
Workplace learning: developing an holistic model

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Abstract

Investigates the real meaning of workplace learning by looking at definitions used by academics to describe how individuals and organisations attach different meanings to the phrase. Goes on to suggest that for workplace learning to work in any situation, certain opportunities, conditions and features need to be in evidence, although workplace learning can take a variety of forms, including formal, informal and incidental learning. Looks at various learning paradigms and models, including the latest patterns of development and learning in response to new demands placed upon employees and organisations and uses the examples of the “new” universities in Australia to illustrate the increase in workplace learning. Concludes that there is increasing recognition for workplace learning, but that employees must realise the benefits of workplace learning in order for the organisation to evolve into a learning organisation.

Over the last 50 years there has been a growing emphasis placed on the importance of work-related training and development, and more recently this has been extended to the idea of workplace learning and organisational learning. Rapid change, competition between local and international organisations, and the apparent skills deficit of employees, have led many organisations to consider the role of their workforce, and how they can be assisted in meeting the new demands being placed upon them by the ever changing work environment. However, despite recognition of the need to improve employee skills, the issue of workplace learning is surrounded by confusion and indecision. Workplace learning is extremely complex, and involves more than simple training and development issues. An understanding of the concept and application of workplace learning requires the integration of a range of diverse factors, such as:

- adult learning theory;
- learning paradigms;
- organisational needs; and
- individual interests;

which together can result in positive workplace learning. The nature of the work environment, the pace of change, the use of technology, the teaching and learning styles used, and the individual and organisational perception of learning in and for the workplace, all have an impact on how learning takes place and whether or not it is successful. The following discussion introduces a number of ideas aimed at clarifying the development, contextual and conditional factors which are necessary for workplace learning. In developing the need for a change in focus a model of workplace learning is presented. The proposed model of workplace learning outlined in this paper draws upon a variety of ideas presented by recognised academics, and includes elements of relevance for most workplaces.

Identifying the concept of workplace learning

Despite the relatively recent emergence of workplace learning as an important trend, and a concern of organisations, it is not a new idea. Various forms of workplace learning have existed since the beginning of formal and informal work patterns. The focus or emphasis of the learning may have changed,

along with the name used; but some form of learning was taking place.

Argyris and Schon (1978, p. 9) argued that the current economic, political and technological environment is characterised by instability, with organisations existing and operating within this instability, needing to understand how learning becomes a continuous part of its activities, not a sporadic or occasional issue. This need is also reflected in all areas of society, business and government, generally with improved productivity and efficiency the most publicised issues of concern. Indeed Cropley (1977, pp. 22–8) argued that concern for equity in education, economic considerations, social change, technological factors, and vocational issues have a significant impact on today's society and work environment. In this respect the current push for workplace learning is in response to the rapid and diverse changes taking place in these environments. Patrickson *et al.* (1995, pp. 13–14), on the other hand, suggest that the factors that have brought about the change in management focus include: rapid technological change, workforce diversity, internationalisation and competition, increased costs, and the growth in participant decision making.

Given the emphasis being placed on the importance of workplace learning, an examination of the concept and the elements involved in workplace learning is necessary. Workplace learning is a concept which is hard to define and is considered to cover many different activities. Indeed, any definition of workplace learning will potentially be constrained by the perception held of the "workplace". Most people view the workplace as a physical location, within which they perform the tasks required of their job. However, the view used for the purposes of this discussion is considerably broader. A workplace is understood to include the physical location, shared meanings, ideas, behaviours and attitudes which determine the working environment and relationships. An individual can physically work in another location, such as at home, but still be and see themselves as an integral part of the "workplace". For example, many academic staff within the university system do a considerable amount of their work, such as marking, at home; but are still working for the university.

A broad definition of workplace learning, which emphasised the importance of

interpersonal and contextual influences, was proposed by Marsick (1987, p. 4, as quoted in NBEET, 1994, p. 10). She argued that workplace learning was:

...the way in which individuals or groups acquire, interpret, reorganise, change or assimilate a related cluster of information, skills and feelings. It is also primary to the way in which people construct meaning in their personal and shared organisational lives.

The way individuals learn, and how they respond to change, are key issues within this definition. Both of these factors are underpinned by the learning context and the reason for learning.

Holliday and Retallick (1995, p. 7) stated that:

Workplace learning refers to the processes and outcomes of learning that individual employees and groups of employees undertake under the auspices of a particular workplace.

This definition is particularly useful as it draws attention to the need to examine both the processes and outcomes of learning.

Rylatt (1994, p. 10) describes workplace learning as:

a sustained and high leverage development of employees in line with organisational business outcomes.

The emphasis within this definition is on the issue of sustained development.

These definitions focus on different, but related, aspects of learning in the workplace. However, each assumes that learning is necessary for individual and organisational development, and that workplace learning in particular should be broader than simply a process of training and development for specific tasks.

By integrating the key issues of each of these definitions it is possible to develop a workplace learning definition which is applicable for use in most organisational situations. The key issues have been identified as:

- the learning context;
- the learning reason;
- the learning process;
- the learning outcomes; and
- sustained development.

The following definition is proposed as a working definition of workplace learning that will underpin the argument and model developed within this paper:

Workplace learning involves the process of reasoned learning towards desirable outcomes for the individual and the organisation. These

outcomes should foster the sustained development of both the individual and the organisation, within the present and future context of organisational goals and individual career development.

The above discussion serves as a good illustration of the breadth of the workplace learning concept, and how individuals and organisations attach different meanings and understanding to its application and outcome in the work setting. The final integrated definition of workplace learning is equally applicable to any organisation and situation. The principal argument within this definition is that any workplace learning should produce desirable outcomes for the individual and the organisation, which will assist their present and future development.

Creating an environment conducive to workplace learning

For workplace learning to achieve its stated objectives, certain learning opportunities, conditions, and features need to be evident within the workplace. Learning opportunities in the workplace are affected by the characteristics of the workplace, and the conditions of the work environment. Any attempts to improve the organisation's efficiency, productivity, profit, or quality must begin by closely examining the workplace. The nature of the workplace will determine how work is carried out, what type of learning is required, and how the emphasis on continued workplace learning will be received by employees. Goal clarity, evaluation of learning outcomes, the interpersonal relationships of group members, the degree of isolation and collaboration between individuals, and the level of involvement in decision making, affect what type of learning takes place and how (adapted from Rosenholtz, 1989, as cited in NBEET, 1994, p. 14).

Closely related to the importance of learning opportunities is the view that workplace learning should take place within certain workplace conditions. Holliday (1994, p. 2) described workplace learning conditions as: ...states of being, thinking or acting that promote, through their presence, processes of learning. They are conditions through which workers learn. This is a different (although related) concept from learning for a condition, or learning about a condition.

which he considered very important.

Conditions relating to the individual's view of themselves and their relationship to others within the workplace are viewed by Holliday (1994, pp. 2–13) to be particularly important for individual learning. The five conditions emphasised were:

- (1) *Self* – the individual's need for a positive feeling about him/her self as a person.
- (2) *Personal meaning* – the individual's ability to reach an understanding of him/herself and his/her learning.
- (3) *Action* – the ability of the individual to develop, apply, and measure the use of his own, and other people's ideas in the workplace; and to learn from the experience.
- (4) *Collegiality* – the individual's capacity to learn with and from colleagues in both a direct and indirect way.
- (5) *Empowerment* – the ability of the individual to “feel a sense of ownership, autonomy, self-control and self-direction over their decisions and actions, including over the processes and outcomes of their learning”.

While the conditions outlined by Holliday (1994) are expressly related to teachers within the school environment, they have equal relevance to other organisational settings.

Identifying workplace learning

Workplace learning is not just any form of learning which takes place within a work environment; it can be formal, informal or incidental. Resnick (1987) and Scribner (1986) (as cited in NBEET, 1994, p. 11) argued that learning within the workplace has a number of features which distinguish it from other types of learning. Learning in the workplace:

- is task focused;
- occurs in a social context characterised by status differences and the risk to one's livelihood;
- is collaborative and often grows out of an experience or a problem for which there is no knowledge base;
- occurs in a political and economic context characterised by a currency of favours and pay for knowledge; and
- is cognitively different from learning in schools (NBEET, 1994, p. 11).

Any form of workplace learning requires a change on the part of the individual and/or

the organisation. This change can take many forms, behavioural or attitudinal; but all change requires an adjustment in the individuals thinking and actions. Estes (1975, p. 9 as quoted in Watkins, 1991, p. 9) argued that "learning always refers to some systematic change in behaviour or behavioural disposition that occurs as a consequence of experience in some specific situation". How an individual or organisation responds to change can have an effect on workplace learning. Issues such as the provision of time and information, the change of culture, the speed of change assimilation, the learning style used, and possible feelings of loss, struggle, anxiety, and resistance to change all need to be addressed when introducing change into the workplace (Holliday and Retallick, 1995).

The type of learning, and the learning styles in the workplace, are largely determined by the learning paradigm of the organisation. Learning paradigms are concerned with how people learn within an organisation and what type of learning is considered to be most important. Marsick (1987, pp. 11–16) has stated that the application and development of workplace learning should be closely tied to the organisation's learning paradigm. The selection of a learning paradigm in any organisation is governed by its goals, strategy, flexibility, and willingness and ability to take risks. Through an examination of these, and other organisational characteristics, Carr and Kemmis (cited in Marsick, 1987, p. 13) identified three paradigms of learning: technical, interpretative and strategic. Each involves the application of different approaches to teaching and learning, and each is based upon different underlying assumptions.

The first of these paradigms is the "Technical paradigm", which is the dominant paradigm in most organisations. Its focus is on the acquisition of specified bodies of knowledge or skills to meet identified task or job requirements. The second approach, the "Interpretative paradigm", involves more interaction on the part of the learner, and aims to help the learner to understand situations, events, experience and personal judgment. The importance of learning from past experience and judgment is the key learning tool in this paradigm. The final paradigm described (Marsick, 1987, p. 13), is the "Strategic paradigm". This approach involves a critical examination of underlying assumptions, values and beliefs on the part of both the teacher and learner. The

most useful learning tool for this paradigm is open dialogue, which promotes discussion of ideas, views and opinions.

Mezirow (cited in Marsick, 1987, pp. 16–17) presented a similar model of learning. He described three domains of learning: instrumental, dialogic and self-reflective. These domains reflect those described by Carr and Kemmis. Instrumental learning is task-oriented, and focuses on how to do a job better. Dialogic learning involves the individual's understanding and interpretation of norms, policies, procedures and goals. Self-reflective learning is concerned with the individual's self-understanding. The primary concern of self-reflective learning is personal change.

The dominant learning paradigm in any organisation is reflective of the objectives of workplace learning within that organisation. Within a university, workplace learning encompasses a wide variety of goals and objectives, both individual and organisational. Elements of all three paradigms proposed by Carr and Kemmis can be seen in the learning taking place. This approach is necessary as it is important to be able to grasp some of the basic functional and technical skills before the individual can move on to an examination of the underlying assumptions or the application of certain skills. A basic understanding of the different techniques is essential before choosing which method to apply, and before any critical reflection is possible. The use of the interpretative and strategic paradigms can only be successful after the acquisition of technical skills in this particular case. This example also corresponds to the model presented by Mezirow who stressed that "Instrumental, dialogic and self-reflective learning cannot easily be separated in any given situation" (Marsick, 1987, p. 17).

The current trend towards increased workplace learning, according to Watkins and Marsick (1992, p. 287), is "fuelled by rapid changes in the global market-place that have pushed many organisations to work, organise, think and learn in very different ways". This trend is reflected in different ways, both at the individual and organisational level. For example, the increased provision of various training programs, the use of different approaches to work (i.e. home-based work, job sharing, flexible hours, teams, etc.) and participative decision making, are a good illustration of the wide variety of means by which individuals and organisations work in today's environment.

The patterns of workplace training, development, and learning are changing to meet the new demands being placed upon employees and organisations. There has been an overall increase in the provision of employer-based training within all industries and occupations; which Carnevale and Carnevale (1994, p. s22) argued is a reflection of the increased commitment of employers, and a move towards the development of a culture of lifelong learning. However, the push for increased workplace learning is not just from organisations. More and more, individuals are consciously making an effort to improve their work related performance, through a range of different training and education programs.

Despite the apparent increased interest in workplace learning it has existed for decades, in some form. Over the years, the form and type of learning taking place has changed. Within the current wave of “workplace learning” the emphasis is quite different, and incorporates many aspects of learning not previously considered. Of particular interest is the emphasis being given to the issues of learning to learn, learning as a group, and learning through reflection. Carnevale and Carnevale (1994, p. s28) have argued that learning to learn is important in the new economy as:

Equipped with this skill a person can achieve competency in all other basic workplace skills. Learning skills are required to respond flexibly and quickly to technical and organisational change; make continuous improvements in quality, efficiency, and speed; and develop new applications for existing technologies, products and services.

However, despite the willingness and desire of employees to be involved in a range of workplace learning activities, they are still concerned with how they can match their career and personal needs to find satisfaction in both areas of their life. The aim of employers is to provide an adequate match between work and personal needs, and thus assist individual commitment and performance at work, while it is argued that through increased satisfaction workplace learning can go some way towards improving commitment and performance at work. Employers need to be careful that the demands of workplace learning activities do not erode the time available for employee leisure, or this will cause other areas of dissatisfaction (Cohen and Gadon, 1978, p. 17).

The trend towards increased workplace learning can be clearly seen within the “new”

universities in Australia. As the institutions moved from being colleges of advanced education to universities, the skills, abilities and qualifications required for appointment to positions as tutors, lecturers and above, have changed. The changed and increased demands being faced by employees made it essential that learning within the workplace took place. Employees were required to meet demands for efficiency, quality and diversity that they had never faced before; and these demands continue to grow and change.

Part of this change is evident in the new organisational culture, which required a broadening of the focus of employees, from quality teaching, to incorporate all activities associated with traditional universities. After the formation of the “new” universities, many staff found themselves faced with the need to become researchers as well as teachers. Some already possessed the willingness and the ability to adopt this new role. Others were not equipped with the necessary skills. If the “new” universities wish to develop staff research skills as part of their workplace learning program, they need to consider how to approach this task and what learning is required.

The universities, like other organisations within Australia, are not immune to the emerging and growing skills gap (difference between existing employee skills and abilities and required skills and abilities). The identification of learning requirements by the universities, such as research skills, is an attempt to reduce the skills gap between existing staff abilities and the requirements of the “new” staff roles. Boswell (1995, p. 258) advocated the growth and importance of workplace learning, as a means of countering the growing skills gap. The growth in the skills gap is a problem common to most industrialised countries. Shaw and Craig (1994, p. s10) state that, “while common sense argues so strongly for job training (for all employee levels), far too many employers have insurmountable difficulty finding a solid basis for investing in their most important resource”. Workplaces have largely been slow to respond to this necessity.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter (Argyris, 1994, p. s36) argued that:

The dawning awareness that high-performance work systems, with an emphasis on learning, hold the key to future competitive success represents a tremendous opportunity...

While Rosabeth Moss Kanter viewed the emphasis on learning as an enormous

opportunity, Boswell (1995) viewed it as a matter of necessity. He argued that there must be a change in attitude towards learning, and that the move for improved workplace learning needed to be coupled with the development of a positive attitude to lifelong learning. Boswell (1995) and Howell (1995, p. 201) stressed that the use of learning in the workplace can no longer be an afterthought, but must become a crucial part of any organisation's planning and development strategies. Lifelong learning, the continuous updating of skills and qualifications, must become the norm, not the exception. Support for these ideas has been seen in a number of recent policies in Australia, designed to improve the skills of the workforce and decrease the growing skills gap. The most well known example of this trend is the emphasis being given to the development of competencies and competency based training.

Developing a model of workplace learning

If organisations are seriously "interested in developing the true capacity of its people" (Rylatt, 1994, p. 15) they must be prepared to examine closely their existing policies, systems and activities to determine whether they are supporting or inhibiting workplace learning. Any industry/workplace wishing to introduce a new attitude to learning in the workplace will face an enormous challenge in convincing individuals, teams, and organisations of the importance of workplace learning for their future, and gaining their true commitment.

For those organisations committed to developing an environment of positive workplace learning a variety of models have been proposed, which draw together many of the ideas presented above. Of particular importance is the individual and organisational perception of workplace learning, as how it is defined directs every aspect of its use and application in the workplace.

The model that will be discussed in detail here is that proposed by Rylatt (1994, p. 18). Underlying the development of this model is the belief that individuals and organisations must change their existing beliefs or mindsets about the workplace. A positive mindset is necessary because, "mindsets have the capacity to transform the growth and performance of the workforce by providing much needed

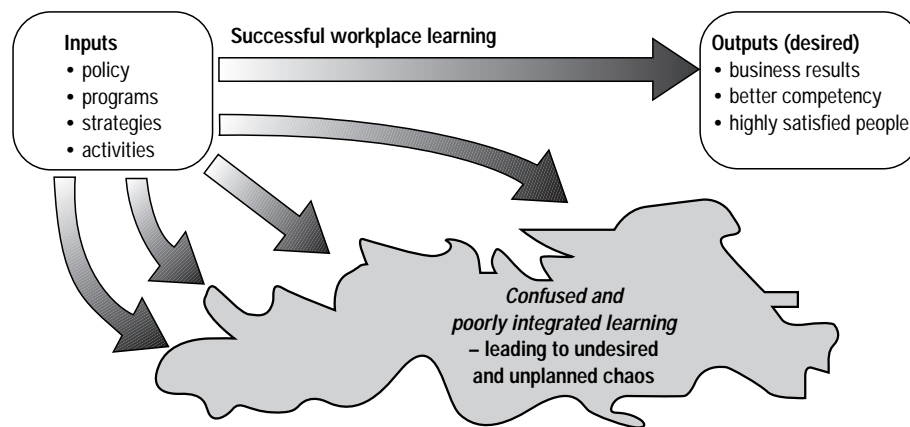
clarity and a sense of purpose to all actions, plans and strategies" (Rylatt, 1994, p. 16).

The eight mindsets identified by Rylatt (1994, pp. 17-21) as essential to the process of workplace learning transformation are:

- (1) Workplace learning must be greater than change. Learning processes must be of a higher or more sophisticated level, which help to create an attitude of commitment and opportunity. Change is no longer seen as a threat.
- (2) Workplace learning must be systematic and interactive. Workplace learning must incorporate a wide range of inputs into its design, delivery, and assessment. Not only must the approach be systematic (Figure 1), but it must also be highly integrated (Figure 2).
- (3) Workplace learning must be geared to business outcomes. If the goal of workplace learning is "to bring about measurable improvements in performance, productivity, quality and potential" (Rylatt, 1994, p. 19) it must be linked to the short and long term needs of the organisation.
- (4) Workplace learning must provide meaning, self-worth and sustainment for all employees. Workplace learning activities should address the whole person, incorporating much more than a development of technical and functional skills.
- (5) Workplace learning must be learner driven. Workplace learning should be flexible enough to respond to the needs of the individual.
- (6) Workplace learning must be competency based. For organisations to acquire the most benefit from workplace learning programs need to be tied closely to the achievement of particular competencies.
- (7) Workplace learning must be "just-in-time". As workplaces are becoming more accountable for the "learning" they provide, there is a need to deliver workplace learning in a timely manner.
- (8) Workplace learning must expand into new frontiers of knowledge. Organisations must be prepared to seek information from internal and external sources to help them maintain a viable strategic intent.

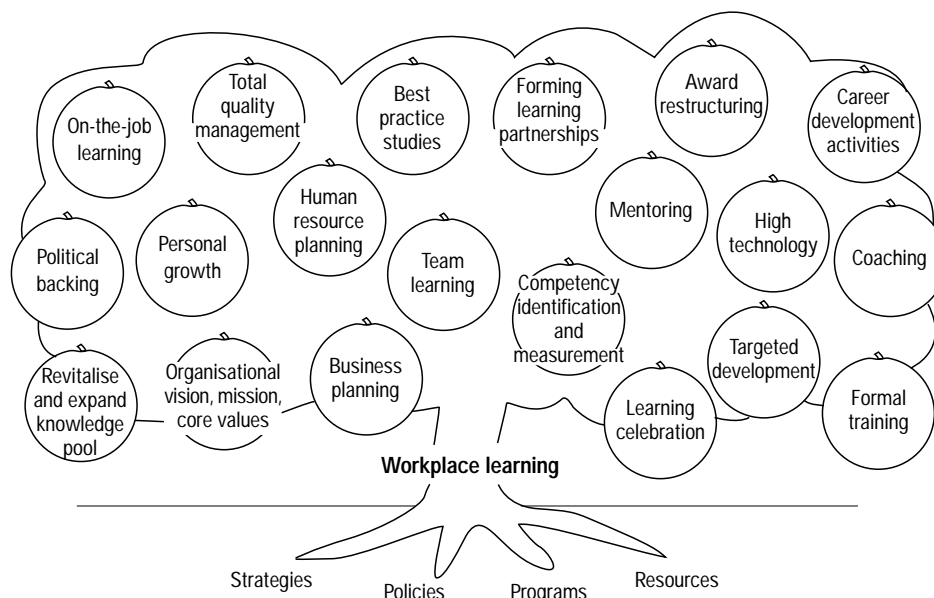
In developing these new mindsets, consideration is given to the individual learner, the business objectives and the future. Rylatt (1994, p. 17) describes the development of workplace learning as a systematic and

Figure 1 A systematic view of workplace learning



Source: Rylatt (1994, p. 18)

Figure 2 An interactive view of workplace learning



Source: Rylatt (1994, p. 18)

interactive process, which must consider a number of influences before improved business results, competency improvement and highly satisfied people can be achieved. If these influences are not considered the organisation's chances of reaching its desired goals are hampered, and the outputs or objectives become confused. By closely examining the model proposed by Rylatt (1994), and taking into consideration the complex nature of workplace learning, and the issues discussed above, a number of necessary changes to the model become clear. While the model presented by Rylatt suggests the need for a systematic,

integrated, rational approach to the use and application of workplace learning, there are a number of gaps. Organisations and the people engaged in workplace learning are not totally rational and do not operate in a vacuum, so a wider variety of influences should be considered. The systematic view of workplace learning (Figure 1) argues that all workplace learning should be related to specific outputs. Rylatt (1994) stresses that if inputs are not closely tied to specific outputs, the result will be confused and undirected learning; therefore wasting valuable financial resources. While it is necessary for workplace learning to

have clear goals and objectives, it is rather naive to suggest that positive learning cannot/does not take place without identified goals. The second model presented by Rylatt (Figure 2), while emphasising that workplace learning is the result of an integration of organisational strategies, policies, programs and resources, provides no explanation of this interaction, and the type of workplace learning process which results from it. The tree diagram (Figure 2) identifies different organisational activities, which can be classified as workplace learning, but gives no details of the mix of inputs required to produce successful workplace learning.

A further criticism of this model is the total absence of input from sources other than the organisation. Organisational needs may have a controlling influence over what workplace learning is considered appropriate, but factors outside of the organisation, and the individual characteristics of employees will have a significant influence on the successfulness of any workplace learning programs. The model suggested by Rylatt (1994), while a useful starting point, is somewhat simplistic. The use of certain inputs to produce particular outputs, overlooks a whole range of factors that both impact upon, and result from the use of, workplace learning; such as, motivational inputs, attitudes, commitment, values. By ignoring factors internal and external to the organisation which will have an influence on workplace learning, Rylatt has left himself open to a great deal of criticism. For example, there is no indication that successful workplace learning contributes to future inputs. To incorporate as many factors as possible, the following model (see Figure 3) draws upon elements of the issues addressed in this paper, and the personal opinions of the author. It is intended that this model will present an holistic view of workplace learning and rectify some of the problems identified in relation to Rylatt's model (1994). While it does not represent the answer to developing a workplace learning environment, it does provide a useful indication of the factors which need to be taken into account.

Any organisational environment for successful workplace learning will be influenced by a range of factors both internal and external to the organisation, and will contribute to the wider environment. Each of the identified areas of influence is placed to overlap the internal, organisational environment and the

external, social/contextual environment to emphasise that no organisation operates in a vacuum. Often the external environment can have the most significant impact on the nature of workplace learning. For example, government policies can limit or direct activities within the workplace. Although now in limbo the Training Guarantee Levy making workplace training and development activities compulsory is a good example of this.

A successful workplace learning environment should also have an internal organisational climate which supports the philosophy of learning advocated by the organisation. The culture, structure, systems, technology and people should be supportive of the workplace learning programs. Providing both resources and encouragement is necessary.

Individual, subjective issues such as attitudes, commitment, motivation, and self-image have been included as these are seen to be particularly important for any learning, inside or outside the workplace, to be successful. People will only adopt new ideas, knowledge, or skills if they are interested in learning, or find some benefit for themselves in doing so.

The example of the need to develop skill and practice in research referred to earlier, can easily be fitted into the new model. Table I shows the key elements of inputs, outputs and outcomes.

Of particular importance is the change in attitude. This must be part of the outcomes of any successful workplace learning if it is to contribute to future inputs. This was clearly illustrated in an article, "Managers – the enemy within", which appeared in *The Age* (1992). This article emphasised that a key problem in the implementation and application of workplace learning is the attitudes of managers. Any form of training/learning, no matter how well-designed or conducted, is useless if managers continue to inhibit the practical application of this knowledge in the workplace. The necessity of getting managers "on side" should not be overlooked, as they can discourage the use of new skills or prevent their use by refusing to accept the relevance of new ideas. Managerial commitment to workplace learning needs to be secured at the beginning of the training process. Managers should be involved in needs analysis, identifying skill deficiencies in employees, and deciding what type of training would be best.

Figure 3 An holistic view of workplace learning

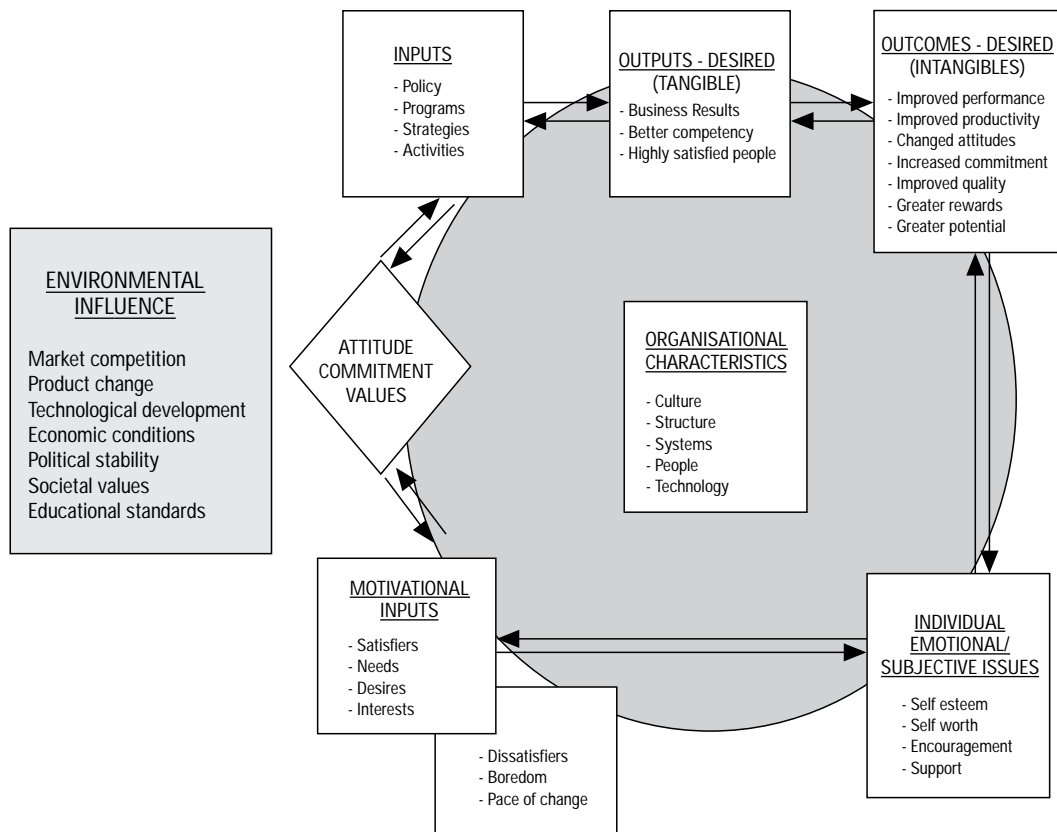


Table I Key elements of inputs, outputs and outcomes

Inputs	Outputs	Outcomes
Assist in preparation to develop research skills	Better competencies	Increased potential
Mentoring	Higher qualifications	Rewards (promotion)
Adjusting teaching loads	Improved productivity	Changed attitudes
Higher degrees		
Short courses		

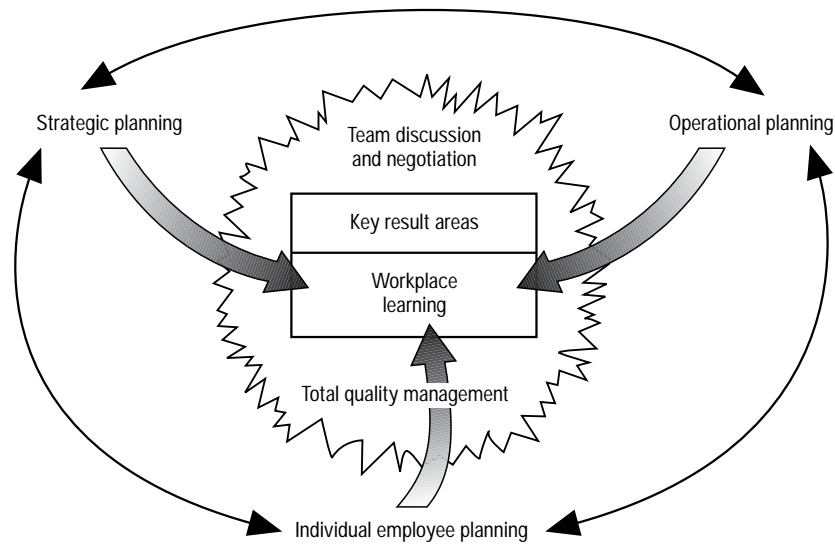
From workplace learning to a learning organisation

If workplace learning is to be successful in the long term and contribute to the development of a learning organisation, there must be consultation in decision making and business planning. Rylatt (1994, p. 104) argued that "it is imperative that employees are kept informed on the impact and consequences of all workplace and individual trends". A clear link between workplace learning and planning is essential if an interactive relationship is to be developed and maintained (see Figure 4). Increased involvement in decision making and planning will improve commitment to team work and continuous improvement; which

increases the potential for workplace learning to become organisational learning.

Figure 4 indicates that strategic planning, operational planning and individual employee planning contribute to the development and implementation of workplace learning. What it does not consider is that there is a need for the results of that workplace learning to feed back into the planning stages of the process. This feedback loop is necessary if the organisation is to become a true learning organisation. If employees involved in workplace learning activities see no advantage to themselves or the organisation from the learning then commitment, money and time is simply being wasted. Employees need to be made aware that their learning will enable them to contribute to

Figure 4 The linkage between workplace learning and planning



Source: Rylatt (1994, p. 105)

future planning and decision-making activities. As in the model discussed earlier (Figure 1), Rylatt's (1994, p. 105) model of the link between workplace learning and planning is somewhat simplistic, and fails to consider the impact of factors outside the organisation. The workplace learning indicated by Rylatt (1994) is also team-based, and restricted to that small group of people or activities. There is no indication that the learning contributes to the larger organisation, and its future growth and development. The move towards a true learning organisation requires a much broader consideration of workplace learning and its impact.

Identifying a learning organisation

To take workplace learning to its ultimate conclusion is to develop a community of learners, or a learning organisation. Organisational learning, like workplace learning, has many different interpretations; but underlying these definitions is the belief in continuous learning for continuous improvement. The most well-known definition is that proposed by Senge (cited in Calvert *et al.*, 1994, p. 40; Garvin, 1993, p. 78); Senge argued that learning organisations are:

where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where

people are continually learning how to learn together.

A detailed definition of a learning organisation was also proposed by Watkins and Marsick (1992, p. 298) who argued that:

a learning organisation is one in which learning is a continuous, strategically used process, – integrated with, and running parallel to, work – that may yield changes in individual and collectively held perceptions, thinkings, behaviours, attitudes, values, beliefs, mental models, systems, strategies, policies and procedures.

Beck (1989, p. 22) proposed a much simpler definition, in which he argued that “a learning organisation is one which facilitates learning and personal development of all its employees, whilst continually transforming itself”.

From these definitions it is clear that a learning organisation emerges as a result of the intentional action of the organisation in its attempts to transform itself through a variety of learning. All learning is directed towards some desired result, involves the encouragement of thinking and group learning, and is a transformative process (Calvert *et al.*, 1994, p. 40). The move from workplace learning to a learning organisation does not happen overnight.

Conclusion

Universities as institutions of learning should aim to be learning organisations. Through

discussion of the concept and application of workplace learning, and the examples drawn from “new” universities, it is clear that the universities advocate and support the need for workplace learning, but like other organisations there is an unwillingness to allocate resources to this area as tangible, quantitative results of the benefits to the organisation are not clear, and take time to become visible. This trend is seen also in the business sector where management concerns are focused on the productivity, efficiency and profitability issues of the here and now, and are often unable or unwilling to invest in the development of staff, as they cannot quantify the advantages of doing so.

The increased recognition of the need for workplace learning is a start, but the momentum needs to be maintained. As individuals and organisations begin to see the benefits of workplace learning activities, such as increased employee commitment, a more flexible and rapid response to global, environmental and technological change, and improved productivity and quality, they will become more committed to its use and evolve into learning organisations.

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