
REVIEW OF THEORY OF HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT TRAINING (LEARNING) PARTICIPATION

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Abstract

Studies on training (learning) participation in human resources development program in the organizations are very sparse despite its importance in human resources development activities. This article tends to focus attention on identifying the factors influencing the training participation in human resources development intervention. This topic is very important in human resources development research because of the increasing concerns on e-learning drop-out rate, HRD measurement and evaluation.

A comprehensive review of literature is presented to identify research gap in participation and completion of HRD – related intervention program. A conceptual framework of HRD training participation is proposed to describe the pattern, factors, structure and the interrelationship between the variables. Finally, the usefulness and applicability of the theory is discussed. In addition, the implication for future research will be discussed in detail.

INTRODUCTION

Training intervention in human resources development is very crucial issue in an organization. To an organization, it is regarded as a means to achieve effective human resources development objectives. The effectiveness of HRD program depends on the degree of participation of employees' and hence, reflects in the intended business outcome. Unlike in adult education research, the employee participates in HRD has received little attention among the researchers. Presently, there is need for research on training participation because of the concern low participation and high drop-out rate of e-learning within the industry.

According to a report cited by ASTD & The masie center (2001) only about 69 per cent of employees participated in mandatory e-learning while 32 per cent of employees participated in voluntary training. Another report confirms that more than 70 per cent of participants in the e-learning training program do not complete the online program schedule. This is refers to as an 'embarrassing secret' corporate learning.

There is a clear indication that technology enhancing e-learning training program are faced with some challenges in attracting participant to actively participate to completion. This challenge makes it necessary to conduct research an in-depth research on this concept with the intention of finding the appropriate theory that will provide an insight for the practicing manager to deploy an effective strategy to improve employees' participation and preference for e learning intervention program.

SIGNIFICANCE

The significance of building a well conceived theory of training participation in HRD program need further comments. The intervention program is an investment activity with associated cost for the organization (Wang, Dua, & Li, 2002). Participation to completion Is therefore a precondition for such an investment to be meaningful, productive and fruitful.

Hence given attention to this topic and identifying important variables influencing participation through a well conceived theory will provides organization with important approach to human capital investment.

Second, understanding the pattern and factors determining learning participation will enable organization to develop policies and strategies to effectively motivate and increase employees' participation. On the other hand, the drop-out rate will be brought to lowest minimum.

Kirkpartrick (1998) describe four level of learning evaluation, while other theories have based their assumption that training participation and completion is not a serious issue, his emphasis that without employees' participation there would be no outcome to measure them.

Few empirical studies has linked employee participation in training program with outcome evaluation (Baldwin, Magjuk, & Lother, 1991; Hicks & Klimoski, 1987; Maurer & Tarulli, 1994). The relationship between learning outcome measurement and training participation are of interest to the practicing managers. Spitzer (2004) argued that training participation should be treated as zero level with respect to four level evaluation proposed. Here, only those who participate actively to completion would be considered in the evaluation and measurement HRD intervention program. None the less, all the group including the drop out, and those who are totally absent are very relevant regarding the investment and potential business outcome of HRD intervention.

Most training program are initiated and sponsored by the organizations as a step toward achieving its goal, this decision are made by the management. It is important to note that research on participation of training program is very sparse most issue on this topic came alive on human resources literature around late 1980's.

Hick and Klinoski (1987) conducted a study examining the relationship between employee degrees of choices in the form of receiving information, when selecting a training program. The group of employees that seen themselves as having a high level of freedom to participate in training are reported to have a favorable post training reactions and a clear sense of achievement than those who are compelled or having little freedom of choice. This research is conducted through field experiment. Baldwin et al, (1991) use similar experimental design to investigate the effect of training choices on training outcome and subsequent motivation and learning process. The study stresses the important role of providing choices of participation as a motivational strategy in training context. On the other hand, the study finds out that if employees do not receives the kind of training they choose, it will definitely leads to poor motivation and the learning outcome will be very poor.

Noe and Wilk (1993) explores the factors influencing employees participation in the training program, some of the factors identified are self-efficacy and work environment perception as reinforced by learning attitude and the developmental needs perception. Through empirical studies, motivation to learn was observed to be important attitudinal variables.

An expectancy-valence model was proposed by Robinson (1997) to address the combination of social and structural division of adult learners. In this model, the decision to participate was affected by a combination of negative and positive forces within the socio-economic environment.

The theories and model explain previously, deal with adult learning in general. Their applicability to human resources development is a subject certain limitations. These models are developed for the purpose of assisting the policy makers in devising a commonly based adult education program and policies. (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). However, human resources development program are organizational based and are structured to achieve certain organization's objectives. Therefore, the variables that determine participation learning in adult education may vary from that of human resources development program in an organization.

Learning program in an organization are drawn towards enhance job performance and improve productivity. Employees are required to participate in the training program as a requisite for improvement in job performance. Therefore, the decision to participate comes from the organization. However, for employees to participate in a training program that are not recognized by the organizations he or she must obtained an approval from the supervisor who will use his discretion to judge the relevance of the training to the overall goal of the organization.

The motivating factors that influence decision to participate in the training program are centre around organizational goal, for instance, meeting management expectation rather than the individual personal interest which often the case in adult learning, the desire for self enrichment (Moller, 1967).

Toward building theory with respect to learning participation in human resources development, it is important to analyze and understand the nature, pattern and the parameters that determine employee's learning participatory behaviors. Next is to identify the effective strategies to assist organizations achieve the objective of employee's performance improvement and invariably contribute to business objectives.

Training intervention in human resources development is an investment activity for the organization (Wang, Dou & Li, 2002). It is necessary for employees to fully participate in the program for the investment to be meaningful productive and fruitful.

Studying on this subject will assist in understanding the factors influencing learning behavior in organization, and this will assist organization in developing strategies and policies to effectively encourage, motivate and support employees active participation.

Building on the previous research on employee's participation in training, this article will examine the characteristics of employee participation and decision making process.

The following section will examine literature on learning participation and motivation in human resources development training intervention. The next section will present conceptual framework of learning participation in human resources or the construct describe the factors and their relationships.

REVIEW OF PREVIOUS LITERATURE

This section review and analyze the previous studies on the human resources development and adult education to establish a ground for building a learning participation theory for human resources development program.

Learning participation theories are directly linked with learning motivational theories because motivation to learn comes first before the full and effective participation in training.

An investigation of motivational theory in adult learning was initiated by Houle (1961). Houle through interview technique of study adult education identified three categories of learning motivation; goal oriented, activity oriented and learning oriented. Several researches such as Sheffield (1964), Burgress (1971), and Boshier (1971) further did n exclusive study on this subject of learning motivation. Learning motivation typology was expanded into six motivating factors to explain the concept of learning participation in adult education, these includes social relationship, external expectations, social welfare, professional advancement, stimulation and cognitive interest.

Several theories emerged following the research development in motivational factors that explore and describe adult participation and involvement in the learning activities. Miller (1967) applies the combination of Lewin (1947) force-field theory with Maslow's theory of motivation hierarchy to identify the that significantly influence different learning outcome. Their empirical investigation also confirm that employee's perception of managers and peer support for career development activities and the working environment affects their participation in the training program.

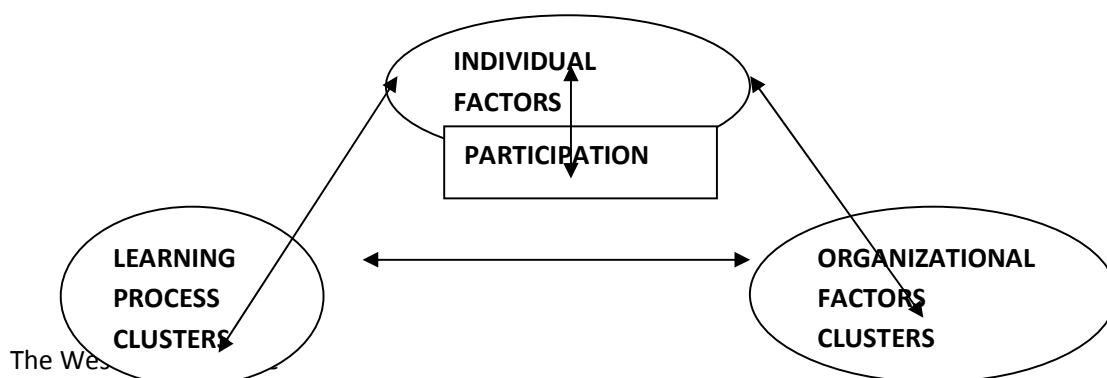
In recent years, an evaluation of training program was conducted to examine the relationship between interest and participation in voluntary training program. Three groups of construct were made, these includes, perceived environment, perceived incentive and outcome, and personal variables. The study shows that individual personal characteristics accounted for the variation in training participation, such characteristics includes career insight, skill development, self efficacy and job involvement(...

Maurer (2002) has build on previous theory and empirical studies on training participation and similarly, proposed an employee training and development orientation (ELDO) model. Being the first theoretical explanation of training participation, Maurer, states that ELDO examines the personal disposition to training, and its relevance to employees' career development. He therefore concludes that learning is directly a product of motivation.

An interesting finding on the studies of training participation is that it has shown similar pattern in the factors influencing the behavior of employees regarding participation in training across different organization, industries and job functions (Maurer & Tarulli, 1994). The information derived from the broad studies provides the basis for building a comprehensive theory on training participation in human resources development program.

It is observed that research on training participation is very sparse given the fast changing business environment and the growing concern about human resources development program participation and its effect in organizational performance. It is important for the human resources development scholars to develop training participation theories to facilitate human resources development program.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



Two major decisions are very important in human resources development program, these are, the decision to participate and the decision whether to complete the train or drop out.

The first decision is basically made by the management and respective individual, even with respect to training seen as voluntary. Some decisions must be reached by the management. In most cases, the decisions of the management are being informed by business consideration and are determined by the supervisors either directly or indirectly.

Moreover, when an employee have thoroughly engaged or enlisted in the training program, he or she is desired to follow up the learning process till completion or either decides to drop out along the way without completion. This second level of decision is solely made by the employees' participating. According to Baldwin et al, (1991) training participation in human development is conceptualized as a multi dimensional construct that could be of different forms. As can be seen from the diagram, three major variables influences employee's participation either to complete or drop out of the training. These factors are inform of clusters and can be depict by the followings, Individual, training process and organizations.

The mediating variables to these major factors are environmental factors. Environmental factors may be influenced under different circumstances by economic downturn, high unemployment in some sectors. The effect of this moderating factor will be apparent by affecting one or more of these factors.

Based on the theoretical and empirical evidences from the literature, six factors are identified in the individual factors; these includes motivation, self-efficacy, personal qualities, technological affinity and cultural differences.

Motivation:

Several empirical studies have shown that employee's motivation is a major variable of interest in finding the level of participation in training program (Allen, 1999; Farr & Middlebrook, 1990; Kozlowski & Farr, 1988; Maurer, 1999; Noe & Wilk, 1993). Motivation can be defined as certain psychological characteristic which enables an individual to behave in certain form in order to accomplish a specific pre-defined goal. This can be further expanded to include motivation to learn, career insight, and job involvement.

Motivation to learn refers to the effort required to complete a training task (Machin & Forgarty, 1997). It is observed to have a positive relationship with the rate of participation in training activities (Nie & Wilk, 1993). Career insight refers to extent to which an employee possess an adequate understanding of the knowledge related to his career, which includes strength and weakness as well as career goal plan (Maurer & Tarulli, 1994; Noe & Wilk, 1993). Job involvement according Maurer and Tarulli (1994) is the extent to which an employee's views work as an important life pursuant. Admittedly, an employee with high consideration for work is likely to participate actively to completion in job related training program.

Self efficacy:

Empirical evidences have shown that self efficacy is an important determinant of participation in training, learning and development program (Maurer, 2002; Maurer & Tarulli, 1994; Noe & Wilk, 1993). It is defined as the principle and assurance exhibited in accomplishing a task or addressing a challenge in training (Baudara, 1977). When an employee has self assurance about training outcome there is likelihood that such employee will participates actively in the training and learning to completion.

Organization membership:

These include work title, tenure and organizational tenure. This has been found to have an important relationship with participation in training (Wang, 1997). In an environment with union activities, the union membership is an important variable in training participation (Kozlowski & Farr, 1988).

Employee's personal characteristics:

Among the variable included in this clusters are age, gender, educational background, ethnic group and in some cases marital status. These are significant determinants of training participation (Wang, 1997). In some cases training programs initiated by an organization often take too much time, in such case employee with children are likely to drop out than those ladies that are single and without nursing children. Cultural differences may also influence the training participation and whether the individual will complete the program or drop out. This is peculiar to Multinational Corporation that operates in different geographical locations.

Learning style:

This represents the cognitive and affective factor which is an indicator of how a learner perceives and respond to the training environment (Keefi, 1979). The cognitive style may represent an information process model which depicts a personal way of thinking, perceiving and solving problem. It may not directly influence the initial decision to participate but may be very important in the decision as to whether the individual will complete the training or drop out of the process (O'Connor & Sceifert, 2003).

Perceived learning needs:

Training needs as describe by Noe &Wilk (1993) have two basic aspect, awareness of training needs and the level of agreement with the organizational training needs assessment. Employee who perceives the training needs assessment conducted by the organization as accurate will more likely to participate in the training program and actively to completion.

Perceived benefits:

According to Nordhang (1989), the perceived benefits comprises of three facets that together increase the rate of participation and completion of the learning program. (i) Development of training motivation, for instance, the desire to participate in future training program and the desire to learn. (ii) In quest for career development (I e more tasking and interesting assignment and promotion). (iii)The desire for self actualization and improved ability to participate in extra mural activities, this is often refers to as psychosocial development. On the other hand, the third aspect is applicable to the traditional learning settings such as classroom, and it may negatively affect participation and completion of the technology enhanced training program.

Learning technology orientation:

Employee's perceive attitude towards technology training is examine and the aptitude or inclination toward technology such as internet. It is unimaginable for an individual that is technology phobia, who cannot operate simple appliances to attend and complete a multi- media online training program. This is an important variable that determines the rate of completion or drop out of technology- based learning program.

Cultural orientation:

Cultural orientation influences individual behavior and attitude towards learning participation and completion or drop out. Di Maggio (1997) identified culture as influencing individual cognitive process. It be inferred from these studies that individual cultural orientation influences learning participation and whether such individual complete or drop out. This is of course relevant with the increasing globalization and diversity; employee's culture should be taken into consideration in the participation learning research.

Learning process construct:

Regardless of whether the previous research is based on general adult learning or management based, most empirical studies have not considered the potential impact of variables associated with learning process. These variable identified are found to be very potent in examining the learner's motivation and persistent during training program. As suggest in the recent studies Wang et al, (2003, 2004) on participation and completion of electronic based learning (e learning) program in United States, and similarly in other international environments. As a result, a comprehensive theory on participation could not be established in absence of the learning process clusters.

Learning process begins once the employees have shown interest in participating in human resources development program, it is now left for employee to determine the relevance of the training program and this will impact on whether the employee will complete the training or drop out of it. The variable underlying the learning process, not only determine the learning persistence, but they in addition, influence the learning outcome, attitudinal and behavioral changes and ultimately business performance. The following are the variables in the learning process clusters, training needs assessment, instructional design, delivery platform or methods, technology –based learning environment and facilitators or instructor. Each of these variables is explain below in relation to the decision of the training participants either to complete or drop out.

Training Need Assessment:

Rothwell &Sredl (1992) describe training needs assessment as the initial movement toward developing human resources development program, the subsequent learning instruction are basically depend on proper identification or assessment of the training needs. If the need assessment is inaccurate, the learners are most likely to drop out, no matter how motivated they may be.

Quality instructional design:

Quality instructional design links training with content of training (Reigeluth, 1980) because it facilitates the learning process and full understanding among the participants. An excellent quality design is likely to inspire, attract and retain learners till the completion of the program. A factor with quality instructional design is interactivity, that is the capacity to control direct activity and coordinate communication among the participants, tutors and the training content (Driscoll, 2002). Research has shown that inaccurate design of instructional interactivity could lead to boredom, frustration and overload (Berge, 1999) and this could eventually leads to drop out rate in training program especially in electronic training program.

Learning delivery methodology, such as classroom settings and internet based also influences behaviors regarding whether a participants will complete or drop out. Recent empirical studies suggest that there is no significant difference between technology-based and traditional classroom learning (Rusell, 1999). The critique of Ruselli (1999) studies shows that the study samples are based on sample of participants who completed training program without given consideration to the drop-out participant. When considering the cost and consequences associated with drop out, the difference will be significant.

Instructor and Facilitator:

Instructor makes the training program interesting to the participants. The delivery style of the facilitators plays a vital role in retaining the learners to the completion of the training program (Siebat, 2000). The qualities of good instructor and facilitator are as given below; flexible and adaptable, responsive, accessible, having in-depth knowledge of the subject matter, courageous and open , among several other characteristics (Collisio, Elbaum, Salam, 2000; Haavid & Tinker, 2000). Facilitators or instructors that are not equipped with this attributes are notlikely to motivate and retain training participants to completion in both traditional and technology based training program.

Organizational Cluster:

Organization distinguished participants of learning between adult learning and human resources development motivated training program. Some literature has identified organizational factors such as organizational context, policies and regulation, and job content.

Organizational context: Comprises of the following variables, organizational philosophy, learning culture and organizational social support.

Organizational philosophy refers to the extent to which employee are regarded as human capital for both present and future achievement of organizational objectives (Maurer, 2000).

Learning culture refers to sets principles, attitude, values and practices that supports and encourage continuous learning process for the organization and its members (Conner & Clawson, 2002).

Organizational support: is the combination of influences from management, supervisors and peer group (feedback and follow-up), these factors influences participation in training program (Maurer & Tarulli, 1994). Employee in an environment with philosophy favorable to learning culture and receives appropriate supports are likely to participate actively in training program to completion.

Organizational policies and regulation: as a matter of fact it could either encourage or discourage employees learning participation. Policies seeking learning opportunity for employee will encourage employees' participation in the human resources development training program.

Job content: may include variables like job enrichment and job enlargement, challenges confronting employee's on the job. This could influence participation in human resources development learning program in such a way of affecting employee's attitude and self-efficacy with respect to the performance and competence, and eventually motivate them to participate actively to completion with the expectation of acquiring more knowledge and skill needed for improved job performance (Maurer, 2000).

Environment factors:

Two factors are identified has having direct impact on participation and completion of training program. The factors are general economic condition and environmental disaster. Wang (1997) empirical study states that learning opportunity is negatively related to unemployment rate. An increase in unemployment rate appears to be directly related with a higher decrease in the probability of organization offering training program to the employees. It may also conclude that high unemployment rate may boost participatory rate.

Adverse environmental variables such as uncontrollable natural disasters can lead to unexpected outcome in training program regarding the full participation. One interesting illustration is the case of China electronic training program,

participation have been rising to the highest level, especially among the multi-nationals, suddenly, the outbreak of SARS in 2003 forced most company to close operation because of the concern for the spread of the virus (Wang, 2004).

Factor influencing training participation:

If an individual recognize that the content of training fits well to his or her educational background or a personal learning needs, he or she will actively participate in training program up to completion in order to maximize the advantage offers by the training to acquire skill and knowledge that hitherto may be lacking. Similarly, if the training program is constructed in a way that followed a well structure learning theories and instructional design principles, learners may find it more interesting and inspiring to participate up to completion.

Although variables in individual construct cluster may be associated with organizational factors. Changes inflicted by the challenges confronting organization either internally or externally such as market competition and cultural changes may induce training opportunity for employee to participate in different training program. Employees with requisite skill and knowledge may reinforce and strengthened the organizational factors and eventually create stronger organizational commitment to human resources development program.

The factors influencing training process could also have direct and indirect link with organizational variables in the conceptual frame work because the training curriculum and objective are somewhat aligned with the business goal and organization are continuously in search of best method of delivery the impact points of the subject matter to achieve the stated business objectives. The practice of learning management system (LCMS) and learning content management system (LCMS) lend credence to the practices.

Technological factors are underlying the three clusters of conceptual framework, an organization may apply technology as a motivational mechanism for full participation in training such as monitoring and tracking individual employee involvement in training and learning program in such a way to promote completion of learning process without drop-out. The practice is more prevailing in integrating the training processes within organizational factors.

The conceptual framework and the construct were developed based on the previous literature and could be applied to the variety of human resources development program such as traditional classroom settings, mentoring program and electronic learning program (e learning).

Decisions making process: Participation and Completion

It is necessary to explain the participation and completion of human resources development intervention in terms of decision making. Organization takes decision for training intervention based on overriding business objectives. It may be as a result of new product or services lunched into the market, changes in business strategy or a result of increase in competition.

Generally, cross sectional studies at organizational level required less effort on data collection. The result obtained may assist the managers in directing their effort in identified major determining factors of employee participation and whether they will complete the learning intervention or drop out because of several factors. The manager can take advantage of their knowledge and skill to address various factors contributing to drop out in training.

The propose framework can also guide the empirical qualitative study, the qualitative research in human resources development may use the construct and the process described to guide their thinking in research design to facilitates the development of interviews questions. In other words, the proposed theory can also take advantage of the distinctive characteristics of qualitative research such as purposeful sampling and inductive analytical research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Generally, the adaptability underlying the qualitative research enable the human resources development scholars to be flexible and responsive to the context, explore from comprehensive view of training participation, completion and drop-out rate; gathering and exploring the data that may be new or quite different from the existing ones; and build theory from an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon derived from the field.

In summary, the discussion above from the proposed model can be empirically used to study the participation and completion phenomenon. In addition, it gives an insight on how to enable the managers to improve on participatory rate in the human resources development program. Prior studies on human resources development participatory have provided feasible empirical basis to validate those variables included in individual learning process (Wang et al, 2003, 2004), organization and environment clusters (Noe & Wilk, 1993; Hick & Klimoski, 1987; Maurer & Taurulli, 1994).

Implication for Human resources development research

The theory of training participation in human resources development program discuss in this article has an important implication for the development of future research in human resources development and theory building.

First, the theory provides a framework for exploring the less focus area of research.

Second, the theory proposed strong link between participation and completion with understanding the relationship between participatory behavior and process. The theory raises certain issues with respect to; return on investment (ROI), measurement practices, it also include the following question, should drop-out be considered as part of learning program cost, if yes, what is the method of measuring ROI to include the drop -out cost.

Lastly, the theory provides an analytical tool for research in human resources development to explore and understand the electronic learning participation and drop-out rate as much as for the traditional Human resources development program.

Still till today, little is known regarding the nature, pattern and behavior of both mandatory and voluntary of traditional human resources development program to full scale. Little is also known about factors affecting e-learning participation and drop-out rate beside the information reported by the press and industry survey. Much more research needs to be done in this area. The theoretical model demand from this will provides a platform for human resources development researchers and managers alike to study and further understand the participation and completion of both traditional and e-learning approach to human resources development program.

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