Faculty of Cognitive Science and Human Development

PRACTICES OF LEARNING TOOLS AND THE PERCEIVED LEVEL OF LEARNING ENHANCEMENT IN ORGANIZATION

Ong Siaw King

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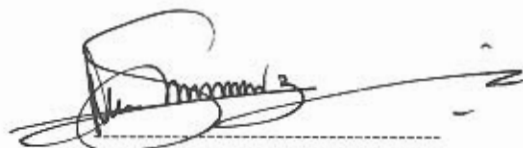
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This project is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a
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ABSTRACT

PRACTICES OF LEARNING TOOLS AND THE PERCEIVED LEVEL OF LEARNING ENHANCEMENT IN ORGANIZATION

Ong Siaw King

The purpose of this research is to analyze the relationship between practices of learning tools with mentoring, shadowing, self-directed learning, self-development and technology application and the perceived level of learning enhancement in organization. This study was done in University Of Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) involving 80 out of 419 support staff as the respondents. A set of 40 statements questionnaire was formulated to collect data. The data was analyzed by using Statistical Package For Social Science (SPSS) version 11. It covered two types of statistical analysis, the descriptive statistics and the inferential statistics. Results of the study showed that all the tested independent variables (practices of mentoring, shadowing, self-directed learning, self-development and technology application) were significantly correlated to the perceived level of learning enhancement in organization. The research concluded with some recommendations to organization and future researchers. Organization needs to stress on mentoring and shadowing in order to enhance learning in organization while self-directed learning and self-development are on the right track towards enhancing learning in organization, people in organization still need to be encouraged to involve in self-driven activities. Technology application should be encouraged continuously as it deeply influences learning enhancement in organization. Future researchers are encouraged to conduct a more in-depth study in order to obtain more reliable result.

ABSTRAK

AMALAN ALAT PEMBELAJARAN DAN PERSEPSI TERHADAP TAHAP PENINGKATAN PEMBELAJARAN DI ORGANISASI

Ong Siaw King

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti hubungan antara amalan alat pembelajaran iaitu mentoring, shadowing, self-directed learning, self-development dan technology application dan persepsi terhadap tahap penningkatan pembelajaran di organisasi. Kajian ini dijalankan di Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) dan melibatkan 80 daripada 419 staf sokongan sebagai responden. Borang soal selidik dengan 40 kenyataan direka untuk mengumpul data. Data yang dikumpul dianalisis dengan menggunakan perisian Statistical Package For Social Science (SPSS) versi 11. Ia meliputi analisis statistik diskriptif dan statistik inferensi. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa semua pembolehubah bebas (amalan mentoring, shadowing, self-directed learning, self-development dan technologya application) adalah berkorelasi secara signifikan dengan persepsi terhadap tahap peningkatan pembelajaran di organisasi. Kajian ini disimpulkan dengan beberapa cadangan kepada organisasi dan pengkaji akan datang. Organisasi perlu menekankan amalan mentoring dan shadowing dalam usaha untuk meningkatkan pembelajaran di organisasi manakala staf organisasi perlu digalakkan untuk melibatkan diri dalam aktiviti peningkatan kendiri. Aplikasi teknologi juga harus digalakkan secara berterusan memandangkan ia mempengaruhi peningkatan pembelajaran di organisasi secara mendalam. Kajian yang lebih mendalam adalah digalakkan bagi memperoleh dapatan kajian yang lebih konkrit.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

Learning nowadays is certainly not a catchword, especially in our rapidly changing environment. Basically, learning is one of the approaches to how we make sense of things. Therefore, learning is essential in our daily activities. Nowadays, learning gains significant attention in organizations. In fact, the notion of learning organization has been widely integrated in the development of organizations. According to Garavan, et al. (2002), the notion of learning at the workplace as a concept has evolved in terms of meaning. Traditionally, learning is associated with the acquisitions of skills and competencies through working experiences but the contemporary views on learning are now focus less on skills acquisitions but emphasis more on thinking differently about workplace issues.

Hosley, et al. (1994) states that in a rapidly changing and unpredictable business environment, a major source of sustainable competitive advantage is likely to be the ability to learn faster than competitors. We have entered the age of knowledge that resulted in the changing nature of work. The world is becoming not labour intensive, not materials intensive, not energy intensive, but knowledge intensive (Drucker,1992). Therefore, learning in organization is the continuous and crucial activities that will assist organization in sustaining its competitiveness.

Organization views people as its important asset and the nature of work within an organization requires people to learn either directly or indirectly. This is how the process of learning in organization occurs. Of course, several aspects such as organizational dimensions, learning culture, learning environment and learning tools also contribute and enhance learning activities in organizations.

The key benefits of learning in organization are huge. Pearn, Roderick & Mulrooney (1995) point out nine benefits or consequences of organizational learning such as, learning is critical to competitive advantage, learning build a quicker responding organization, learning create an adaptive workforce, learning improve performance, learning increases pride and dignity, learning sharpen focus on the long term, learning improve communication and knowledge transfer and learning create better network and superior workforce.

When talking about learning in organization, the roles of managers need not to be ignored. Pearn, Roderick & Mulrooney (1995) mention that in working towards becoming a learning organization, there are key activities required from the management role. According to them also there are roles of a manager in a learning organization where managers can be a leader, learner, facilitator and an individual learner.

With the combination of management role and the learning awareness within organizations, it is not possible to create a micro learning community in organizations. It seems obvious that learning is still the most powerful tool in coping with changes. Senge (1990) states

that in a situation of rapid change, only organizations that are adaptive, flexible and productive will excel.

1.2   Background Of The Study

Human being is the most important entity in learning. Traditionally, most of us relate learning to schools. Teachers, textbook, peers, blackboard, computer and examinations are tools that assist and enhance learning. Many people tend to believe that learning bears no relationships with working when they start working. As long as life goes on, learning is necessary everywhere no matter in schools or at workplace.

Learning in organization has different dimensions that is much more complex, complex in the sense that it helps organization to be adaptive to a faster and fierce changing environment. It is clear that learning is taking place in many organizations. The increasing awareness of learning at the workplace lies upon one of the important mechanisms that support learning in workplace, that is the tools that facilitate, guide, and enhance learning within organization. Learning organization support learning by putting in place individual and organizational enhancers to learning, as well as temporary scaffolding, which together optimize the quantity and quality of learning opportunities within the organization. (Pearn, Roderick & Mulrooney, 1995). The word 'scaffolding' refers to structure or practices that support the learning process in organization.

Tools for enhancing learning in organization as compare to the roles of nutrition in the physical development of a child mirror the same reflection where both of them require mechanisms to support their notion. In organization, although learning can occurs naturally, most people failed to identify the 'how' and the 'what' of learning (Smith, 2001). To ensure people in organization are aware of learning process, the driving mechanism or the learning tools must be identified and practiced. Learning tools are influenced by the learning activities in organization and the nature of work. In certain level, practices of learning tools such as mentoring can contribute to meaningful process of learning in organization. The ability of organization in identifying the learning tools and practice them will assist it to reach its learning goals and thus enhance the learning process in organization.

1.3   Problem Statement

The rate of change and the need to learn lead many organizations to continuously review and figure out the learning process that occurs at the workplace. Many believe that learning help people to gain knowledge which is a powerful tool to in order adapt to the increasingly changing environment.

One aspect need not to be neglected by organization in facilitating and enhancing learning in the workplace is the practices of learning tools. Simply put together, learning tools act as the bridge that joining up the learning process and the results of it. While all people have the capacity to learn in organization, the structures in which they have to function are often not conducive to reflection and engagement (Senge, 1990). Without supportive learning tools, learning may not occur in the organization. As a result, organization may become less competitive and unable to achieve its goals in long term.

Therefore, practices of learning tools are the primary mechanisms that enhance learning in organization. Each organization has its own dimensions, culture, environment and nature of work that facilitate the learning process either directly or indirectly. In fact, learning may occur as people performing their tasks but they may not be aware of it. This is because people may lack tools and guidance that will help them to become aware of the situation they face in organization. So, this study is attempting to answer the following question:

i.   What are the practices of learning tools in organization?
ii.   How do the practices of the learning tools correlated with the perceived level of learning enhancement in organization?

1.4   Objectives Of The Study

1.4.1 General objective

The main purpose of this study is to identify the relationship between learning tools practices and the perceived level of learning enhancement in organization.

1.4.2 Specific objectives

Specifically, this study is aiming to identify:
i.   The relationship between practices of Mentoring and the perceived level of learning enhancement in organization.
ii.   The relationship between practices of Shadowing and the perceived level of learning enhancement in organization.
iii.   The relationship between practices of Self-directed learning and the perceived level of learning enhancement in organization.
iv.   The relationship between practices of Self-development and the perceived level of learning enhancement in organization.
v.   The relationship between practices of Technology application and the perceived level of learning enhancement in organization.

1.5   Conceptual Framework

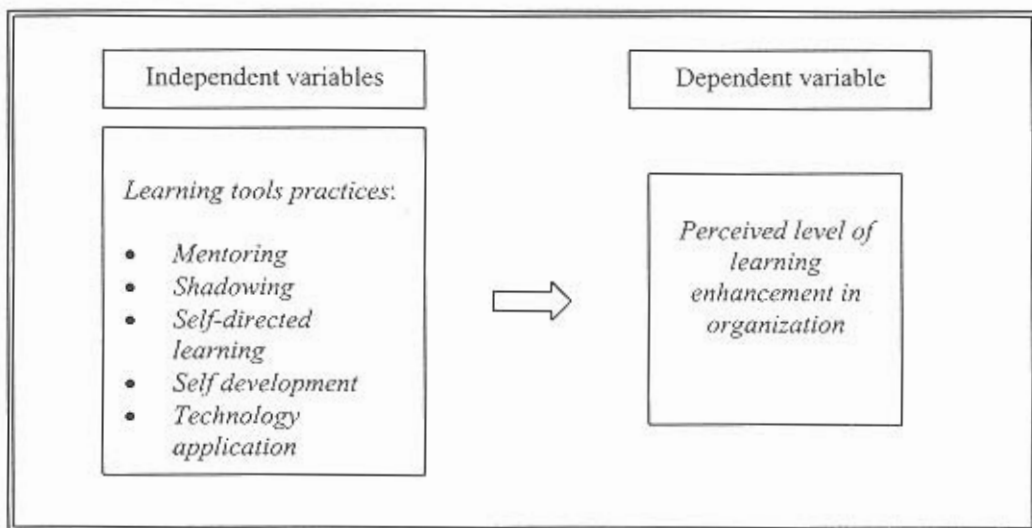| Independent variables	Dependent variable
Learning tools practices: • Mentoring • Shadowing • Self-directed learning • Self development • Technology application	⇨ Perceived level of learning enhancement in organization

Figure 1: Conceptual framework
As shown above, the independent variables for this study are practices of mentoring, shadowing, self-directed learning, self-development and technology application. The dependent variable is the perceived level of learning enhancement in organization.

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1.6 Hypotheses

Ho1   There is no significant relationship between practices of Mentoring and the perceived level of learning enhancement in organization.

Ho2   There is no significant relationship between practices of Shadowing and the perceived level of learning enhancement in organization.

Ho3   There is no significant relationship between practices of Self-directed learning and the perceived level of learning enhancement in organization.

Ho4   There is no significant relationship between practices of Self-development and the perceived level of learning enhancement in organization.

Ho5   There is no significant relationship between practices of Technology application and the perceive level of learning enhancement in organization.

1.7 Significance Of The Study

This study will assists organization in identifying the tools that facilitate and enhance learning process at the workplace such as mentoring, shadowing, self-directed learning, self-development and technology application. Besides that, this study also directly helps organization to identify the degree of practices of these tools. This study will also assists employees in organization to continuously view learning as the core of competency. It also helps them to think differently about workplace issues.

Apart from that, this study will also assists organization in identifying its learning ability and capacity. It thus prepares organization to continuously adapt to the changing environment. This study also directly provides organization with some guidance for choosing the right tools for enhancing learning in organization based on the employees perceptions towards the practices of learning tools. Some tools may have been practiced either formally or informally in organization. Therefore, organization needs to be sensitive in selecting the right tools to enhance learning in organization.

1.8 Definitions

1.8.1 Learning tools

Conceptual: Supporting mechanisms or ways of supporting learning to upgrade the learning skills of all employees (Pearn, Mulrooney & Roderick, 1995).

Operational: In this study, it refers to the practices of mentoring, shadowing, self-directed learning, self-development and technology application that support learning in organization.

1.8.2 Organization

Conceptual: Jarrell (1993) defines an organization as a collection of human, material and capital resources sociotechnically arranged to allow their use to accomplish a productive end.

Operational: In this study, it refers to an entity consists of a group of people who continuously performing tasks and at the same learn and contribute to the organization's operation.

1.8.3 Mentoring

Conceptual: An on-the-job approach to training and development in which the trainee is given an opportunity to learn on one-to-one basis from more experienced organizational members. (Mondy, Noe & Premeaux, 1999).

Operational: In this study, it refers to the process where a more experienced person act as a mentor who provide job-related guidance to new comers of the organization.

1.8.4 Shadowing

Conceptual: A technique in which a person wishing to learn a skill accompanies, observes and collaborates with another, learn what that person is employing on a value producing assignment (Elash & Long, 2002).

Operational :   In this study, it refers to the process of observing more skilled and experienced colleagues performing certain tasks.

1.8.5 Self-directed learning

Conceptual: Focuses on the process by which adults take control of their own learning, in particular how they set their own learning goals, locate appropriate resources, decide on which learning methods to use and evaluate their progress (Brookfield, 1995).

Operational: In this study, it refers to the initiative of individual to involve in the learning activities in organization.

1.8.6 Self-development

Conceptual: Investigating new perspectives, attitudes, behaviours and taking steps to evaluate and improve one's own performance (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003).

Operational: Practically, in this study it refers to the awareness and sensitivity of individuals on their own learning.

1.8.7 Technology application

Conceptual: It refers to the action of adding technological power to organizational learning (Marquardt. 1996).

Operational: In this study, it refers to the distribution usage of computer based mechanisms such as computer-based learning.

1.8.8 Learning enhancement

Conceptual: Increased attractiveness of the process of gaining knowledge and skills (Pearn, Mulrooney and Roderick, 1995).

Operational: The increase in knowledge, skills and abilities of individuals in organization and optimizing the overall capacity of organization to adapt to its changing environment.

1.9 Limitations Of The Study

i. This study is conducted only in one organization.
ii. In this study, only five practices of learning tools are being studied. There might be other practices of learning tools that are not being considered in this study.
iii. Respondent for this study is limited, since only support staff are being studied in one organization.
iv. The reliability and validity of the study depends on the respondents' sincerity and honesty in answering the questionnaires.

1.10 Conclusion

This section discusses the background of the study, problem statement, objectives of the study, conceptual framework, the hypotheses, significance of the study, related definitions (key terms) and the limitation of the study. The following section will examine the related literature on tools for enhancing learning in organization.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This section reviews the theoretical and researches literature related to this study which include learning, theories of learning, levels of learning, workplace learning, organizational learning, how do individual learn at the workplace, tools for enhancing learning in organization and managers' role in helping employees learn at the workplace.

2.2 Learning

Learning is one of the basic approaches to gain knowledge, skills and abilities. We learn everyday to adapt to different situations. It is a lifelong effort as learning serves as the driving force for us to predict future and change. Without learning, we fail to response to the changing world. According to Dixon (1999), learning and change reinforce each other and provoke knowledge. There is reciprocal relationship between learning, knowledge and change as the greater the rate of change, the more knowledge we must gain through learning to deal with change.

A generally accepted definition of learning is the changing of behaviour. DeSimone and Harris (1999) define learning as a relatively permanent change in behaviour, cognition or effect that occurs as a result of one's interaction with the environment. Kimble (in Hergenhahn and Olson, 1997), defines learning as a relatively permanent change in behavioural pontentiality that occurs as a result of reinforced practice. According to The Oxford Paperback Dictionary (1994), learning means gaining knowledge or skills in something by studying or experiencing or by being taught. Learning can happen naturally or by being reinforced. No matter what the definitions are, learning is essential in every context and situations.

We tend to relate learning with individual effort. Most psychological definitions of learning remain at the level of learning by the individual (Probst and Büchel, 1997). From now on, we have to shift our attention to learning in organization and how people at the workplace contribute to learning in organization. The notion of learning organization has gained wide attention as the capacity of an organization to learn is crucial to gain competitive advantage. Without learning, there is always no improvement and organization cannot develop further. Individuals in organization are the key people in driving learning in organization because they are the one who learn. Therefore, learning in organization has close relationship with its people and organization overall.

2.3   Theories Of Learning

Over the century, many psychologists have came out with different approaches to investigate how human being learn. Basically, psychologists views on learning can be grouped into three categories: Behaviourism, Cognitivism and Constructivism. Each of these learning approach has its own perspectives in examining the nature of learning process.

Behaviourism approach to learning lies upon the notion of external stimuli which causes behaviour. According to Bruinsma and Berghuis (1990), behaviour is a result of the response to the environmental stimuli. Therefore, behaviour can be changed by manipulating the environment to cause the right behaviour.

Behaviourism at the same time is influenced by two perspectives: Classical conditioning and Operant conditiong. Classical conditioning lies on the famous experience by Russian physiologist, Ivan Pavlov with his dog. Operant conditioning by B. F Skinner tells that a certain behaviour will only re-occur after a reward or reinforcement and it depends on the consequences of that particular behaviour (DeMar, 1988). In other words, behaviourism focuses on the importance of the consequences of performance and the responses which are followed by rewards or reinforcement are more likely to occur in the future.

Cognitivism focuses on the mental activities, the inner processes that lead to responses to the environmental condition in facilitating learning. According to cognitivism, people are not programmed animal that respond to environmental stimuli in the same way, but people are rational beings that every action of them are a consequence of thinking   (Bruinsma and Berghuis, 1990).

Constructivism is a quite recent approach to examine learning. It emphasizes that learning is an active, constructive process and it occurs when learners actively process the information and build interpretation based on their experiences (Bruisma and Berghuis, 1990). So, in constructivism, the learner and the environmental factors are critical in the whole learning process.

Besides behaviourism, cognitivism and constructivism, another approach to explain the nature of learning is the social learning theory. This theory mixes many approach from different schools of psychology. Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory claims that human are cognitive beings whose active processing of information from the environment play a major role in learning and development (Sigelman, 1999). Bandura highlights that observational learning is the important driving force for human behaviour changes. Observational learning is simply learning that results from observing the behaviour of other people (Sigelman, 1999). One of the major concept of Bandura's Social Learning Theory is reciprocal determination, which claims that there is a constant interaction among the environment, the behaviour and the person (Hergenhahn and Olson, 1997).

Both cognitivism and behaviourism emphasize on the role of environment conditions in facilitating learning. As for constructivism, both leaner and environmental factors are critical in the learning process. Overall, different perspectives on learning increase our understanding of learning process.

2.4   Levels Of Learning

2.4.1   Adaptive learning

Adaptive learning is the process of adjusting effectively to given goals and norms by mastering the environment (Probst and Büchel, 1997). In organization context, it refers to how the organization adapts to its environment. People in the organization are sensitive and are able to identify problems in their surroundings. Consequently, they form and implement strategies to deal with the situation. Adaptive learning is the reaction of the organization to its internal and external environment (Probst and Büchel, 1997). Figure 2 shows the process of adaptive learning.
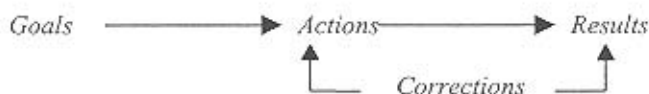
Goals   ⟶   Actions ⟶ Results

           Corrections

Figure 2: Adaptive, or single-loop Learning

Source: Probst, G. J., & Büchel, B. S. T. (1997). Organizational learning: The competitive advantage of the future. Hertfordshire: Prentice-Hall. (based on Argyris and Schön, 1978).

2.4.2   Reconstructive learning

Reconstructive learning is the process of questioning organizational norms and values and building a new frame of references (Probst and Büchel, 1997). It involves profoundly in changes besides behavioural adaptation. As crucial changes occur in the relationship between the organization and its environment, it requires more than a simple adaptation. Reconstructive learning or double-loop learning represents a shift in the way employees learn because it involves basic assumptions and core values about how they work. (DeSimone and Harris, 1999). Figure 3 shows the process of reconstructive, or double-loop learning.

Goals ⟶ Actions ⟶ Results

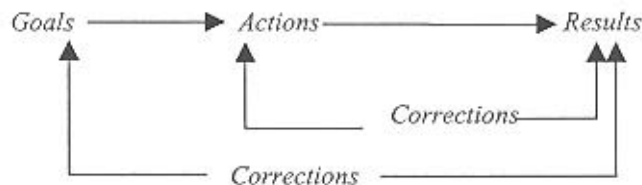   Corrections

           Corrections

Figure 3: Reconstructive, or double-loop learning

Source: Probst, G. J., & Büchel, B. S. T. (1997). Organizational learning: The competitive advantage of the future. Hertfordshire: Prentice-Hall. (based on Argyris and Schön, 1978).

2.4.3   Process learning

Process learning occurs through gaining insight into the learning process. It means learning to learn. It is the highest level of learning (Probst and Büchel, 1997). Process learning actually form the complete picture of different levels of learning by learning to understand the previous adaptive and reconstructive learning. Improvement of the ability to learn is the major element in process learning. Figure 4 below shows the process of process learning.
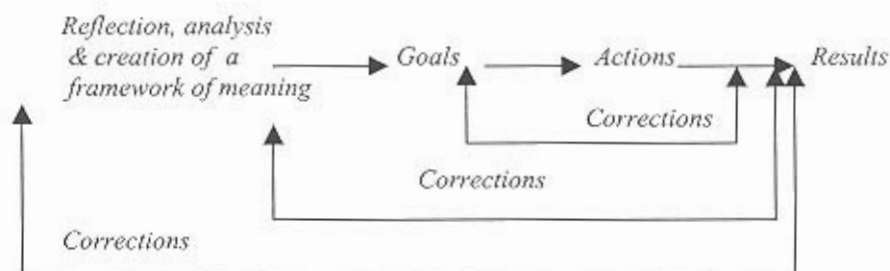

Figure 4: Process learning

Source: Probst, G. J., & Büchel, B. S. T. (1997). Organizational learning: The competitive advantage of the future. Hertfordshire: Prentice-Hall. (based on Argyris and Schön, 1978).

2.5   Workplace Learning

2.5.1 Concepts of workplace learning

People came to work everyday. Generally, most people hardly figure out what actually they are working on and to what extend they learn in organization. The idea of workplace learning is not new and various forms of workplace learning have existed since the beginning of formal and informal work pattern (Matthews, 1999).

Recently, the idea of workplace learning and organizational learning have gained significant attention at workplace and in organization. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the concept and related elements at workplace learning. Marsick (in Matthews, 1999) defines workplace learning as the way in which individual or team acquire, interpret, reorganize, alter or assimilate information, skills and feelings. It refers to how people construct meaning in their personal and shared organizational lives. While Holliday and Retallick (in Matthews, 1999) refer workplace learning to the process and outcome of learning that individual employees and groups of employees undertake under the aspires of a particular workplace. Rylatt (1994) describes workplace learning as a sustained and high leverage development of employees in line with organizational business outcomes. These three definitions reflect that workplace learning involves sustained development through its unique process and outcome of individual learning, including how and why they learn.

According to Matthews (1999), workplace learning is far more complex in the sense that it is not just the issue of training and development. After all, the driving force behind workplace learning is rapid change. The way workplaces afford opportunities for learning and how individual elect to engage in learning activities and with the support and guidance provided by

the workplace is central to understanding workplace as learning environment (Billett, 2001). Several elements such as the nature of the work environment, the rate of change, technology application, the practice of teaching and learning and the perceptions of people and organization towards learning at the workplace contribute to the whole ideal picture of learning at the workplace. Therefore, creating an environment conducive to learning is necessary. Matthews (1999) states that for workplace to become reality, related learning opportunities, conditions and characteristics need to be strengthened at the workplace.

2.5.2 Creating an environment conducive to workplace learning

It is true to say that the environment of workplace can exert significant influence to the learning process of individual learners. Learning opportunities in the workplace are affected by the characteristics of the workplace and the conditions of the working environment. Matthews (1999) states that the nature of the workplace will determine how work is carried out, what type of learning is required and how the outcomes emphasis on continued workplace learning will be received by employees. Holliday (in Matthews, 1999) views five conditions particularly important for individual learning. The five conditions mentioned is as follows:

i. Self: the individual's need for a positive feeling about him or her self as a person.
ii. Personal meaning: the individual's ability to reach an understanding of him or herself and his or her learning
iii. 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 experiences.
iv. Collegiality: the individual's capacity to learn with and from colleagues in both direct and indirect way.
v. 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.

2.5.3 Developing a model of workplace learning

Rylatt (1994) presents a comprehensive discussions on the model of workplace learning. The belief underlying the development of the model is that individual and organization must change their mindsets about the workplace. It is suggests that if organization are interested in developing the capacity of learning of its employees, they must be prepared to review closely their current policies, practices and activities to determine whether their employees are supporting or inhibiting workplace learning. The eight mindsets identified by Rylatt (1994) are as follows:

i. Workplace learning must be greater than change.
ii. Workplace learning must be systematic and interactive.
iii. Workplace learning must be geared to business outcome.
iv. Workplace learning must provide meaning, self-worth and sustainment for all employees.
v. Workplace learning must be learner driven.
vi. Workplace learning must be competency based.
vii. Workplace learning must be just in time.
viii. Workplace learning must expand into new frontiers of knowledge.