a view to effectively improve workplace management, managers often focus on motivating employees. When employees are motivated they are open to new learning and embrace the culture of continuous learning with a view to foster their professional development while also being focused towards achieving the organizational goals and objectives.

In addition to motivation, let us see the significant role of job satisfaction in professional development.

**3.4 Job Satisfaction**

Job satisfaction from an organizational context is a widely researched topic specifically in researches that relate to management and organizational studies. Taylor and Tashakkori, (1995) define job satisfaction as “feelings that employees hold toward the job”. Job satisfaction plays a crucial role within organizations as it has a major impact on employees professional development. Job satisfaction is said to impact the employees’ level of commitment, absenteeism, motivation, turnover and productivity performance (Tsai, 2011). Job satisfaction as an aspect is integral to professional development. When employees are satisfied in their work, they tend to be motivated, keen to learn and the chances of satisfied employees putting in extra efforts towards professional development are more as compared to employees who are not satisfied (Kwong et al., 2010).

Continuous learning as an aspect comprises of diverse facets which includes; capacity for organizational learning, sharing of knowledge, innovation, teamwork, work place learning, empowerment and several other aspects. From a common perspective, the situational tactic towards job satisfaction is primarily impacted by organizational as well as work conditions (Chiva & Alegre, 2008). The traits of an organization that engages in continuous learning then might necessarily make an impact on job satisfaction. Several studies exist which focus on job satisfaction with regards to individual traits pertaining to an organization that engages in continuous learning. Mikkelsen et al. (2000) established that a positive connection existed between job satisfaction and working environment. However, Rowden and Ahmad (2000) were of the opinion that when employees were presented with opportunities for continuous learning it enhanced the job satisfaction levels amongst employees. While according to findings presented in a study by Chiva and Alegre (2008) revealed that when continuous learning within organizations was facilitated through a work environment that was encouraging it had a substantial impact in fostering professional development of employees and the level of job satisfaction.

From practical research conducted in the past by Belias et al. (2015) it was revealed that promoting continuous learning within organizations could enhance the level of job satisfaction. The concept of job satisfaction is quite intricate and is one which is affected by diverse factors. These factors would relate to working environment, continuous learning, motivation, remuneration and attitudes (Mafini & Pooe, 2013). These factors could either individually affect job satisfaction or could
have a collective impact. Considering the intricacy of concept, several studies have outlined diverse impacts that job satisfaction can have on professional development. However, an aspect that is clear is that when employees are satisfied in their jobs they are bound to be more motivated, have positive attitudes are receptive towards continuous learning which in turn impacts organizational performance (Sharma & Jyoti, 2009).

Professional development can only occur when organizations facilitate continuous learning (Bakotić, 2016). Hence, it could be concluded that job satisfaction rather robustly outlines organizational performance than job satisfaction determines professional development. However, the key factors that facilitate job satisfaction are as mentioned above and refer to working environment, attitudes and motivation.

4.0 Conclusion

Thus, from the above it can be concluded that each of the variables are intrinsically linked to each other and have a direct impact on professional development. What it implies is that absence of a favourable working environment can make an impact on how employees respond to continuous learning which could lead to professional development. The working environment also impacts attitudes of employees, their level of motivation and job satisfaction. Similarly, attitudes of employees are also closely linked to professional development. Employees with positive attitudes would be more open to continuous learning and may collectively create a favourable working environment which eventually leads to motivation and job satisfaction. As a factor, employee motivation also impacts professional development. Motivated employees are more likely to have positive attitudes and be satisfied at their jobs. However, working environment plays a crucial role in keeping employees motivated. Employees who are more satisfied with their jobs would be more receptive to continuous learning with a view to develop them professionally. But achieving job satisfaction is dependent on working environment, motivation and attitudes.

Therefore, the aforesaid factors can make a sizable impact on continuous learning with a view to achieve professional development.

Reference


