# Workplace Learning and Learning Conditions- A Literature Review

Merin M Abraham
*Research Scholar – Bharathiar University*
*Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India*

**Abstract**

*Background: To reach a conclusion about cause and effect of Workplace Learning that can be generalised in various contexts has been studied across the years. Learning conditions or factors that influense learning at workplace is an important element that needs to be studied more, has been agreed upon. In this context, the different elements in learning conditions that has been studied and has contributed to the development of literature is examined in this paper.*

**Key words -** *Workplace Learning, Learning Condition, Learning Climate,Organisational Learning, Learning Organisation*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The culture, policy, procedures and the implicit norms followed in an organisation is essential to mould an employee's perception as to whether the conditions facilitate learning at Workplace. (Marsick and Watkins, 1990)[6]. Billett (2004)[1] states that the workplace needs to provide an optimal context for the individual to develop and grow in his job. Tjepkema (2002)[8] defines these learning conditions as"characteristics of the organisation and the individual that enable or hinder learningfrom team members" (Tjepkema, 2002, p. 111).

Literature says that there are four main domains of conditions which play a role in the approach to learning of employees, which are personality, circumstances, organizationalculture and climate, and an in-company training system. Personality, e. g. education, age, motivation, etc., and circumstances, e. g. financial situation, family, health, etc., are on theemployees' side and should be also considered when we talk about work place learning even though the company cannot change them.

On the other hand, there is organizational culture and climate which is very important not only for learning and training in companies but also for work. The last domain, an in-company training system and its form, shows the importance that management attaches to training. This paper collates studies that talks about both the environment in the organisation and the personality traits.

Learning conditions are defined as conditions created in the social, material orinformational environment and in the work environment itself by key figures andagents of the labour organisation, and by the employees themselves so that otheremployees can learn (Clauwaert and Van Bree, 2008)[2].

## II. WORK PLACE LEARNING

Workplace learning is a process of acquiring knowledge and skills to improve individual and organizational performances (Hicks, Bagg, Doyle, & Young, 2007)[9]. It is often characterized as formal and informal (Cofer, 2000;Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007)[10]. Formal learning refers to organized activities that take place in formal educational settings and often lead to some form of official recognition (for example, a degree or certification)(Lohman, 2009; Marsick& Watkins, 1990). Examples of formal learning are courses, seminars and conferences (Watkins &Marsick, 1992). Informal learning is defined as activities that are initiated by the employees at the workplace to develop and maintain knowledge and skills (Lohman, 2009)[11]. Informal learning activities include reading, discussion and meeting (Lancester, Milia, & Cameron, 2013; Watkins &Cervero, 2000)[12]

There are several factors that are conducive to Workplace learning and several that are inhibitors. Work environment inhibitors refer to any working conditions, practices or situations that can inhibit accountants' informal learning activities (Abdul Wahab et al. 2012[13]; Crouse,Doyle, & Young, 2011; Hicks et al., 2007). There are many work environment inhibitors to learning activities. The inhibitors include lack of time due to heavy workload (Abdul Wahab et al., 2012; Hicks et al., 2007; Lohman, 2009), lack of proximity to colleagues' working areas (Lohman 2006, 2009; Lohman& Woolf, 2001),lack of support from others (Abdul Wahab et al., 2012; Hicks et al., 2007; Jurasaite-Harbison, 2009). Other inhibitors are lack of meaningful rewards (Ashton, 2004; Lohman, 2000), lack of fund (Crouse et al., 2011;Ellinger, 2004; Sambrook& Stewart, 2000), lack of access to updated learning materials (Crouse et al., 2011;Lohman, 2000), lack of access to computer (Lohman, 2000, 2006, 2009) and limited influence on firm's

operation(Jurasaite-Harbison, 2009; Lohman& Woolf, 2001).

Presence of favourable factors that help in work place learning has also been studied to a great extent and this has been clubbed under the term Learning conditions. The different ways given by an organisation to its employees to foster learning amongst themselves is an important factor that should be studied

## III. PERCEIVED LEARNING CONDITIONS AT WORKPLACE

As early as 1965 since the Hawthorne studies, it was studied that individually "perceived"rather than the "objective" work conditions may contribute to the practice of learning at workplace. Organizations can provide a working environment that promotes and encourages opportunities for learning (Marsick& Volpe, 1999).

Lester and Costley (2010, p. 563) note that to foster good WPL, the work environment must be: capable of supporting learner-managed, (and) reflective learning at an appropriate level. It was opined by them that, although at workplace learning opportunities can be created, at times a practical intervention or a gentle push by the superior is required in the right direction.

There are several commnalities between various theories that focus on perceptions of support for learning. The Watkins and Marsick model (1997) examines perception of support for learning at a macro level (individual, team, and organizational level), whereas the Baldwin and Ford model (1988) would be used to examine support at a micro level (distinct work environment).

Learning conditions, for instance, represents observed workplace conditions that stimulate the learning process (Kyndt et al., 2009, 2015).

The most important (general) stimulating learning conditions that were found in literature are communication and interaction (Collin, 2002; Education Development Center, 1998[3]; Ellstrom, 2001[4]; Eraut, 1994[5]; Sterck, 2004), cooperation (Collin, 2002; Education Development Center, 1998), feedback (Ellstrom, 2001; Eraut, 1994; Skule,2004[7]; Sterck, 2004), evaluation (Collin, 2002; Ellstrom, 2001), participation (Collin, 2002;Ellstrom, 2001), reflection (Ellstrom, 2001), coaching (Ellstrom, 2001; Sterck, 2004) and information (Sterck, 2004).

Vermeulen and Schmidt (2008) and Hays and Clements (2011) studied 5 factors as learning conditions that foster work place learning. :

Relationships that foster learning - A willingness to share knowledge, particularly when it is not easily seen or understood and make it easy to comprehend, Determine and provide access to activities that are required for development plus sequence them in a meaningful way, Provide close guidance that will develop professional practice and guard against inappropriate practice, Effective Communication - Effective communication, a two way process where the message is delivered and received accurately, is essential to facilitate learning. Effective feedback for future development is one where the learner understands the information being given and is willing to act (Price et al., 2010), Motivational Ability – An environment that will motivate learners if it has a culture of learning, provides support for learning at an appropriate level and monitors the learning conditions (Orrell, 2004), Expert Role models - Role models are those whose behaviours, attitudes, practices are copied by others therefore expert and professional role models are required to demonstrate quality practice (Filstad, 2010).

Clauwaert and Van Bree (2008) dividedthe learning conditions into six categories: work organisation, internal learningnetworks, external learning networks, individual learning coaching, individual work coaching and information systems. This is shown in Table 1

Many other researchers also studied Learning conditions in various contexts and is summarised in Table 2

While several studies bring in various factors, the major commanalities were Communication, Networks, Feedback, Superior`s support and Individuals attitude. Communication refers to the extent to which consulting other departments, holding meetings etc are encouraged. Networks include both internal and external that forms workgroups or teams for debriefing, projects etc or visiting colleagues from other organisations, go as guest speakers etc. By Feedback what is implied is the personal development plan or feedback on a particular work function that is provided by a superior. The extent to which the employee perceives support from the superior officer or management is another common factor (Clarke, 2004; Russ-Eft, 2002).. The individual employees attitude towards learning in terms of commitment, responsibility etc also has been studied as an element in learning conditions

**Table 1 : Learning Conditions at Workplace**
**Clauwert&Vanbree**

| General Learning Conditions | Categories | Items |
|---|---|---|
| Communication, interaction, cooperation and participation | Work organisation | Consult other departments<br>Results of inquiries<br>Trade union meetings<br>Internal job openings<br>Job rotation<br>Common breaks |
| | Internal learning networks | Work groups<br>Intervision<br>Debriefing<br>Project teams<br>Self-directing teams<br>Common rooms |
| | External learning networks | External colleagues<br>Visit other organisations<br>Demonstrations<br>Guest speakers<br>Community of practice |
| Feedback, evaluation, coaching and reflection | Individual learning coaching | Personal development plan<br>Job controls<br>Walk along with colleague<br>Contact person<br>Coach<br>Internship<br>Buddy system<br>Godfather/godmother<br>Trial period<br>Mentor<br>Complex assignments |
| | Individual work coaching | Feedback on functioning<br>Coach<br>Functioning consultation<br>Career consultation |
| Information | Information systems | Knowledge of decisions<br>Job aids<br>Databases<br>Newsletter<br>Internet<br>Work e-mail address<br>Phone<br>Library<br>Log<br>TV<br>CD-ROMs<br>Idea box<br>Quality manual<br>Reports, files<br>Radio |

## IV. CONCLUSION

Searching for factors that is said to have an impact on learning at workplace eitherdirectly or indirectly has been the approach across the years. Researchers have agreed thatmore of these factors should be unearthed and should be studied in different combinations indifferent contexts to add to the theoretical implications. This paper attempts to collate themajor conditions at workplace that has been studied previously and to draw parallels

A tabular representation of factors that has been taken into account for studiesof Learning Condition and Workplace Learning is presented

**Table 2 : Summary of Learning conditions**

| Author | Factors studied |
|---|---|
| Clauwaert& Van Bree (2008) | Work organisation,<br>internal learning networks<br>external learning networks<br>individual learning coaching<br>individual work coaching<br>information systems. |
| Moller (2001) | Commitment,<br>Responsibility<br>Loyalty<br>Initiative<br>Productivity<br>Relations<br>Quality<br>Professional competence<br>Flexibility<br>Implementation<br>Energy |
| Vermeulen and Schmidt (2008) and Hays and Clements (2011) | Relationships that foster learning<br>Effective Communication<br>Professional Judgement and Assessment<br>Expert role models<br>Motivational ability |
| Chappell & Hawke (2005) | Manager/management support;<br>Intentional creation of learning opportunities by the institution;<br>Involvement in teams<br>Provision of useful feedback on performance<br>A clear sense of the organization's mission/purpose;<br>Ready access to necessary information<br>Ready access to other people in the organization |
| Eraut et al 2000 | Challenge and value of the work<br>Feedback and support<br>Confidence and Commitment<br>Allocation and structuring of work<br>Encounters and relationships with people at work<br>Expectations of each persons role<br>Performance and progress |
| Ellstrom (2001, 2006) | Learning potential of the task<br>Balance between autonomy and standardisation,<br>Participation of employees in decision making<br>Individuals attitude To Learning<br>Workplace norms<br>Direction & Goals of the organisation |
| Deci& Ryan (1985) | Experiencing autonomy<br>Experiencing competence<br>Experiencing social integration |
| Kyndt et al., (2009) | Cooperation<br>access to information<br>feedback<br>coaching<br>evaluation<br>reflection<br>task demands<br>task control |
| (Tracey &Tews, 2005) | Organizational support<br>Supervisor support<br>Job characteristics |

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