Workplace Learning: The Sixth Generation of the Field Once Called Training

Premrudee Chobphon

Introduction

The rapid pace of technological change, economic reform, globalization, information intensity and demographic change has reshaped the workforce and required individuals and organizations to adjust. In order to cope with these changes, organizations and their employees have to develop themselves. At first, people focused on training, activities that changes individual by equipping them with knowledge, skills and attitude to suit the need of organization (Rothwell, 2004), as a tool to help employees develop skills required for their jobs. Later on, people recognized that training couldn't equip them with all the skills and knowledge required to carry through their working lives. In fact, people typically spend a greater proportion of their lives in a workplace setting than they do in formal training (Candy and Mathew, 1998). Therefore, training has undergone dramatic changes, which have been reflected in new names for the field (Rothwell, 2004). According to Rothwell (2004) there have been six generations of the field called training. These six generations are (Rothwell, 2004) : (1) Training and development (T&D) (2) Human Resource Development (HRD) (3) Human Performance Improvement (HPI) (4) Workplace Learning and Performance (WLP) (5) Workplace Learner (WPL) (6) a revised version of Workplace Learning and Performance.

Each generation makes different assumptions about what people who work in the field should do. Training and development focused on one activity, that is training. Training changes individuals by equipping them with the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to perform successfully. Human Resource Development is defined as the integrated use of training, organization development and career development. Human Performance Improvement is the process of identifying the root causes of human performance problems and finding solutions or interventions to address those causes. Workplace Learning and Performance is defined as the integrated use of learning and other interventions for the purpose of improving human performance and addressing individual and organizational needs. The Workplace Learner generation focuses on individual change through learning.

Premrudee Chobphon Assistant Professor Department of Career Sciences

Increasing of Attention on Workplace Learning

The importance of workplace as a site of learning is attracting attention for a number of different reasons. Firstly, recent research has indicated that knowledge, competence and capacity to do the work are socially constructed in a workplace (Candy and Matthew, 1998) Secondly, the workplace is becoming the site of both learning and enhancing the development of individuals through contributing to knowledge, skills and capacity to further their own learning with respect to their roles as employees (Boud, 1998). Thirdly, knowledge is treated as a meaningful resource; the ability to learn faster than competitors is the way to sustain competitive advantages (Candy and Matthew, 1998). Finally, Jackson (1983, cited in Candy and Matthew, 1998: 15-16)) claimed that advantages of work-based learning were, the increase of productivity, greater job satisfaction for staff and the building of good work relationships.

The Concept of Workplace Learning

Holiday and Retallic(1995, cited in Matthews, 1999: 19) explained that workplace learning refers to the process and outcomes of learning that individual employees and groups of employees undertake under auspices of a particular workplace. This definition of workplace learning emphasizes on both the processes and outcomes of learning.

P. Matthews (1999) proposed as a working definition of workplace learning: "the process of reasoned learning towards desirable outcomes for the individual and the organization. These outcomes should foster the sustained development of both the individual and the organization, within the present and future context of organizational goal and individual development." This definition illustrates the breadth of workplace learning concept. It is also states that workplace learning should produce desirable outcomes for the individual and organization. Moreover, the learning will assist the present and future development of each individual.

Garavan et al. (2002) in summarizing from many definitions stated that a workplace learning represented a set of processes that occur in a specific organizational context and focus on acquiring and assimilating an integrated cluster of knowledge, skills, values and feelings that result in individuals and teams refocusing and changing their behavior. This definition focuses on learning at work that can change employees' behavior.

Resnick (1987, cited in Matthews, 1999: 3) and Scribner (1986, cited in Matthews, 1999: 3) argued that learning within a workplace has many specific features that distinguish it from other types of learning. The specific features are as follows: (a) it is task focused. (b)

it occurs in a social context. (c) it is collaborative and often grows out of the experience, (d) it occurs in a political and economic context.

We can summarize the above definitions of workplace learning by stating that workplace learning is the learning of employees that occurs through doing both routine and non-routine work activities. Factors of the workplace environment such as the nature of the work, social relations in the workplace and employees' characteristics impede or support the learning. Moreover, it is expected that workplace learning should produce desirable outcomes for each individual and the organization.

Learning at Work

Billett (2002) concluded from his researches on learning through work in a range of industries such as services, manufacturing and government that the workplace had a number of strengths as a learning environment. Based on workers' experience and views, the key contributors to their learning of their vocational practice through work were as follows: (a) engagement in all work tasks and problem solving (b) authentic, goal-directed activities and (c) access to guidance--both close guidance of co-workers and indirect guidance provided by workplace itself or others in a workplace.

The result from the study of employees in McDonald fast food restaurants (Grolnic, 2001), secretarial employees (Jerich, 2000), librarians (Li, 2001) and newcomers in a management consulting organization (Chao, 2001) confirmed that work was essential in providing learning opportunities. The employees' professional development came from their experience of working on challenging work and from their interaction with others, such as customers, co-workers and managers. Moreover, the freedom to try new ways of completing jobs and opportunities to practice and experiment were also raised as important factors that affect learning at work.

Furthermore, workers also identified limitations associated with learning through work. They are as follows:

(a) inappropriate knowledge. This kind of knowledge included dangerous work practices, bad safety habits and the unequal relationships between participants.

(b) the reluctance of experts. In some situations, experts may be reluctant about sharing knowledge for fear of status loss. Experts who are not rewarded or fear of displacement by those they have guided and supported maybe unwilling to provide guidance (Billett, 2002).

(c) lack of challenging authentic activities. The result of a study of newcomers in an organization confirmed that the confidence of the employees, especially the new ones, depended on the successful completion of challenging work. (Eraut et al, 2004)

Lohman (2000) proposed four environmental inhibitors to informal learning for teachers in public schools. They were: lack of time for learning, lack of proximity to learning resources, lack of meaningful rewards for learning and limited decision-making power in school management.

In order to gain experience in workplace it is not only workplace context factors that have an effect on learning, but also the characteristics of learners are important. The characteristics of learners that enhance learning are: confidence and commitment (Eraut et al, 2004), critical reflection and creativity (Watkins and Marsick, 1992, cited in Lankard, 1995: 5). Confidence means that the learners have to be proactive in seeking learning opportunities and in taking charge of and directing his or her learning. These kinds of action require confidence. Commitment is generated through social inclusion in teams and by appreciating the value of the work. Critical reflection is the way in which learners identify explicit norms and values in workplace. Creativity is the quality that enables people to think beyond their own point of view.

Another interesting aspect of workplace learning is the ways in which professionals learn. Cheetham (2001) concluded from his empirical research about the ways professionals learnt that they usually learnt from: on-the-job learning, working alongside with more experience colleagues, working as a part of a team, self analysis or self reflection, learning from customers, networking with others doing the similar work, learning through teaching or training others, support from mentors, use of role models and pre-entry experience.

Professional Education and Learning in Workplace

Traditional understandings of occupational practice have largely ignored workplace learning as a significant component. The role of professional preparation has been to provide the theoretical basis that workers can apply to deal with the workplace situation as they arise. According to Schon (1983, cited in Hager, 2001: 82), it is a major mistake to locate professional education away from the actual workplace. Many studies have indicated the inability of theory/practice thinking to account for the workplace practice. The study of expertise by cognitive psychologist has also increased realization that graduates of academic courses are not yet equipped as competent practitioners in the workplace. For

example, the tourism industry in Thailand has voiced its complaint that tourism and hospitality studies programs placed too much emphasis on theoretical rather than practical aspects. According to Hager (2001), learning that occurs during professional work experience is valuable, and that a higher education level professional preparation courses that lack such experiential learning are inherently flaw. Billett (2002) also echoed the idea that workplace experiences make contributions to learning vocational practice. In order to gain acceptance, many highly regarded professional preparation programs, such as, in law and medicine, have to include lengthy periods of workplace experience as interns or apprentices. Internship, apprenticeship and co-operative education programs are designed to help students experience employment, accept responsibility to complete tasks, gain greater maturity, and develop attitudes and standards appropriate to career aspirations (Busy, Brunt and Baber, 1997). These programs are also designed to help students develop an accurate self-concept and gain a realistic understanding of various career fields and organizational environments (Anakwee and Greenhause, 2000). Prior researches (eg. Brooks et al, 1995 and Tylor, 1998, cited in Callanan and Benzing, 2004: 83) proved that internships provide positive developmental experience, such as, improved individual career decision-making, self-efficacy and strengthening the crystallization of professional self-concept. Busy, Brunt and Baber (1997) found that the end skills students usually obtained from co-operative programs in tourism related to communication skills, technical knowledge, sales skills and greater confidence.

The idea of co-operative education, which views the workplace as a place to gain valuable experience, was brought to Thailand about a decade ago. However, the Office of Higher Education Commission (OHEC) began promoting this kind of program in 2002. Kasetsart University (KU.) was one of the pioneer universities that joined this program in the second semester of the year 2002. From that time up to the present, the university has wholeheartedly supported co-operative education program as a service to students. Moreover, the university also encourages all students to pursue anticipatory socialization assignments. In order to make cooperative education program successful, the collaboration between universities and private or public enterprises is necessary. From the commercial perspective, employers have a golden opportunity to identify those students that they wish to recruit. Sometimes, placement students are viewed as flexible human resources or low cost employees. Some employers identified "extra help" as the advantage of placement students (Busby, Brunt and Baber, 1997). For students, completion of co-operative educational assignments has been found to develop an accurate self-concept and to enable them to gain a realistic understanding of their own career fields and organizational

environments. With more intense competition among graduates for employment, it is apparent that co-operative education programs play a vital role in providing students additional skills and better chances to obtain full-time employment after graduation.

Conclusion

At present, it is realized that the better work performance of staff in enterprises cannot be developed through initial training programs. As a matter of fact, people usually spend a greater proportion of their time in workplace settings than in formal training. Therefore, learning in the workplace is considered an effective tool to improve the work performance of staff that will also enhance the development of enterprises. Moreover learning is not something that can be developed through training programs. It cannot be left to the in-house training department alone because learning is an on-going element that occurs in all parts of the enterprises. Consequently, the view of performance development of staff in enterprises has become broader than simply training because it is recognized that most development occurs on the job. Apart from the benefits to the business sector, the concept of learning in the workplace is also valuable to education. Although universities responded to this area of knowledge slowly at first, there is now interest in workplaces as learning environments. The recognition of the concept is reflected in new approaches to developing degree programs incorporating workplace experience. The idea of co-operative education that concentrates on practice linked with academic study is a familiar part of higher education nowadays. In conclusion, workplace learning is an important activity that both contribute to an organization and the broader learning and development of individual participants. The concept of workplace learning is now recognized by both business and education.

References

Anakwee, P. and Greenhause, H. 2000. "Prior Work Experience and Socialization Experiences of College graduates." **International Journal of Manpower** 21, 2: 95-111

Billett, S. 2002. "Toward a Workplace Pedagogy: Guidance, Participation and Engagement." **Adult Education Quarterly** 53, 1: 27-41.

Boud, D. 1998. "A New Focus on Workplace Learning Research." In D. Boud, editor. **Current Issues and New Agendas in Workplace Learning,** pp. 1-8. Australia: NCVER Ltd.

Busy, G., Brunt, P., and Baber, S. 1997. "Tourism Sandwich Placements: an Appraisal." **Tourism Management.** 18, 2: 105-110.

Callanan, G. and Benzing, C. 2004. "Assessing the Role of Internships in the Career-Oriented Employment of Graduating College Students." **Education & Training,** 46, 2: 82-89.

Candy, P. and Matthews, J. 1998. "Fusing Learning and Work: Changing Concepts of Workplace Learning." In D. Boud, editor. **Current Issues and New Agendas in Workplace Learning,** pp. 9-30. Australia: NCVER Ltd.

Chao, C. 2001. "Workplace Learning as Legitimate Peripheral Participation: A Case Study of Newcomers in Management Consulting Organization." **UMI ProQuest Digital Dissertation. (Online).** Available: http://wwwlib.umi.com/dissertations/fullcit/3024162. (Accessed November 29, 2002).

Cheetham, G. 2001. "How Professional Learning in Practice: An Investigating of Informal Learning Amongst People Working in Professions." **Journal of European Industrial Training,** 25, 5: 248-292.

Eraut, M. et al. 2004. **Learning in the Professional Workplace: Relationships between Learning Factors and Contextual Factors.** Paper presented at AERA 2004 Conference. San Diego: AERA.

Garavan, T. et al. 2002. "Human Resource Development and Workplace Learning: Emerging Theoretical Perspectives and Organizational Practices." **Journal of European Industrial Training** 21, 2-4: 60-71.

Grolnic, S. 2001. "Information Learning in Workplace: What can be Learned Doing a Mc Job?" **UMI ProQuest Digital Dissertations.** (Online). Available: http://www.lib.umi.com/dissertations/Fulcit/3012921. (Accessed July 23, 2002).

Hager, P. 2001. "Lifelong Learning and the Contribution of Formal Learning." In D. Aspin, editor, **International Handbook of Lifelong Learning,** pp. 31-46. London: Kluwer Academic.

Jerich, M. 2000. "Assessing Professional Development Needs of Secretarial Employees at the University of Illinois at Urbana- Champaign." **UMI ProQuest Digital Dissertations.** (Online). Available: http:// wwwlib.umi.com/dissertations/fullcit/9971106. (Accessed June 23, 2003).

Lankard, B. 1995. "New Ways of Learning in the Workplace." **ERIC Digest.** (Online). Available: http://www.ed.gov/database/Eric_Digest/ed3855778.html (Accessed December 12, 2002)

Li, A. 2001. "Librarians' Learning in the Workplace." **UMI ProQuest Digital Dissertations.** (Online). Available: http://wwwlib.umi.com/dissertation/fullcit/3032709 (Accessed December 28, 2002)

Lohman, M. 2000. "Environmental Inhibitors to Informal Learning in the Workplace: A Case Study Of Public School Teachers." **Adult Education Quarterly** 50, 2: 83-101.

Matthews, P. 1999. "Workplace Learning: Developing an Holistic Model." **The Learning Organization** 6, 1: 18-29.

Rothwell, J. 2004. **The Six Generations of the Field Once called Training: Are you Developing Talent in Your Organization?,** paper presented at Doctor of Education Program, Graduate School, Burapha University. Cholburi: Burapha University. (Unpublished)