Linking Training Programs to Employee Performance: A Theoretical Review

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Abstract— *Effective design of Training programs has broadly been perceived as an approach to enhancing employees' performance. Arguably, factors such as technological breakthroughs, globalization, change in values, and demographic change have necessitated organizations to continuously think about innovative approaches to bring businesses to a cutting edge of which talented employees play a pivotal role. Although training and development programs are normally designed to enhance the performance of employees, still studies have established the prevalence of performance gaps, associating such gaps with the challenges that designers of training programs face in linking such programs to the overall objectives of the organization. By using content analysis and hermeneutic perspectives, the paper has established an approach that will enable the designers to bridge the poles, hence, making organizations "entities for knowledge creation" an approach that seems plausible in business environments that are ever-changing.*

Keywords— *Training and Development; Organizational Learning; Organizational Performance.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Training and development have broadly been conceived as the pivotal tools for bringing businesses to the cutting edge. The assumption is that the growing turbulence of the business environment needs a talented workforce, a learning culture, and organizations' readiness to exploit opportunities as they arrive with innovation and creativity. In that vein, businesses take training and development as a strategic tool for competitiveness, and survival (M. Khan & Jabbar, 2013; Namada, 2018; Rodriguez & Walters, 2017; Thakore, 2013). The organization`s choice to offer in-person training, online training, in-house training, or off-site training is based on specific needs and the environment in which such organizations operate. The focus of this work is on specific factors that add value to the effectiveness and efficiency of training programs for an individual employee, alone or in a team.

In literature training and development programs are associated with the improvement of employee's productivity (Knight & Yorke, 2003), employees innovativeness (Chris Argyris, 2017; P. Drucker, 2012), employee self-command in task accomplishment (Knight & Yorke, 2003), employees cooperativeness (Barnard &Westermarck, 2009), to mention but a few. Training and development programs therefore, are designed on the bases of the objectives of the organization and knowledge/skills gap of the employees. Scholars have also indicated factors which might hinder the effectiveness of training and development programs, such as culture, organizational setting and training environment. According to Hofstede, Jan Hofstede, & Minkov, (2010), cultural differences not only affect the way employees adapt to organizations' values, but also their relationships amongst themselves, their trustfulness, their cooperation to the organization's goal, and their perception of fairness. Such factors tend to thwart the level of socialization amongst members, hence their level of sharing and using tacit knowledge (Argyris & Schön (1997; Schein (2004). The concepts "training and development" are used synonymously with organizational learning (Khasawneh & Bates, 2005; Namada, 2018; Rodriguez & Walters, 2017), as facets of "learning organization". Rahman, for example, uses the concept "learning organization" interchangeably with "innovation", arguing that both serve the same organizational variables and strategies that will enhance the adaptability and flexibility of organizations in ways that improve long-term performance. Argyris, makes a distinction between individual learning and organizational learning, that the first serves short-term purpose of effective task accomplishment, while the latter serves long-term purpose of organizations' adaptability to environment based on value creation. However, he underlines the importance of individual learning in relation to organizational learning. This paper intends to pinpoint aspects which can link individual learning to organizational learning.

The outcomes of organizational learning and innovation are associated with many of the same variables, including creation of culture, conducive climate of work, leadership, management practices, information acquisition, retrieval and sharing, as well as organizational structures, and systems (Khasawneh & Bates, 2005). The authors urge that innovation is closely related to organizational learning, where every organization is, to some degree, a learning organization. However, they differ by the degree to which they can learn better, faster, or more comprehensively. This could be revealed through outcomes such as creativity and innovation and are likely to be facilitated and supported by psychological climates and human resource systems that enhance and support learning and its application (Kaiser, 2000). This paper will also establish the correlation between organizational learning and employee performance.

II. CONCEPTUALIZING "ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING"

Although the concepts of training and development seem to be used interchangeably to mean the acquisition of new knowledge, yet they differ in some extent. While the first pertains to imparting job-related knowledge to new employees, the latter intends to bring about transition in thinking about

organization's activities, focusing on information, knowledge, and creative thinking through creating, retaining, and transferring knowledge within an organization. While the first occurs at the individual level, the latter occurs at the system level (Khasawneh & Bates, 2005). Organizational learning stands for "intentional use of learning processes at the individual, group, and system level to continuously transform the organization in a direction that is increasingly satisfying to its mission and vision" (Gemy, 1985:29). While individual learning is based on gaining new skills for effective task accomplishment, organizational learning arises from sharing tacit insights, values, and experiences. According to Kim & Kim Sloan (1993), the major difference between the two lies on the mental model. He defines mental model as "conceptualization of reality held by individuals, implicitly or explicitly." Organizational learning happens when the cognitive outcomes, the new and shared mental models, are "embedded in members' minds, in the artefacts, and the organizational environment"(See also, Argyris, 1977; Mintzberg, 2004; Schein, 2004). In the same line, Argyris (1977) suggests that there is an interrelationship between individual learning and organizational learning. Organizational learning occurs through the experience and actions of individuals that he calls 'single-loop learning'. However, individual learning does not necessarily imply organizational learning. To explain the difference between individual and organizational learning, Argyris says, "Individual learning occurs when a member of an organization detects an error and strives to correct it through inquiry, attributing such error to strategies and his/her assumptions in existing theory-in-use" (Argyris, 1977:14). In case of a mismatch, the members need to invent new strategies based on new assumptions in order to correct an error that requires them to produce those strategies, evaluate, and generalize the results of that new action. Organizational learning, on the other hand, happens when individuals reflect critically on their attitudes and identify the ways such behaviors unconsciously contribute to the organizational functioning. The latter is a deeper form of learning that Argyris terms 'double-loop learning'. While single-loop learning changes strategies of actions in conduct that leave the values of a theory of action unchanged, double-loop learning yields a change in mindset and value of the theory-in-use, as well as its strategies and basic underlying assumption (See also, Schein, 2004). Argyris named single-loop learning as the theory-in-use (the learning that intends to solve a problem at hand), while double-loop learning was said to be a theory-in-action (that is change-related). According to him, the distinction of the two is that theory-in-action governs the values different from those of the theory-in-use, where: (i) every member is in control; (ii) everyone wins; (iii) feelings are expressed; (iv) rationality is downplayed. For the theory-in-use to lead to theory-in-action, the learning model has to produce valid information, which provides a room for an informed choice and vigilant monitoring of the effectiveness of implemented actions to assess their degree of effectiveness (Argyris & Schön, 1997).

Other scholars of organizational psychology associate theory-in-use with defensive reasoning (See Jansen, 1998),

whereas theory-in-action is associated with productive reasoning. Defensive reasoning hinders socialization (Schein, 2004). Markedly, Argyris does not undermine the importance of single-loop learning, as noted previously that there is no organizational learning lest an individual has learned. His thesis is that, unless training programs leads to the change in the mindsets of the trainees, making them capable of solving problems they face in task accomplishment, then they will hardly yield the change needed to bring organizations to the cutting edge.

Organizational learning is systemic in nature and its effectiveness depends on the extent to which it succeeds to give the members conducive environment for inventing, producing, and generalizing at both individual, group, and organizational levels (See also, Barnard, 2006). Learning therefore is associated with the creation of new knowledge, new insights, and new understandings. Deep learning occurs when all the three features are in the service of effectiveness and efficiency of organization's functioning (Nikezić, Dželetović, & Vučinić, 2016; Williamson, 1995). Argyris further argues that, although organizations can be considered "a conducive learning system", they are structured by policy, practice, and actions (formal structures) which are prone to inhibiting double-loop learning. Such setback is associated with the difficulties organizations face in merging the conflicting interests and the *status-quo* of the owners (See also, Kaplan & Norton, 1992) that he refers to as primary inhibitory loop. To him, such aspects deploy conditions for errors; and so long as conditions for errors remain in force, individuals will hardly function effectively (socialize effectively) as agents of organizational learning. In the same line, Suddaby (2006) holds that organizations, by the very nature of being a formal structure, exemplify concealment and, for a concealment to be effective, the intention must also be concealed. However, studies have broadly indicated that it is plausible to enhance organizational learning even in formal structures as psychologists suggest that *on the bases of ontological and epistemological perspectives, human beings are skillfully incompetent and unaware, in the sense that, once they become skilled, they forget much of what they went through to become skillful* (Nipponica, 2018; Suddaby, 2006; Wren & Greenwood, 1998). Inferably, effective organizational learning requires managers to use skillful actions, i.e., those that appear effortless, that which is automatic and usually tacit, and that which is taken for granted, that which the trainees will like participating in the learning process. Psychologists hold that it is unlikely that human beings will give or receive useful feedback to deal with their skilled incompetence and skilled unawareness (Kampmann, 2012; Seel, 2017). So, the effectiveness of training requires trainers to strengthen productive mindsets and, at the same time, reduce the defensive reasoning mindsets, a process that requires genuine virtues such as caring, help, support, respect, strength, honesty, and integrity, elements that Coser (1917) named *social virtues.*

Different from Drucker (1993)) who built his learning theory on the coded-knowledge, Argyris considers organizational learning as cognitive inquiry that happens out of participation, cooperation, and team spirit of those involved, as he puts: "An organization is like an organism each of whose

cells contains a particular, partial, changing image in itself about the whole" (Argyris, 2003: 37). Therefore, effectiveness of organizational learning programs requires active organizational process which is at the root of a cognitive enterprise, rather than static entity so-called the organization.

To sum up:

i. Organizations as the learning system provide a conducive enabling environment for both, the individual and organizational learning, respectively. However, organizations as the formal structures characterize the theory-in-use, which manifests itself in planning, designing, formulating policies and practices to the myriad of conversations related to managing organizations, activities that encourage more defensive reasoning, rather than productive reasoning.

ii. The purpose of organizational learning is not only to facilitate problem-solving, but more importantly, it also has to lead to the change of the mindset.

iii. Learning then emerges as a form of disciplinary technology, not just in the sense of the workplace surveillance issues, but also, more generally, as a way in which individuals may construe themselves and their relation to their workplaces and their societies.

III. DESIGNING TRAINING PROGRAMS

Designing training programs can significantly affect the implementation and, consequentially, the training outcomes. We have noted, heretofore, that training programs need to consider both, individual needs and the organization's strategic option. Hence, the choice of a training program has to consider needs analysis at individual, group, and organizational levels. The design may vary accordingly, either by creating the model that fits the situation, or by adopting the models that already exist. According to Thakore (2013), using an existing model is an indication that the designer is aware of the available resources and knows how to use them. However, a designer can create something new, or a combination of created and existing models, respectively. Nadler & Nadler (2012) propose guide questions to effective designing training programs, including: What is the purpose of the model? For what kinds of learning is most appropriate? Does it tell the designer what to look for in the process, or only the road to take? Does it help the designer anticipate possible challenges and opportunities? Does it provide alternatives? According to him, good models have foundations in theory. Hence, the designer should ascertain the concepts that are embodied in the chosen model. The conceptual training model should represent reality in a simplified and, therefore, comprehensible form.

In designing and/or using training models, the potential user should ascertain if the theoretical base from which the model has sprung provides the required tools, i.e., the model should explain the various aspects of human behavior, bring together what is known through research and observation, simplify complex human processes, provide help in observing a situation. Apparently, there is no single model that fits all situations. However, Nadler & Nadler (2012) have proposed four steps to follow in designing an effective training program as indicated in Figure1below:
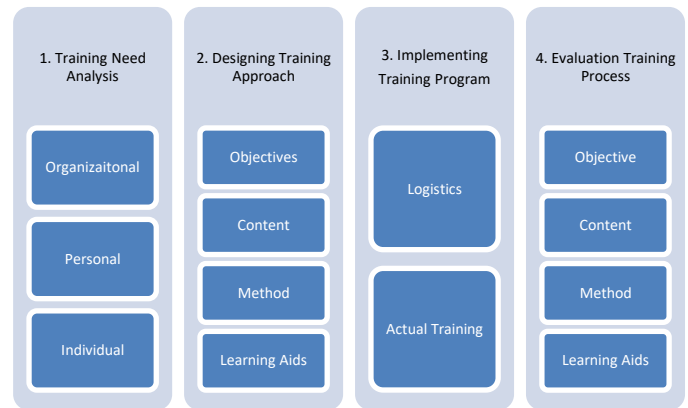

Fig. 1. Steps of Designing Training Program
Adopted from Nadler & Nadler, (2012)

Training Need Analysis involves the determination of the kind of training needed to fill the knowledge gap, improve abilities and skills needed at the workplace. To achieve this objective, the analysis needs to be done through individual level, personal level and organizational level analysis. Data can be collected from target participants' supervisors, customers, and even by using multiple data collection methods such as survey, observation, and performance appraisal results. Designers can also establish training need by analyzing the long-range plans of the organizations, practices of other organizations, request of training by subsidiary companies, as well as legislation requirements to ensure continuity and attainment of organization's mission and vision.

The design of training approach pertains the planning of the entire training program. Designers can reach that goal by establishing the goals and objectives to be achieved; hence, determining the topics and contents to be covered. Wickramasinghe (2006) adds that training objectives are the basis for evaluating the success of the program. Hence, they should be SMART, and in respect to the overall mission, vision and strategies. With the content in hand, the designer can easily discern the appropriate methods to use by specifying the corresponding visual aids and learning materials. A typical training design will contain training title, venue, date, goal, specific objectives, sequences of topics, time allocation per topic, methodology, resources needed, and evaluation method.

Training implementation covers logistical aspects such as venue, food, budget, equipment, resource persons, transportation, and participants. Whether the training programs are done within the company or outside, it will be determined by factors such as the nature of program, budget and financial capability of the organization. Some organizations set aside sufficient budget for major training programs, especially for managers; and, normally, these are done outside the company with external consultants as trainers (Manthorpe et al., 2009; Robinson et al, 2008). However, managers need to be aware that the needs, rather than managerial levels, determine the training programs.

Noticeably, training can be single-loop if it intends to impart specific skills or technical competence of the trainees in relation to task accomplishment, and the double-loop learning pertains ensuring the learning of competencies related to the

workforce attitudes and habits. The choice of any or a combination of the training methodologies will largely depend on the objectives, type of participants, and the duration of the training. The Figure 2 below, indicates a few examples that distinguish a Single-Loop Training Program from a Double Loop-Training Program.
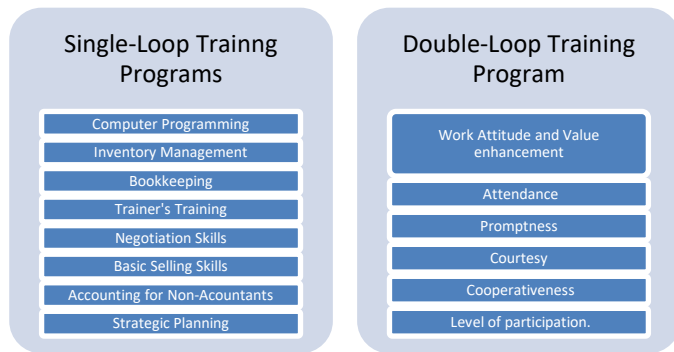

Fig. 2. Evaluation of Training Programs
Adopted from Chris Argyris (2003)

Evaluation of a training process pertains the measurement of the training success or effectiveness to establish whether an investment in a particular training has paid off (Darrow, 2009). Evaluators of the Training program can achieve that goal based on the achievement of the previously set objectives and results, considering the needs, methods, and other areas of training administration. According to (Thakore, 2013), there are four levels of evaluating training programs that are: (i) reaction; (ii) learning; (iii) behavioral change; and (iv) impact to organization. Reaction evaluation involves measuring the participants' feedback right after the conduct of the training. Issues to measure include: level of attainment of objectives, processes, methodologies, time, reading materials, resource persons/facilitators, and other logistics of the training. Participants' learning evaluation determines specific skills, knowledge, or even what they learned is commonly asked at the end of the training period. Such evaluation can be done with a Questionnaire Form administered at the end of the training which is very often done to measure the reaction level. Thakore (2013) proposes other ways such as formal or informal interviews, feedback from line managers, feedback from the Training Unit, meet a cross-section of suppliers or customers, discuss with staff that attended the training session, walk around the offices and talk to people, number of requests to attend other events, assessing academic or practical standards reached, formal certification, as well as a cost benefit analysis.

The behavioral change level assesses the changes on the attitude and/ or habits of the trainees after the training that is usually observable at the workplace. This will involve a follow up of the trainees in coordination with the immediate supervisor. Examples of behavioral indicators include work attitude and value enhancement, attendance, promptness, courtesy, cooperativeness, and level of participation.

IV. ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING AND EMPLOYEES PERFORMANCE

In previous sectionswe have learned that organizational performance is virtually determined by performance of individuals. Training programs, though established for individual members, areintended to enhance performance of an organization. Scholars have defined employees' performance in different ways. Back in 1930th Chester Barnard defined employees' performance as his/her cooperation towards organization's goals (Barnard & Westermark, 2009). He argued that organization's performance depends on the effectiveness and efficiency of its employees; and because organizations have goals to achieve, the main function of the executives remain to ensure the cooperativeness of employees and, consequentially, their effectiveness and efficiency. For him, an organization is efficient when it succeeds to induce the cooperation of the individuals by integrating their objectives and that of the organization, while efficiency is associated to goal accomplishment.

Rodriguez & Walters (2017) define employees' performance as the outcome of individuals with respect to process, results, relevance, and success. Some scholars consider only a single aspect of employees performance such as productivity (Gemy, 1985), or in terms of change in behavior (Kim, Hornung, & Rousseau, 2011). Other facets of employees' performance include., easiness in adapting to new technology, increasing their willingness to work for an organization, and the organization's citizenship. In some literature, scholars agree that training and development contribute to an employees' performance. It is the overall achievement of a particular task measured against pre-selected standards of accuracy, cost, ad speed; or the strategic approach to enhancing organizational effectiveness by improving the performance of individuals who work in the organization. In addition, a well-designed training program contributes to value-based task accomplishment by cultivating goal-oriented job achievement, consistency, accountability, continuity of job accomplishment and ownership. Furthermore, training programs can easily enhance team spirit amongst the members and a sense of "feeling good", a concept that organizational psychologists have associated with employees' interractiveness, open communication, reduced absenteeism, and self-command(D. H. Kim & Kim Sloan, 1993; T. G. Kim et al., 2011; Van Dick, 2001).

As we have noted before, designing well training and development programs can gradually transform organizations to learning entities that ensure viability of such businesses through proactive and informed decision. As Argyris mentioned earlier, organizations being the formal structures are conducive for a learning process, although, the same structures (if not concealed) may inhibit members' ability to socialize and share tacit knowledge.

As business environments are rapidly changing, then businesses which have created conducive environment for their members to socialization can easily create value to those, which base on gradual training sessions. It is from the learning organization that employees can change from actual performance (Position of an individual between the Limits as determined by his Motivation) to ideal performance (the upper

limit of performance as set by employee's ability and technical systems) (See, Morandini, Masarati, & Mantegazza, 2005; Svensrud & Åsvoll, 2012)

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Training and development have direct relationship to an organization's performance. It has been noted that in order to achieve ideal employees' performance, training programs should not only target to improve individual's capability, but also the long-term results in terms of the organization's innovativeness and creativity.

To achieve that goal, training programs need to consider the overall needs of the organization by identifying the gaps at individual, group and organizational levels. In addition, the continuous changing business environment brings about a dire need for learning organizations. However, the paper acknowledges the constraints that hamper the process of creating a learning organization, specifically in SMEs in the developing countries, including the dimensions of culture (Hofstede et al., 2010), company budgets, as well as workers' time (Clark, McEwan, & Christie, 2019). In this respect, a specific study in that line would contribute to such knowledge gap.

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