Diagnosing Student Learning Outcomes Using the Organizational Learning Contract Framework

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ABSTRACT

Using the Goodman and Beenen (2008) organizational learning contract framework as a diagnostic tool, this study investigates the effectiveness of an academic institution’s learning environments by examining students’ perception of their mastery of the institution’s established curriculum learning goals. Students at a major Southeastern university were surveyed regarding their awareness of College of Business learning goals, their self-perceived goal mastery, and regarding learning environments they felt had helped them develop the related skill sets for each learning goal. Ordinary Least Squares regression and descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. These results are analyzed and discussed through the lens of the Organizational Learning Contract framework, highlighting its potential in diagnosing curriculum fulfillment of expectations and goals.

Keywords: Learning Environments, Learning Goals, Learning Outcomes, Organizational Learning Contract, Student Learning

INTRODUCTION

Recent advancements in learning techniques utilized at the collegial level have resulted in a more holistic view of education, whereby it’s expected that student learning is achieved by incorporating more than traditional lectures (Auster & Wylie, 2006; O’Brien & Hart, 1999; Tushman, Fenollosa, McGrath, O’Reilly, & Kleinbaum, 2007; Whetten, 2007). Rather than focusing on individual classes, the holistic view seeks to achieve student learning by examining the overall educational curriculum (Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Whetten, 2007). Students derive benefits from an academic curriculum that implements learning environments that are individually effective and synergistic, where learning takes place across multiple environments and settings. The organizational learning contract has been proposed as a way to diagnose the effectiveness...
of learning environments, and determine their impact on total student learning (Goodman & Beenen, 2008). Drawing from the psychological contract (Rousseau, 1989) literature, learning contracts in an academic setting represent the common understandings regarding curriculum assumptions, roles, and goals shared between the student and their educational institutions (Goodman & Beenen, 2008).

Learning environments, including traditional classroom lectures, group projects, and student internships, and their associated activities, have a strong impact on both student learning and future professional abilities (Tushman et al., 2007). To ensure the quality and effectiveness of their curriculums, educational institutions should examine both the learning environments they have implemented, and the students’ awareness of the institution’s intended learning goals. The institution must ultimately assess whether the goals it transmits to the students align with the learning environments that it has implemented to help achieve them (Goodman & Beenen, 2008). When the students become aware of a (learning) goal discrepancy, it is likely that both the students perceptions towards the institutions will change, and their level of engagement will decrease (Entwistle, 1991; Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2009; Könings, Brand-Gruwel, van Merriënboer, & Broers, 2008; Lewis, 2004; Lyke & Young, 2006).

This study intends to achieve two goals through the use of the Goodman and Beenen (2008) organizational learning contract framework as a diagnostic tool. The first goal is to use the framework to investigate potential shortfalls between an academic institution’s curriculum learning goals and the students’ perceived learning outcomes. The second is to investigate how the institution’s academic learning environments moderate the learning goal-learning outcome perception relationship.

The next section provides a brief review of the relevant literature regarding the psychological contract literature, which serves as a basis for the learning contract framework developed by Goodman and Beenen (2008). Next, the research model, which includes a description of the hypotheses used to test the impact of learning environments on perceived learning outcomes, is explained. The methodology and the development of the survey instrument are presented, followed by the presentation and discussion of the study results. Finally, implications for educators and researchers are presented along with study limitations and concluding remarks.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The psychological contract construct, from which the organizational learning contract framework evolved, was originally developed by Levinson, Price, Munden, and Solley (1962), and was later revised and refined by Rousseau (1989, 1998, 2001), among others. The construct examines how an individual perceives both their connection to an organization, or social group, and the mutual obligations between the two (Bunderson, 2001; Goodman & Beenen, 2008; Ng & Feldman, 2008; Payne, Culbertson, Boswell, & Barger, 2008; Rousseau, 1989; Schalk & Roe, 2007). The individual can be affected when the psychological contract between themselves and the organization is perceived to have been breached (Conway, Guest, & Trenberth, 2011; Morrison & Robinson, 1997; Robinson, Kraatz, & Rousseau, 1994; Rousseau, 1989). This breach will then affect the individual’s cognitive states, perceptions of the other party, as well as their affective states. These mental state changes in the individual may then drive changes in their intended and actual behaviors (Robinson et al., 1994; Rousseau, 1989, 1998, 2001; Rousseau, Ho, & Greenberg, 2006).

The organizational learning contract, developed by Goodman and Beenen (2008), draws on the psychological contract literature by examining the mutual understandings that exist between students and the educational institutions of which they are a part. A learning contract breach occurs when the implemented learning environments do not align with the shared understanding (i.e., student awareness) of learning goals, similar in manner to the psychological contract breach (Aquino & Serva, 2005; Auster & Wylie, 2006; Halbesleben &
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