Chapter 1
Managing Informal Learning in Workplaces: The Practice of China

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ABSTRACT
There has been increasing interest in informal learning in recent years and interest in managing informal learning, especially in workplaces. This study selects sample companies and surveys in informal learning in work environments and presents the current situation and problems of informal learning in workplaces. The study establishes the mode of informal learning in the work environment and develops the conceptual framework of managing informal learning. This is done based on the theories of knowledge management and social constructionism.

INTRODUCTION
Informal learning is a kind of kind occurring in a random context. It can be seen everywhere in the workplace where learners can obtain work-related resources at any time. In an organization, employees rarely have the time to participate in formal learning; even if it is e-learning, informal learning usually takes a very short time. It is not expensive because it does not need to hire teachers, provide catering and employees do not need to leave their post. Moreover, the information facilities in an organization provide technical support for the implementation of informal learning in fact, communities of practice, e-Coaching, BBS based on the organizational network facility informal learning.

From the perspective of the individual learner, informal learning essentially emphasizes a personalized, random learning philosophy. Learning is no longer a single, fixed form of organizational behavior but the growth process of self-realization and self-pursuit of learners (Yuan & Xu, 2009). This learning concept deviates from the traditional...
worship of scientific knowledge. Instead, it emphasizes the effectiveness value of knowledge. It has a practical significance for individuals in a particular social context, especially in the actual work situation of problem-solving orientation. Therefore, there has been increasing interest in informal learning in recent years as well as interest in managing informal learning in workplaces. Boud and Middleton (2003) claim that an informal information exchange between peers in the workplace is the main learning mode. Relatively speaking, the role of formal training activities is relatively weak. To pay attention to informal learning, integrate learning resources in an organization, and manage informal learning in the work environment would be of great significance.

In an era of ongoing change, workplace learning has taken on an increasingly popular role as a vehicle through which organizations can achieve not only their short-term goals but also their long-term, strategic visions (Cofer, 2000). In recent years, the research on social networks has opened a new vision for informal learning in workplaces. A growing number of scholars have found that a network in an organization can affect the emergence and development of informal learning because in the interaction among people, a lot of information and resources are exchanged and transferred. Web 2.0 technologies provide the tools for the establishment of interpersonal networks and the expansion of exchanges among people. This study focuses on informal learning in workplaces and develops a framework to manage informal learning in workplaces so that individuals can learn faster and more effectively in their daily work.

**RESEARCH BASE**

**The Concept**

Livingston (2006) refined his definition of informal learning to include all forms of intentional or tacit learning in which we engage, either individually or collectively, without direct reliance on a teacher or an externally organized curriculum. He referred to these forms of learning as self-directed or collective informal learning and highlighted the fact that unintentional or tacit informal learning has been relatively underestimated or ignored. La Belle (1982), Mocker and Spear (1982), Livestone (1999), Bagnall (1990), Marsick and Watkins (1999), Bransford et al. (2006), Rossett and Hoffman (2007) define informal learning respectively from the perspective of comparison between informal learning and formal learning. The learning is divided into Formal Education/Learning, Non-Formal Education/Learning, and Informal Learning. The former two are collectively referred to as formal learning. Informal learning is all learning that occurs outside the formal education and non-formal education institutions. Marsick and Watkins (1990) defined informal and incidental learning by their very contrast with their formal learning counterparts. Formal learning is typically institutionally sponsored, classroom-based, and highly structured. Informal learning, a category that includes incidental learning, may occur in institutions but it is not typically classroom-based or highly structured and control of learning rests primarily in the hands of the learner. Formal and informal learning are only a conceptual framework. The two actually are without boundaries, which means that the learning time and the institutions are not the defining feature of the informal learning. In fact, informal learning can also occur in formal learning (Sawyer, 2006). Additionally, the definition of informal learning itself is a type of study. Once the informal learning is objectified, classified, and measured, in a way, its role has been diminished (Garrick, 1998). Another thing to note is how to distinguish the relationship among informal learning, workplace learning, workflow learning, and work-based learning. Hewlett Packard (HP) uses work-based learning instead of informal learning because this can show learning’s personalization, authenticity, activity and integrity with work (Rossett & Hoffman, 2007).
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