

ENHANCING WORK PLACE COMPETENCY THROUGH INNOVATIVE INTEGRATED LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

The present business environment demands innovative integrated learning which is a key driver of growth and productivity. In an economy driven by knowledge management the emphasis is on continuous and instant innovative learning in the organization. The holistic approach to Integrated learning involves the understanding of business requirements and advancements in the sector. The approach focuses on learner's interest for self-directed learning and flexibility within the organization. Many organizations are bound by traditional fixed training schedules with practice of face – to face – learning models at the work place. The integrated learning approach prime focus is on everchanging business needs and interrelationship of learning mechanisms at work place. Innovative Integrated learning plays a prominent role in improving work place competency and performance. It takes various criteria into consideration viz business needs, learners interest, advancement of technology and composition of various innovative models of learning. In the process of implementation the following components needs to be redesigned in terms of knowledge acquisition and transfer, motivation in the process of integrated learning, community formulation to suit life long employability and design of effective integrated learning mechanisms to suit the job requirements. The following article examines the innovative integrated learning mechanism and its role in enhancing work place competency.

Keywords: Innovative Integrated learning, Work Place Competency, Learning, Organization, Business Needs.

INTRODUCTION

In the present competitive business environment timely competency is the engine of business growth and productivity of an organization. In a knowledge based economy there is renewed focus by Organizations to create a culture of continuous learning and competitiveness to sustain and excel in the era of Globalization. A well designed comprehensive customized Innovative Integrated learning mechanism is essential for Organizations to update with the everchanging business needs and customer requirements

Innovative Integrated learning focuses on

- Advancements of technology in respective domains
- Critical analysis of employee skill set with reference to Business requirements
- Bridge the gap between existing employee skill set and advancements in respective domains

- To form learning communities in the organization to facilitate Work based learning
- To evaluate job design and design appropriate innovative learning mechanisms to facilitate employee skill development

Holistic approach

A holistic approach is essential for organizations to create integrated learning environment. Many of the organizations have fixed traditional training schedules content and often use face-to-face learning models. There is a lack of correlation between the training imparted and the business requirements in the particular sector. The holistic approach suggests innovative learning and its integration within various domains in organization. The process involves learning using wide variety of tools, technologies and a blend of various customized solutions to suit different everchanging learning needs and expectations. The prime focus of integrated learning must

be an enterprise-wide solutions to understand the functioning of technology components of various domains in organization. The integrated learning must also account for learner's domain needs and employability skills to further enhance competency of the organization. The learner's experiences and flexibility to adapt to new technologies allows for self directed learning and exchange of resources which adds value to the composition of integrated learning environment

Literature Review

(Schmeidinger, 2005) examines Competence based Business Development (CbBD) that can help organizations in the effective identification, measurement, combination and integration of organizational competencies which are in the form of human competencies, tools and materials. Malhotra Yogesh (2001) The Understanding of Information processing capabilities play an important role in Knowledge Management Activities. Knowledge management emphasizes on interactions between information processing and various aspects of work flow execution and Decision making. Mallach Efrem G. (2002) It is important to understand how Decision support and Data Warehouse systems provide valuable information on business intelligence and performance monitoring of various Business units. The role of Data warehouse as an integrated repository for understanding and evaluating business performance within the environment. Stuart Russell and Peter Norvig (1995) The Application areas of Artificial Intelligence technology and to analyse the often overlooked complexities in deploying advanced technologies to End Users. The use of Artificial Intelligence as a framework to develop Interactive and Innovative applications at Work place Learning Environment. DiLiello, T.C. and Houghton, J.D. (2006) The impact of organizational leadership capacity in developing a model of innovation and creativity. Innovation creativity consists of two distinct elements viz Creative potential and Creative Behavior. Creative potential refers to an individual's creative skills and abilities in an organization and Creative Behavior is the measured result of creative efforts. Efraim Turban, Jay E. Aronson. (1995) Decision Support Systems with distinct features of Artificial Intelligence capabilities results in

knowledge acquisition and transfer within the Organization work environment. It develops a framework for practical application of Cognitive skills and expertise of stakeholders involved in Mutual and Joint Learning processes. (Lidgren, 2002) develops the Range of competence systems and also studies the various barriers of accepting these competence systems in knowledge based organizations.

(Stenmark, 2002) discusses the usage of intranet as a tool in knowledge management for the competence system. (Mostafa, M. 2005) The study detected a statistically significant difference in attitudes towards organisational creativity based on the managers' functional domain areas in the organisation. (E.C. Martins, F. Terblanche. 2003) The determinants of organisational culture were identified. The determinants are strategy, structure, support mechanisms, behaviour that encourages innovation, and open communication. The influence of each determinant on creativity and innovation is discussed. Values, norms and beliefs that play a role in creativity and innovation can either support or inhibit creativity and innovation depending on how they influence individual and group behaviour. (Politis, J. D. 2005). The study has shown that the "stimulant" dimensions of the work environment for creativity have a positive and significant impact on both creativity and productivity.

Innovative Learning Environment

Organizations today are of knowledge based and success and survival depends on innovation at the work place. The creativity of the knowledge workers in respective domains needs to be shared in an organization. Creativity and innovation play an important role in establishing Innovative learning environment in an organization. Many Authors have used the concepts of creativity and innovation interchangeably defining "creativity" as an internal, and intellectual process of bringing about new ideas while "innovation" refers to the practical application of these ideas (Koontz et al., 1980). Innovative learning environment focuses on the nature of thought processes and intellectual events which are used to generate new insights of solutions to problems in

various domains. Innovative learning environment lays emphasis on personal characteristics and intellectual abilities of individuals in coming out with application of creative concepts in an organization.

The following are the important points that the organizations need to follow in designing Integrated Innovative learning environment:

- Organizations need to make a thorough analysis of learning outcomes in respective domains
- The traditional menu of training needs to be avoided and focus shift should be on providing customized solutions to suit the business requirements.
- The innovative learning has to be designed as per learner-centric approach and intellectual capabilities of employees
- Learning environment in an organization should be designed and developed exactly to integrate with various domains across the organization.

Integrated Learning Environment

The following should be given prime importance in the process of designing integrated learning environment.

Analyse the Existing Learning Environment

The existing Learning environment in the organization needs to be thoroughly analysed with focus on advancements in the respective sector. This is a world of change and competition and updation of every domain is of prime importance for organization to be successful in competitive environment.

Re-design Learning environment at Work Place

It is very important to re-design learning environment with thorough investigation of various factors and attributes in employees of various domains in an organization viz conceptual skills, behavioral skills, intellectual capabilities, individual abilities, domain experience and product knowledge update. To co-ordinate and synergize all these qualities in work place it is a challenge for the organization. It is important to design innovative and flexi mode learning environment whereby employees can learn, share and exchange their experiences with reference to business requirements and advancements. These include peer

training, mentoring and networking with various domains in the organization.

Re-define the process of Integrated Learning

The process of Integrated Learning needs to be defined and designed with consultation with professional domain knowledge experts. Employees need to have the right kind of exposure with experts of the domain and know-how this process is essential to gain expertise in the respective sector. The learning process needs to focus on Business requirements in the present context and explore the business demands in the near future. Employees need to undergo a sequence of learning modules which make them proficient and further develop employability skill set to meet business advancements.

Web-portal Learning

Integrated Learning needs to review recent developments in the sector by analyzing the data content in various portals. With the advancements in information technology and internet it is a challenge for learners to update with the speed and developments in the sector. Portals which are useful as part of integrated learning must be embedded in the ongoing innovative learning programs in the organization. Integrated learning is important in the organization and it facilitates knowledge transfer among the employees. The following are the various advantages of integrated learning.

Advantages of Integrated Learning at Work Place

Knowledge Transfer

Integrated learning results in knowledge acquisition and transfer of resources within the organization. In the process Knowledge bank is created with all these small encapsulations for easy updation and retrieval of data bank. This results in the flow of core competence and domain knowledge to the trainees and people who join the organization. Knowledge transfer within the organization across various domains is an important factor for integration to be effective in an organization

Integrated learning minimizes time-to-apply

A systematic approach to integrated learning will eliminate process redundancy and latency. The required learning materials are transferred to the learners and in the

process time-to-apply is minimized and workforce can easily acquire and apply skillset to compete in their respective levels. Time is the constraint and crucial factor in organizations to plan and execute learning programs. Therefore integration in this context helps the learners to update and learn within stipulated time period

Motivation and Flexibility in Integrated learning

Motivation plays a very important role in encouraging employees to learn, share and exchange domain expertise in the organization. Integrated learning supports flexible learning approach and further enriches employee skill set by participation in work based projects. Flexible learning approach helps the employee to select and plan his approach to enrich himself from integrated learning.

Learning communities to support lifelong employability

Employees with similar learning interests and domains tend to form learning communities who expertise in particular subject or domain. Over a period of time learning communities achieve intellectual capital which is of utmost importance for enhancing organization competence. These communities often access knowledge bank to update with the business advancements. In the world of competition organization needs to train its employees before the competition catches up and in the process integrated learning helps the organization to respond to change within short period of time.

Determinants of Culture and Climate for Innovative Integrated Learning Environment

Culture is the primary determinant in the organization for Innovative Integrated Learning Environment to match against changing business requirements. The climate of the organization is created by its employees through organizational practices, procedures, systems implementation and the way day to day activities are carried on in a routine basis. The culture and climate in an organization are reflected by interpersonal relationships, degree of hierarchy, nature of work pressure, stress levels, rewards and recognition. The success of innovative

integrated learning in an organization is primarily dependent on culture prevailing in an organization. Culture may be perceived in terms of cultural norms along with its dimensions of intensity and crystallization. Learning culture exists in an organization with the correlation of degree of intensity and crystallization. The foundation for integrated learning environment is the existence of strong innovative culture interrelating all the components in the work place. Individual factors and organizational factors influence innovative integrated learning at work place to a great extent. Individual factors viz personality traits, cognitive factors, emotional intelligence, motivation and Organizational factors viz structure, hierarchy, layout, leadership, cross functional interaction, flexibility, autonomy and freedom at work place. The various factors viz Corporate vision and mission, Quality management, Balanced autonomy, leadership commitment do have a strong impact on the practice of innovative learning in organization.

Innovation and Competition

Change and competition are the two buzzwords in Globalization era. There is immense competition prevailing in all the sectors and organizations need to design and implement mechanisms to sustain and lead in competitive markets. In the world of competition life cycle of the product shortens and products become obsolete within short period of time. As a result the pressure to innovate and launch new products increases to match customer tastes and preferences. Due to never ending quest for quality and performance of new products innovation process is constantly evolving as a challenge for organizations. The success of organizations are based on design and implementation of innovative integrated learning environment to equip and nourish employees on creativity and innovation. As competitive pressure increases the need for innovation and creativity becomes inevitable for organizations to sustain in the future.

Advantages of Work-based projects as part of Innovative Integrated Learning:

- Work based projects facilitates Integrated learning by bringing employees from specific domain areas

together to work on enhancing competency

- They facilitate team working and exchange of skill set among the employees
- Renewed focus on the processes and procedures practiced at the work place and ways to improve continuously.
- Through Work based projects experience of work place personnel can be shared and exchanged with other employees
- Instrumental and helps the management to meet their compliance requirements and standards specification
- Empowers employees on processes and procedures followed in the organization and motivates employees to design innovative procedures in future.
- Encourages employees to share Peer knowledge and promotes lifelong employability skills
- Enables employees to form life long learning communities to exchange talent and skillset from one another
- Facilitates communication flow across the organization and promotes interactive communication within various domains in the organization.
- All the levels of the organization gain a clear understanding of workplace issues and its impact on employee performance and productivity of the organization.
- Helps to develop core competencies and harnesses skill set of employees to face competition with confidence

The first step in Gap analysis (Figure 1) is to have a thorough analysis of business advancements in the concerned sector. In the world of competition and globalization new products are launched within short period of time and products become obsolete within short product life cycle. Analyzing business advancements in particular sectors gives the organization a direction to excel in product research. In the second step analysis of available resources in the organization needs to be reviewed and

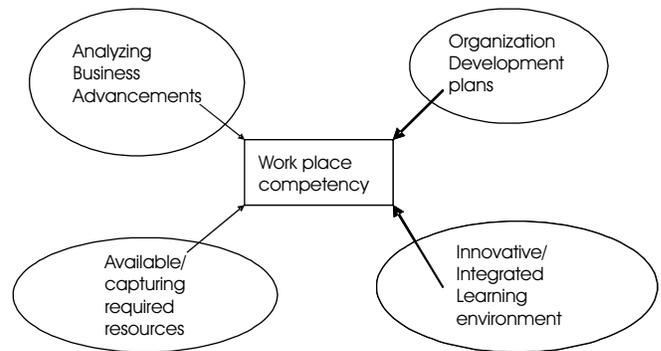


Figure 1. Gap Analysis for Enhancing Competency in Organization

the required resources are to be planned. In the third step learning environment needs to be integrated across various domains to share and exchange knowledge expertise. In the process of integration there is a great scope for core competence enrichment of various domains and knowledge transfer in the organization. Finally a continuous implementation of all the three steps will result in Organization excellence and development to sustain in cut-throat competition.

To survive in the world of globalization and cut-throat competition an organization needs to be competent to survive and compete with everchanging business requirements. The various elements (Figure 2) in the Organization viz climate, culture, structure, resources, technology, employee skill set, peer-knowledge and core competencies are to be interrelated and integrated with Learning environment. Practical implementation of new ideas , mechanisms across various domains will further facilitate innovation at work place. Effective integration of various components in the organization will result in

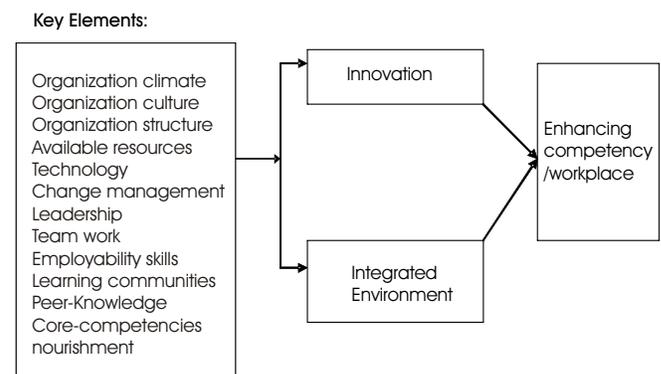


Figure 2. Enhancing Competency through Innovative Integrated Learning

enhancing work place competence and further paves way for organization excellence.

Conclusion

Work place competency plays an important role in the present global competitive environment. It can be enhanced by providing innovative integrated learning environment. All the key elements in the organization needs to be interrelated for effective participation in integrated learning environment. Innovation is the order of the day and all organizations are in a rush to launch new innovative products and take the first mover advantage in the markets. Due to innovation product life cycle has become short and products are in obsolete stage within short period of time. Integrated learning should be a part of employees commitment towards the organization and prime focus should be on knowledge transfer and employability skills. A proper design of innovative integrated learning environment is essential to enhance the work place competency and achieve expertise in core-competencies.

The core competencies are strategically important for an organization as they cannot be copied, acquired or imitated by competitors. A well designed learning environment interlinking various key elements like culture, climate, leadership, peer knowledge and learning communities are vital for enhancing work place competency in an organization.

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