Trainee Characteristics and Organizational Environment for Enhancing Individual Performance in e-Learning Involvement

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ABSTRACT

Despite the emerging development of information technology which has significantly contributed to the learning organization enhancement, many organizations still find a great challenge to fully optimize the use of e-learning by their employees in order to enhance their individual performance. The objective of this article is to investigate what factors actually determine an effective training performance which leads to high individual performance from online training and e-learning. Drawing from the self-determination and institutional learning theories, trainee characteristics and organizational environment constructs were determined to investigate whether they have an impact on the individual performance of the employees. 203 employees in private sector in the Sabah state of Malaysia were used to test the research hypotheses. The research provides a significant insight and better understanding on how organizations better utilize the e-learning environment to enhance the learning process of their employees.

KEYWORDS

e-Learning, Individual Performance, Learning Organization, Organizational Environment, Trainee Characteristics

INTRODUCTION

E-learning and online training programs have recently become an important method for organizations to facilitate the learning process to their employees. As part of training and development most organizations adopt, continuous learning is becoming more integrated with work with short-term length, most customized and with instant delivery systems. Because of this flexibility, e-learning initiatives have become a popular approach in many organizations and workplace settings (Yoo and Huang, 2017; Osenberg, 2006; Sambrook, 2003). These e-learning initiatives are subjected to a rapid rate of technological change. The hardware and software infrastructure and technological platforms are important institutional conditions for successful applications of e-learning technologies (Marshall, 2012; McGill et al., 2014). However, due to these technological fluctuations, the diversity of individual learning styles of employees become vulnerable to these fluctuations (Manochehr, 2006). Driven by this prolific development of Internet-based environment, many studies confirm that an educational content delivered in either blended or Internet-based conditions may be more efficient than the content delivered in a traditional face-to-face setting (Abdous and Yoshimura, 2010). On the other hand, some other studies oppose the argument, failing to find significant differences in the effectiveness between the two methods (Bernard et al., 2004; Delialioglu and Yildirim, 2008). This debate shows that a gap between the effectiveness of both settings still exists in the literature (Tsai et al., 2011). Moreover,
despite the increasing adoption of e-learning programs in the workplace, a meta-analysis study by Sitzmann et al. (2006) shows that internet-based learning has only resulted in slightly greater learning than classroom learning. While it is always orated that internet-based learning is always preferred over the conventional learning, there is still little evidence on how to make the internet-based learning more effective and beneficial to employees and hence organizations (Bedwell and Salas, 2010; Salas et al., 2012), especially when considering the vast amount of money invested in the e-learning infrastructure (Kraiger, 2003). With many businesses and organizational changing their learning environment for their workforce, the question of whether these learning programs actually change employee behavior and enable them for a maximum potential remains crucial. Although knowledge can be learned by participating in e-learning programs, it is still arguable whether the outcome can help improve the work performance (Patel, 2010; Salas et al., 2012). This shows another crucial gap in the literature between corporate interests and learner needs (Servage, 2005; Rodriguez and Armellini, 2013). Therefore, the objective of this paper is to investigate what factors could affect employee's performance when using e-learning. The paper further investigates how good training performance will lead to high performance of employees. In order to achieve this objective, the mediating role of the training performance towards the employee performance will also be examined.

CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

Individual Performance

The performance of an employee as an individual is an important building wedge of an organization. Training programs has been widely used in many organizations for the purpose of enhancing employees’ knowledge. The organizational learning is not an effort of just one or two individual’s effort; but a collective effort of all members of the organization who contribute toward the organizational performance. Learning activities in the workplace should be directed to address both individual needs and work performance. In this regard, the alignment of individual and organizational learning needs, and the link between learning and work performance and individual learner should be carefully considered (Wang et al., 2010). Performance is a broad construct used to describe the outcome of a work to ensure it is aligned with the strategic goals of the organization (Rogers, 1994; Mwita, 2000). There is little evidence in the literature on the influence of workplace conditions on individual job performance and whether e-learning environment would facilitate an individual performance (Brown, 2005; Delialioglu and Yildirim, 2008). Organizations are using performance measurement to measure and improve performance by setting clear objectives, collecting and analysing data, in order to drive performance development (Mwita, 2000). Therefore, studying the e-learning environment is prominent to clearly understand how the individual performance is shaped and emerged.

E-Learning Environment

E-learning encompasses the delivery of learning through purely digital technology using the Internet or private networks (Laudon and Laudon, 2003). It often refers to a various platforms and applications such as web-based learning, computer-based learning and digital collaboration (Cheng et al., 2012). This nature of e-learning had let many researchers to focus mainly on the cognitive approach of the user which impacts the interaction with the system in a techno-centric design (Lohr, 2000). According to Agrawal et al. (2016), traditional classroom learning has been largely complemented by self-driven online-learning. This dominant approach often overlooks individual learning differences with an affective nature such as motivation and support, and are less frequently studied than technical ones (Zaharias, 2005; Zaharias, 2009). It has been often emphasized in the cognitive studies that affective learning factors are important to the successful of the e-learning process (O’regan, 2003; Shen, 2009). Nokelainen (2006) studied the criteria for evaluating the pedagogical usability of digital learning material, not to assess the quality perspective, but rather to help the learner to choose the
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