

ILO/SKILLS-AP/Japan
Regional technical workshop and study programme
on skills training in the workplace

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Background Paper

Different International Approaches to Learning and Training in Companies

Introduction

This paper addresses the need for skills development in companies and different approaches internationally to learning and training in companies. It includes examples at

- (i) national level;
- (ii) sub-national (sector level); and
- (iii) company level (and also of organisations in the public sector)

of systems to support learning and training, particularly workplace learning, and

The need for skills development in companies

There are several – related – reasons underlining the importance of skills development in companies (and other organisations).

These include:

For national productivity and national wealth creation

For organisational productivity and organisational wealth creation

For individual productivity and wealth creation

At the global and national level, it is important to recognise the contribution of skills development to poverty reduction – which is, rightly, a major priority of governments and international development banks. Skills development is important to poverty reduction for a number of reasons, including:

- Skills development is important for raising productivity and incomes in the informal sector, where most new jobs in Asia/Pacific are created; and
- Skills development is important to enable the poor to access decent work and to add value in existing subsistence employment

Formal and informal skills development

Training and learning in companies directed at skills development can take place by either formal or informal means – or, of course, by a combination of formal and informal means.

Formal skills development includes “off the job” training, either on company premises (perhaps by a training division) or external to the company (for example by a commercial or governmental training organisation).

Informal skills development includes – as is the focus of this workshop – workplace learning.

What is Workplace Learning?

Workplace learning can be defined as the acquisition of knowledge or skills by formal or informal means that occurs in the workplace (rather than knowledge or skills acquisition outside the workplace - for example in classrooms)

Increasing emphasis on employment-relevant learning

There is an increasing emphasis internationally on employment-relevant learning.

That is for a number of reasons, including globalisation and international competition driving the need for skills development.

It has been said that “the only competitive advantage we have in the long run is our knowledge and skills”.

So, companies, particularly those which either operate internationally or face international competition in their home market increasingly need continually to develop the skills of their employees.

Increasing emphasis on workplace learning

Within that overall picture of an increasing emphasis internationally on skills development, there is a related increasing emphasis internationally on workplace learning.

That, again, is for a number of reasons, amongst which the most important include:

- The need for a company to be different from its competitors, and better than its competitors drives the need for organisation-specific (rather than generic) skills development
- The efficiency and effectiveness of workplace learning is increasingly recognised, as are the limitations and problems of external training)
- Workplace learning – by focussing on the specific skills needed in an organisation - helps reduce the mis-match between labour market needs and supply of skills
- In a context in which there is a shortage of particular skills nationally, and in which it is therefore important for companies to retain skilled workers, the development of company-specific skills helps in staff retention (it should be said that such benefits to companies are contradicted by the off-setting disbenefit to the country’s economy as a whole by reducing labour market mobility)
- As a by-product of assisting staff retention, workplace learning may also assist (in relation to those companies located in rural areas) in minimising the rural to urban migration which is a substantial problem in a number of countries (though, again,

there is the off-setting disbenefit to the country's economy as a whole by reducing labour market mobility)

Limitations and Problems of external training

Formal training external to the company has a number of clear benefits.

It does, though, have a number of associated limitations and problems.

These include:

- The lack of direct relevance to the company/organisation of parts (much?) of what is taught on external courses
- Frequently, an insufficient understanding by external providers of the organisation's activities
- The rigidities of time and location of external training
- The cost of external training

Benefits of workplace learning

Some of the limitations and problems of external training are reflected by the benefits of workplace learning.

The benefits of workplace learning include:

- A focus on the skills which are essential to the individual and the organisation
- A means of transmitting and underlining the organisation's culture and values

In its June 2008 report "Education and Skills: Strategies for Accelerated Development in Asia & the Pacific", the Asian Development Bank said of the region:

"Generally, too much emphasis is placed in Asia on pre-employment, institution-based training"

The implication is that generally too little emphasis is placed in Asia on within-employment training and workplace training.

It may be, then, that – in contrast with the international trends stated at the start of this paper – an increasing emphasis internationally on employment-relevant learning, and an increasing emphasis internationally on workplace learning, those priorities have not – previously – been so manifest in Asia as elsewhere. That is relevant, of course, to the increasing interest in Asia currently on employment-relevant training and workplace learning.

Spectrum of types of workplace learning

Within the definition of workplace learning presented above – "Workplace learning can be defined as the acquisition of knowledge or skills by formal or informal means that occurs in the workplace (rather than knowledge or skills acquisition outwith the workplace - for example in classrooms)" – there is a spectrum of types of workplace learning. One classification of types of workplace learning is:

- Informal skills and knowledge transfer (e.g. by passing “hints and tips”, sharing ideas, passing information, observation, etc)
- Semi-structured learning (e.g. an experienced machine operator showing a new employee how to operate a particular machine)
- Formal training (e.g. apprenticeship programmes, training courses, etc)

Types of informal / “on the job” training

The first of the above - informal skills and knowledge transfer – includes a number of different types of training, amongst which are:

- Training by the trainee’s line manager or other superordinate
- Training by the company’s training officer or training department
- Training provided by external training companies
- Training provide by equipment suppliers
- Computer-based learning (especially when the job involves using computers)

Learners’ preferences about methods of workplace learning

A – very recent – study – published just two months ago, in November 2009, by the UK Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (the main professional body in the field in UK) reported learners’ preferences about methods of workplace learning as follows:

- 1st: “Be shown and practice” (reported by 46% of the respondents as their preferred method)
- 2nd: One-to-one coaching (reported by 18% of the respondents as their preferred method)
- 3rd: Classrooms (reported by 15% of the respondents as their preferred method)
- 4th: Colleagues (reported by 13% of the respondents as their preferred method)
- 5th: Books, etc (reported by 8% of the respondents as their preferred method)

Differences between large organisations and small organisations (and different countries)

A number of studies have reported significant differences between large organisations and small organisations in the ways in which they provide training.

In summary, small organisations tend particularly to focus on informal and workplace learning. On the other hand, large organisations tend to have a wider mixture of formal off-the-job and workplace training.

There are also differences between countries with different economic profiles.

Based on the Asian Development Bank classification of:

- Low income agricultural countries (e.g. Bangladesh, Papua New Guinea)

- Countries focussing on low-cost manufacturing (e.g Sri Lanka)
- Transitional economies (e.g Lao PDR, Viet Nam)
- Countries which have investment-driven growth (e.g Indonesia, Malaysia)
- Countries which have innovation-driven growth (e.g. Korea, Japan, Singapore)
- Small island countries (e.g. Samoa, Tonga)

Informal and workplace learning is used in all countries, but with formal/external training being more extensive in some – particularly in those countries where there are a larger number of large organisations.

The relevance of competence frameworks

During the past 20 years, several countries have progressively introduced competence frameworks - specifications of required competences for each occupation in each sector of the economy.

The uses of such competence frameworks include:

- For recruitment – specifying the competences needed in a job
- For prioritising and driving training plans – both the organisation’s overall training plan and the training plans of individual employees or groups of employees
- Sometimes, for pay scales

Competence frameworks are particularly relevant to workplace learning as they are very helpful in specifying the competences needed for a particular job role or for a group of employees, and thereby acting as a basis for determining – and prioritising – the training programme (or learning programme) of particular individuals or work groups.

The Learning Organisation, and Lifelong Learning

Again during the last 20 years, in parallel with the development of competence frameworks, has been the development of the concept of the Learning Organisation. That is relevant in the context of workplace learning in that a central concept of the learning organisation is the sharing of learning within the organisation.

The concept of lifelong learning (and the related concept of “lifewide learning – learning across a broader range of capabilities than that which is usually incorporated into country’s formal education systems) are also directly relevant in the context of workplace learning. Formal education systems in school, colleges and universities have tended to emphasise (though there have been some developments in recent years) pre-employment education. The concept of lifelong learning places an increasing emphasis on within-employment learning, of which an important dimension is workplace learning.

Evaluation of training, learning, and workplace learning

Formal training is sometimes (though, arguably, insufficiently often) evaluated.

One popular framework for doing so is the Kirkpatrick 4 level model:

- Level 1: Participants’ reactions (sometimes called “happy sheets”)
- Level 2: Learning gain (often through “pre-tests and post-tests)

- Level 3: Extent of application of new skills
- Level 4: Improvements in the organisation

Workplace learning is less frequently formally evaluated.

In principle, though, a framework such as that above is equally applicable to the evaluation of informal learning and workplace learning.

A matter related to Evaluation is that of Quality Assurance. That includes the relevance, or not, of quality assurance frameworks such as ISO. Such frameworks clearly have a relevance to private sector training providers in their marketing activities. Opinion seems to be divided in relation to their relevance to workplace learning; in principle they should be of direct relevance though in practice the trade-off between benefits and administrative costs and time is sometimes reported on adversely.

Examples of workplace learning programmes

Within the context of the main issues being addressed internationally in training and learning, we turn now to examples of workplace learning programmes.

Firstly, we include a number of examples – from different countries – of national programmes and frameworks relevant to workplace learning, before turning to a number of examples of company's approaches to workplace learning programmes.

National programmes to support workplace learning

Various countries have established national programmes and frameworks to promote and support training within employment, including workplace learning. Those programmes and frameworks have aspects in common, but also with important differences. Examples include:

Malaysia Human Resource Development Fund (HRDF)

- Started 1992
- A levy/grant programme
- 1% levy on payroll for firms with more than 10 employees
- Employers can re-claim up to about 75% of the costs of training (up to maximum of levy paid) - for eligible/approved training
- Issues of "complex paperwork" – especially for SME's

Skills Development Fund, Singapore

- Started 1979
- A levy/grant programme
- 1% levy on payroll
- Grants cover 30%-70% of training costs
- Training for certifiable skills is the priority
- SDF has contributed to large expansion of company training
- Current emphasis on SME's, service sector, less-skilled workers, older workers

Training and Productivity Authority of Fiji (TPAF)

- A levy/grant programme
- 1% levy on employers
- Employers can re-claim up to 90% of their levy
- Large employers tend to re-claim; SME's do so to a smaller extent
- Levy covers all costs of TPAF, so TPAF does not depend on public funds (unique in Pacific)

Industry Training Programme, New Zealand

- 40+ Industry Training Organisations (ITOs) established for all major sectors
- ITOs work with individual companies to help them assess training needs
- ITOs can contract with training partners to provide workplace learning (or external training)
- Training relates to the National Qualifications Framework

Sector Skills Councils, UK

- Initially sector-based Industry Training Organisations (ITOs), with a National Council of ITOs
- Evolved into Sector Skills Councils
- Responsible for specifying competences in occupations in their sector
- Responsible for promoting training (including workplace training) in their sector

Dual system, Germany

- Long-established programme
- Vocational qualifications based on theoretical studies in college combined with workplace training
- Elements of the Dual System have been incorporated into training systems in many countries

Trade Union learning programme, UK

- Government funded; managed by Trades Union Congress (TUC)
- Objective: to support participation by those in the workforce who are not currently taking part in learning, particularly those with basic skill needs
- 4,500 people trained as “Union Learning Representatives”
- Sectors: printing, transport, retail, low-paid workers in local government, hospitality/hotels

Apprenticeships in Finland

- Often “top of the league” in world surveys of education and skills
- Agricultural/forestry to high tech (Nokia)
- Most apprenticeships are for adults
- Competence-based apprenticeship
- Individualised learning programmes
- 20% theoretical; 80% workplace learning

SME's in Spain

3 types of input:

- Permanent tutors
- Supervisor / mentor
- Informal training by other employees at times when these employees have less work – that is, they become “unofficial tutors”

Advanced Vocational Training (AVT) in Sweden

•Focus

- developing analytical ability
- applying system approaches
- assuming responsibility

•Needs:

- advanced supervision
- workplace must be organised so as to make learning feasible

Company/organisational case study examples

As can be seen in the above section, programmes and frameworks at national level have aspects in common, but also with important differences.

Programmes in companies are equally variable in type, as the following examples illustrate.

7-Eleven Thailand

- Shop assistants trained in-store in
 - Products
 - Customer service
- Training provided by mix of
 - Store managers
 - Trainers from 7-Eleven training centre
 - Computer-based training
- Competence-based, using generic retail competences tailored for 7-Eleven

Gough & Gilmour Mining, Australia

- Training program was designed for mechanics to maintain the Caterpillar equipment used in the local mining industry.
- Training modules from the trade course were customised modules to meet the specific needs of the company.
- The course consisted of 200 hours of accredited modules from the plan mechanic trade course
- The course was designed to ensure participants gained the specific skills required on the job

Van Hool bus manufacturers, Belgium

- 4,000 employees
- Labour shortage of welders and fitters
- Recruitment from long-term unemployed and unskilled, migrant workers, women and older job-seekers
- Guiding principle: support for the new recruits within the enterprise.
- Technical training in welding and/or fitting
- Occupational behaviour training

Workplace Language and Literacy (WELL), Australia

- Training was provided for Health Department employees in the catering, linen services and housekeeping areas.
- 700+ employees received training in 3 years - for many employees it was first formal qualification
- WELL teachers work closely with the industry experts to ensure that workplace needs are met.
- Training is always on the job and flexible
- Delivery modes are designed to fit in with Workplace production pressures

4 industrial sectors in Canada

A recent study in Canada in 4 sectors (office skills, jewellery making, technical drawing, and modelling) highlighted the importance in the success of the programme to the skills of workplace mentors

- Openness
- Attentiveness
- Responsiveness to questions
- Imparting of “tips and tricks”
- Communication of methods of work
- Patient behavior in the face of challenges
- Encouragement
- Explanation
- Relevant advice
- Developing confidence in themselves

PRIMO Abattoirs, Australia

- On the job training is provided for employees of in Certificates II & III in Abattoir, Boning and Slaughtering
- Delivery is on-the-job with close alliance with the employer to support existing and new workers in the plant.
- Consultancy services are also provided to assist PRIMO in their expansion into the export market

Ford Motors: Employee Development and Assistance Programme (EDAP)

- Not really “learning at work” because it is for learning out of work time
- Provides funding for employees to learn a variety of skills (not necessarily work-related) for example, IT, languages, car repairs, building, etc)
- The rationale is the if people become more open to (non work related) learning they become more open also to work-related learning

Removing barriers to updating training programmes; and updating and supporting trainers and instructors

One major barrier to updating training programmes is often the examination and testing processes are rigid and do not reflect sufficiently well or sufficiently quickly the changes in technology and changes in workplace practice. Where competency-based frameworks of occupational competencies are developed and agreed, it is useful to have examination or testing agencies as one party to the workgroups developing competencies, so that matters of assessment and testing can be addressed as part of the process of developing competencies, rather than as an afterthought.

Another barrier to updating training programmes can be the level of skills of trainers – this, of course, is one of the reasons for, and one of the benefits of, updating and supporting trainers and instructors.

It is relevant to ask “Who has the main responsibility for the professional development of a trainer? Is it the trainer himself/herself? Or the trainer’s employer? One process which can be successful is for the trainer to take responsibility for his/her own development, supported by the employer.

It is also relevant to ask is training delivered by the people who designed it? Or are training delivers different people from training designers?

In countries which there are competency-based national frameworks, those frameworks usually including competencies of instructors, trainers and training managers. Professional development of trainers should, in those countries, be based on competency standards.

Examples of occupational competencies for trainers and instructors include:

In UK: National Occupational Standards for Learning and Development www.ento.co.uk

In Australia: Training and Development Training Package available from the National Training Information Service www.ntis.gov.au

Network of Trainers in Europe has produced “A Framework for Continuous Professional Development of Trainers”, based on 5 principles.

- (1) The professional development of trainers can include a range of different modes of learning, including: external study; workplace learning; self-study; e-learning; etc.

- (2) Trainers and instructors need to develop a full range of competencies, including: occupational competencies; training competencies; and inter-personal competencies.
- (3) Networking is important for trainers as part of their continuing professional development, including: networking within companies; networking between companies; and networking in trainers' professional organisations.
- (4) Trainers should be "reflective practitioners". Such reflection on practice can be supported by peer review and/or mentoring.
- (5) Formal qualifications in training may be important for some trainers, but may not be important for others.

A step forward in the professional development of trainers (if trainers are mainly deliverers of training rather than designers of training) is the involvement of trainers and instructors in training design as well as training delivery – perhaps as part of a design group.

Another step forward is progressively moving from training delivery and design into management of training.

If an organisation claims to be, or aspires to be a "learning organisation" that can only be a reality if the trainers and instructors in that organisation are not only trainers but are also learners, taking some responsibility for their own professional development, supported by the organisation itself.

Conclusion

In a context of:

- (i) an increased international emphasis on employment-relevant skills development; and
- (ii) an increased international emphasis on workplace learning

the approaches adopted

- for national programmes to promote and support training within employment, including workplace learning, and
- of company approaches to training and learning, including workplace learning

show considerable differences between countries and between organisations.

That is not surprising, of course, as approaches to learning and skills development are substantially culturally influenced.

The differences do, though, helpfully, result in their being a considerable range of approaches and examples from which we can all learn.

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