

WELCOME TO THE WORKCAFE

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ABSTRACT

The workplace is a complex and dynamic environment (entity) that consists of the physical space, structure, the technology, the furniture, the social interaction, the actual work and practice, the culture and to bind all this together is the continuous learning, both formal and informal that takes place. To face the challenges of the future and to keep pace with the rapid demands and change continuous learning is critical. To make the workplace a potential learning environment the various factors for informal learning need to be reviewed. This paper assesses the influence of physical factors on workplace learning. A survey was conducted to examine the influence of physical factors like the necessity of conducive environment; availability of spaces for gathering; Space consideration being a part of strategic planning; arrangement of people, office and workstations so that frequency of Informal, chance contacts are increased to facilitate informal learning at the workplace. Through the findings, it could be concluded that physical environmental factors collectively influence the workplace learning. Theoretical and practical implications of the study and suggestions for future research are also discussed.

Keywords : Workplace Learning, Informal Learning, Physical Workplace, Strategy, Physical Environment

INTRODUCTION

Many countries, organizations and managers are finding it difficult to respond to the skill needs of industry and their workforce in a time of increasing globalization, new technology and changing patterns of work. The current global financial, political and economic situation has contributed to recognition of the need for recovery strategies based on investment in skills development in an attempt to improve productivity, employment growth and employability of the workforce through training and re-training. A key strategy for achieving this is to promote workplace learning, in the context of lifelong learning, to ensure that workers' skills are constantly renewed and adapted and thus ensure that they are equipped for a variety of potential jobs.

The ILO's Human Resources Development Recommendation No. 195 (2004) stresses that countries should "promote the expansion of workplace learning and training". Over recent years, the use of the workplace as a centre of learning has been transformed due to the growth of the knowledge economy, the

impact of new technology on productivity and the growing use of high-performance work practices that are transforming the ways in which work is organized.

Workplace learning is the amalgamation between the learning process of the members and the environment of the physical workplace. The physical environment is a facilitator to learning at the workplace. It facilitates continuous learning to share experiences and learning and to prepare people and organizations for the need of the present and future. At the workplace individuals and groups and communities meet regularly, and these opportunities need to be exploited and converted into learning activities, through a conducive learning environment. (Illeris, 2004)

WORKPLACE LEARNING ACTIVITIES AND HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGERS

A number of workplace learning environment factors influence workplace learning and make it successful. Facilitation by the management, interactions and sharing of learning and best practices, between communities, groups

and individuals, effective and timely communication, opportunities for learning, and the physical environment are some of the factors that influence workplace learning (Krauss & Guat, 2008)

To facilitate learning at the workplace between human resource professionals, the necessary conditions need to be created. This motivates in individual and team learning at the workplace. (Lourenço, 2015)

Certain conditions will have a good chance to increase work motivation and thereby effectiveness. Hence, members' work motivation can be seen as a mediator in group functioning. In our view, and following Kozlowski and Ilgen (2006), who state that team learning, motivation, and effectiveness are entwined, so the conditions that promote team learning could play an important role in order to increase work members' motivation and team effectiveness, namely members' satisfaction with the team. (Lourenço, 2015)

PHYSICAL WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT FACTORS AS FACILITATORS TO INFORMAL WORKPLACE LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Workplace learning has a broader project and potential to link development of the individual with development of the organization or business, through an emphasis on sustained development and learning processes as well as learning outcomes. If changes in society and economy have loosened learning from the classroom, then the workplace is also more than just a physical location. We can consider 'the workplace' to be a physical location and shared meanings, ideas, behaviors and attitudes – all of which help determine the working environment and the network of formal and informal relationships that feature the latter. These, place learning at the centre of workplace: looking at work from the viewpoint of its learning potential is fundamentally different to looking at it simply in terms of competencies needed in order to perform the job well. Learning needs to be viewed as a natural characteristic of everyday work, and work itself is seen as a rich source of learning facilitated by an effective and right physical environment (Manuti, Pastore, Scardigno, Giancaspro, & Morciano, 2015)

Various factors identified from previous research, and included in the questionnaire are, Conducive Physical workplace environment (Toole, 2001), Spaces for gathering need to be available at a short notice (Bates & Hillage, 2005), Space considerations should be a part of strategic planning

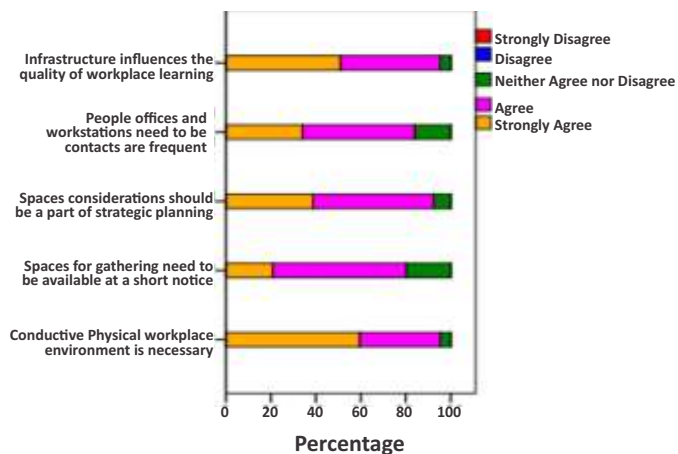
(Overton & Dixon, 2016), People, offices and workstations need to be arranged so that informal, chance contacts are frequent (Bates & Hillage, 2005). These factors were investigated to identify the influence of physical factors on the workplace learning.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data of this study were gathered through a mail survey approach. Respondents were Human Resource managers in large and medium scale organizations in Karnataka. They were selected because informal learning activities are compulsory to develop and maintain their knowledge and skills in current and future work roles (MIA, 2007). 150 (approximately 10% of the population) respondents were randomly selected by database which has around 1200 organizations in the category out of these 106 were selected. The questionnaires were sent to their correspondence addresses. The questionnaire consisted of six items on the frequency of engagement informal learning activities on the physical workplace environment. A Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) was used for the informal workplace learning environment and activities items.

RESULTS

To investigate the influence of physical factors like the necessity of conducive environment; availability of spaces for gathering; Space consideration being a part of strategic planning; arrangement of people, office and workstations so that frequency of Informal, chance contacts are increased and Infrastructure, that responses of 106 employees are considered. The respondents rated statements regarding physical factors on a scale of 1 to 5. The following table presents the responses of all the respondents.



The stacked bar chart clearly points out that no respondent has marked disagreeing options. So it is safe to conclude that physical factors like Conducive environment, Space for gathering, Considerations of space, Frequent informal or Chance contacts and Infrastructure have significant effect on workplace learning.

Of all the responses, “Agree” seems to be most favored with an average responses of 48.66% followed by Strongly agree and Neutral. It can also be noted that at least 10% of the respondents are Neutral on the subject.

Of the physical factors listed, Conducive environment seems to be most favored with 96.2% of the respondents agreeing on it. Conducive environment is followed by Infrastructure (with 95.2% agreements), Space considerations (with 92.5% agreements), Frequent chance contacts (with 84% agreements) and Spaces for gathering (with 80.2% agreements).

Since the frequency of disagreements in the above table is zero, we could conclude that environment factors definitely influence workplace learning. Further, a statistical verification can be done using ANOVA. Since we have established earlier that data measured on a Likert scale fails Normality we may consider Nonparametric counterpart of ANOVA, Friedman's test for k-samples. This test is used for testing differences between two or more groups measured on an ordinal scale based on average ratings and can also be used in situations where Normality conditions fail. Following tables present results of Friedman's test.

Ranks

Statements	Mean Response.
Conducive Physical workplace environment is necessary.	3.55
Spaces for gathering need to be available at a short notice.	2.35
Space considerations should be a part of strategic planning.	3.00
People, offices and workstations need to be arranged so that informal, chance contacts are frequent.	2.74
Infrastructure influences the quality of workplace learning.	3.36

One can observe that the average response for all the statements differ significantly. This could also be validated by the fact that there is a significant difference between the groups with the help of Chi-square test statistic. Hence, it could be concluded that the physical environmental factors collectively influence the workplace learning.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of physical factors like the necessity of conducive environment; availability of spaces for gathering, on informal workplace learning; Space consideration being a part of strategic planning; arrangement of people, office and workstations so that frequency of Informal, chance contacts are increased and Infrastructure. This research identified that human resource managers recognize that the physical workplace environment does make an impact on the workplace learning. This finding is consistent with prior literature (Toole, 2001; Lippman et al., 2010; Lohman, 2005)

The research findings indicate that there is the physical workplace environment does influence the workplace learning therefore it can be concluded that there is an interaction that happens not only between communities, groups and individuals, but also between these and the physical factors. The physical environment needs to be a part of the strategic planning of the organization for better learning, and to create a learning organization and develop organizational learning.

This research has several implications to theory and practice. The theoretical implication of this research is that it develops a greater understanding of the physical work environment with relation to workplace learning. The practical implication is information about the physical workplace factors can be used by organizations and human resource professionals to create a conducive work environment to facilitate effective learning at the workplace.

This research is descriptive in nature and it is restricted to a certain context and geographical area. Further research could examine the extent to which the physical workplace factors facilitate learning at the workplace and the influence of these factors on the learning outcomes. Such research would provide further conclusive empirical evidence on this and improve the generalization ability of the findings.

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