

Impact of Informal Workplace Learning on Job Satisfaction

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Abstract

In order to remain competitive in the global economy, many employers emphasized lifelong learning on their workers. But most of them focused on formal learning and tend to overlook the informal learning in the workplace. Current evidence suggests that informal learning is far more important for skill development and predict employees' behavior in the workplace. Therefore, this study takes into account the impact of informal workplace learning on employees' job satisfaction. Samples of the study were 197 property executives. Instruments used in this study were Small Business Workplace Learning Survey (SBWLS) and Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS). Result shows that there was a significant positive impact of informal workplace learning on the job satisfaction. Further analysis concluded that all three components of informal workplace learning such as past episode, current experience and future behavior were positively significant predictors of job satisfaction among property executives. Some limitations and recommendations for future research were discussed in this article. For overall, this study provided full support for the predictive role of informal workplace learning towards employees' job satisfaction especially in property consulting firms.

Keywords: Informal workplace learning, job satisfaction, property executive.

Abstrak

Untuk kekal berdaya saing dalam ekonomi global, ramai majikan menekankan pembelajaran sepanjang hayat kepada pekerja mereka. Tetapi kebanyakan mereka memfokuskan kepada pembelajaran formal dan mengabaikan pembelajaran tidak formal di tempat kerja. Kajian masa kini mencadangkan bahawa pembelajaran tidak formal adalah jauh lebih penting dalam mengembangkan kemahiran dan meramal tingkahlaku pekerja di tempat kerja. Justeru itu, kajian ini mengambil kira impak pembelajaran tidak formal di tempat kerja terhadap kepuasan kerja dalam kalangan eksekutif hartanah. Sampel kajian ialah 197 orang eksekutif hartanah. Instrumen yang digunakan ialah Small Business Workplace Learning Survey (SBWLS) dan Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS). Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa terdapat impak positif yang signifikan bagi pembelajaran tidak formal di tempat kerja terhadap kepuasan kerja. Analisis lebih lanjut menyimpulkan bahawa ketiga-tiga komponen pembelajaran tidak formal di tempat kerja seperti episod lepas, perasaan semasa dan tingkahlaku akan datang adalah peramal positif yang signifikan kepada kepuasan kerja dalam kalangan eksekutif hartanah. Beberapa limitasi dan cadangan kajian akan datang dibincangkan dalam artikel ini. Keseluruhannya, kajian ini menyokong sepenuhnya peranan pembelajaran tidak formal di tempat kerja dalam meramal kepuasan kerja terutamanya dalam kalangan eksekutif hartanah.

Kata kunci: Pembelajaran tidak formal di tempat kerja, kepuasan kerja, eksekutif hartanah

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Dissatisfaction among employees would mean the higher probability of a company to lose its own skilled and talented employees as well as the loss of intellectual capital (Masroor & Jamilha, 2009). If a worker does not satisfy with the job it will be hard to keep up going to work and there is a high probability that the employees would leave the job (Zeytinoglu et al., 2007). These behaviors will disrupt the organizational achievement as there are insufficient numbers of workforce. As a result, more time and effort will be spent on recruitment instead of focusing on improving the business development. In order to prevent these problems, many researchers try to explore the predictor of job satisfaction. It is the first step to finding the solution to low job satisfaction. Different predictors have been justified and related to job satisfaction such as job stress and organizational support (Shrestha & Mishra, 2010), personality and demographic factors (Halepota, 2009; Krueger et al., 2002), leadership, career opportunities, communication and teamwork (Shoman, 2009). There still other factors that could have a significant impact on job satisfaction but less explored by past researchers. One of the possible factors is informal workplace learning.

Previous researchers who have rediscovered the concept of 'informal learning' realized that it should no longer be known as an inferior form of learning (Coffield, 2000). Informal learning should be known as a significant alternative form of learning. Coffield (2002) stated that informal learning needs to be seen as fundamental, necessary and valuable in its own right. It is because informal learning is an on going process which involves enhancement of an individuals' knowledge and skills (Conlon, 2003). It happens everywhere and anywhere as long as an individual has acquired new knowledge, perception and skills (Conlon, 2003).

Basically, learning at the workplace can be both formal which involve teaching in classrooms and informal which is more on the mentoring and guidance at workplace (Malcom, Hodkinson & Colley, 2003). However, there are still many small companies and enterprises that are lacking of formal learning activities due to financial and time constraint (Cedefop, 2015; Conlon, 2003). Alternatively, these companies focuses more towards on-the-job training which is informal learning and being carried out by variety of people such as managers, supervisors and peers (Doyle & Hughes, 2004). Thus, informal workplace learning is normally more common in small and mid-sized companies such as retail, telemarketing companies and property consulting firms because it is more reactive directed to immediate problems rather than long-term people development (Conlon, 2003; Chiang & Wang, 2008).

Informal learning is an element that is more appropriate to a business environment where jobs are constantly changing (Marsick & Volpe, 1999). It shows that learning from outside of training occurs more frequently than learning from inside of training. These forms of informal learning were more suitable in a property consulting firms due to the nature of the job where property executives need to be updated with the property market values which fluctuate frequently (Rowden & Ahmad, 2000). When the property market values keep on changing, property executives needs to learn from their senior colleague on how to estimate and give the accurate value of indication to clients and customers from time to time. Soon enough they would also learn from their own experience on how to estimate property value accurately. In other words, the employees learned through experiences, trial and error and from their co-workers most of the time (Berg & Chyung, 2008).

Although informal learning is essential for skill development of employees, most of the employers tend to overlook the informal learning due to its unstructured or unplanned characteristics (Grip, 2015; Livingstone, 2001). As a result, the employer would be unable to identify the specific reason for their employees dissatisfaction and performance decline. This is because past research suggest that informal workplace learning will influence employees' job satisfaction (Kovach, 1987; Rowden & Conine, 2005), job performance (Judge, Thoresen, Bono & Patton, 2001) and knowledge or adaptation especially for new hires in an organization (Grip, 2015). Therefore, it would be fair to assume that by focusing on informal learning would be beneficial to an organization.

Informal learning in the workplace is an educational activity or one of the adaptation process that is specific to job position and workplace environment. It can facilitate and speed up the employees' familiarity to working conditions, social and cultural environment especially for new workers (Nekoranec & Nagyova, 2014). Informal learning increases employees' job performance as they are getting better at work due to essential knowledge and skills gained from their experienced peers (Judge et al., 2001). It can also increase job satisfaction because higher job performance shows that the employees have a better job satisfaction (Saari & Judge, 2004).

Job satisfaction refers to the workers' overall attitude towards their job. Spector defined job satisfaction as a cluster to measure and evaluate an individuals' feeling toward his job (Spector, 1997). It is closely related to the need of fulfillment as it measures how well an occupation satisfies ones' needs and thus reversely created a form of motivation (Jones, 2005; Spector, 1997). The definition of job satisfaction has also been extended to the essence of pleasurable or positive feeling towards the task, job achievement and job experiences (Worell, 2004). Job satisfaction is one of the important aspects of an organization as it influenced the staff turnover and absenteeism which then gives indirect impact to the financial performance of a company (Saari & Judge, 2004). Grievances and dissatisfaction at workplace normally include the incompetence of workers when completing a task due to the lack of guidelines or guidance from superiors or co-workers (Blanchard & Thancker, 2004).

As there is a need to conduct a study about the role of informal workplace learning as a predictor of job satisfaction especially in property consulting firms. This study aims to identify cause and effect relationship between these variables with focus on property executives. It will reflect better on the real situation of a property consulting firm whether or not informal workplace learning is related to property executives' job satisfaction.

■ 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Informal Learning

“Learning is not directly observable, but it is something that almost everyone did. It is clear from physiological evidence that learning is related to changes in the physical, neuronal structure of the brain and also to electrochemical functioning” (Blanchard & Thancker, 2004). The social learning theory developed by Albert Bandura explains that the events and situation which happens around the individual will become stimuli which cognitively processed before it is being learned and influenced the individuals' behaviour (Bandura, 2001). The cognitive processes include motivation, attention, retention and reproduction (Bandura, 2001). The social learning theory emphasizes that learning is not necessarily caused by formal learning in classroom (Blanchard & Thancker, 2004). Thus, the term ‘informal learning’ has been increasingly used in adult education because it takes place in a wider variety of settings than formal education or training” (Livingstone, 2001; Eraut, 2004).

“Informal learning is a variable that includes incidental learning, it may occur in institutions, but it is not typically classroom-based or highly structured and control of learning rests primarily on the hands of the learner” (Marsick & Watkins, 1990). One of the earliest models of informal learning was being introduced by Argyris and Schon in 1974 (Argyris & Schon, 1974). In their model, the individuals' intentions or objectives is guided by assumptions, values and beliefs. The intentions will then guide the actions they make (strategies) and give certain outcomes. The resulted outcomes can be either positive outcome (achieved the initial intentions and objectives - match) or negative outcomes (did not achieved the initial intentions and objectives - mismatch) (Argyris & Schon, 1974). Different types of informal workplace learning processes that occur depend on the circumstances in which the learning takes place and the individual past experience (Eraut, 2000). There are three types of informal workplace learning circumstances which are past episode, current experience and future behavior (Eraut, 2000; 2004).

Past episode is a type of learning through reflection and review of past situations, communications, events and experiences. This includes learning from mistakes and adapting to the organization culture (Rowden & Conine, 2005). *Current experience* is an informal workplace learning which happens very often when works in a team or received unstructured guidance from others. It involves problem-solving, exchanging opinions, idea and decision making (Eraut, 2000). *Future behavior* is a type of learning based on the previous behavior experience which then aroused the planned learning and planned career performance and goal. People with this kind of learning

will be more prepared for emergent learning opportunities to face any circumstances by taking an initiative of self-learning and planning (Eraut, 2000). In other words, it is the unconscious effect of previous experience.

Job Satisfaction

There are many models and theories from past researchers which related to the job satisfaction. Situational occurrences theory of job satisfaction is one of them. It hypothesizes that job satisfaction is a result of the nature of the job and the working condition (Quarstein, McAfee & Glassman, 1992). This theory described that job satisfactions are determined by situational characteristics and situational occurrence (Quarstein et al., 1992). Situational characteristics are typical working conditions such as salary, benefits, working environment and appreciation. Meanwhile, situational occurrence refers to conditions occur after an individual start to be part of the working members.

Intrinsic motivation is one of the situational characteristics focused on the job which leads to higher levels of job satisfaction (Judge & Klinger, 2008). There are five cores of job intrinsic motivating characteristics which are task identity, task significant, skill variety, autonomy and feedback (Judge & Klinger, 2008). Jobs that are enriched to provide these characteristics are likely to be more satisfying and motivating to the employees (Quarstein et al., 1992). Because it provides opportunities for employees to experience meaningfulness of work, responsibility for outcomes of the work and knowledge of results of work activities. These experiences will then lead to positive response of work which described by changes in both attitude (increased work motivation and job satisfaction) and behavioral (increased performance and decreased turnover) outcome (Renn & Vandenberg, 1995).

There are certain aspects of the job which derived a person to compare his job to another. An individual will tend to approach a satisfying job and will try to avoid the unsatisfying job (Spector, 1985). The same thing goes to the employers were they prefer workers who are satisfied than those who are not (Ivancevich & Matterson, 1987). Spector viewed job satisfaction based on nine aspects of a job such as pay, promotion, supervision, benefits, contingent rewards, operating procedures, co-workers, nature of work and communication. Therefore, by managing those aspects of job would lead to satisfied employee as well as satisfied employer. As a result, the individual achievement and organizational performance would also enhance (Judge et al., 2001; Stahl, Chua, Caligiuri, Cerdin & Taniguchi, 2009). The concept of job satisfaction by Spector is close to this study as it focused more on human service industries which include the property consulting firms (Spector, 1985).

The Relationship Between Informal Workplace Learning and Job Satisfaction

The previous study by Njis, Dochy and Kyndt concluded that there is a relationship between employees' job satisfaction and learning conditions at workplace (Kyndt, Dochy & Njis, 2009). Learning-oriented operation has a beneficial impact on job satisfaction (Dirani, 2009). To be exact the relationship between workplace learning variables and job satisfaction variables were positively significant (Rose, Kumar & Pak, 2009; Rowden & Conine, 2005). The higher the extent to which an organization has set the learning opportunities in the workplace, the more satisfied employees appear to their job (Dekulou & Trivellas, 2015). This shows that the opportunity of learning in the workplace has drawn an important aspect on employees' job satisfaction. The intercorrelation among the three types of workplace learning which are formal learning, informal learning and incidental learning has shown a significant positive relationship with job satisfaction (Egan, Yang & Bartlett, 2004; Rowden & Conine, 2005). However, informal workplace learning shows the strongest relationship with job satisfaction compared to the other two workplace learning activities (Rowden & Conine, 2005).

Similarly, there was another study which also determine the relationship between workplace learning and job satisfaction in small and mid-sized businesses in Malaysia (Rowden & Ahmad, 2000; Chang & Lee, 2007; Shamuni & Ruhizan, 2015). They indicates that there is a significant relationship between those variables (Chang & Lee, 2007; Rowden & Ahmad, 2000). It was found that employees of small and medium size of enterprises in Malaysia experience job satisfaction through workplace learning (Shamuni & Ruhizan, 2015). Some studies also associate the workplace learning and job satisfaction with organizational commitment. There was a significant positive relationship between workplace learning, job satisfaction and organizational commitment in small to midsize companies in Taiwan (Chiang & Wang, 2008).

With respect to the relationship between workplace learning and job satisfaction, informal learning is considered as an extensive factor in the workplace and establishes strong linkages between workplace learning and job satisfaction among employees (Rowden & Conine, 2005). Therefore, the future study should explore more on the association between the specific learning culture in organization and job satisfaction (Egan et al., 2004).

Based on previous research and support from literature, this study assumes that informal workplace learning has a significant impact on job satisfaction. In this study, the informal workplace learning variable was operationalized into three main constructs which are past episode, current experience and future behavior. Meanwhile, the job satisfaction variable was unidimensional. Thus, the following hypotheses were formulated for the purpose of empirical testing:

- H1 : Informal workplace learning based on past episode will give a significant impact on job satisfaction.
- H2 : Informal workplace learning based on current experience will give a significant impact on job satisfaction.
- H3 : Informal workplace learning based on future behavior will give a significant impact on job satisfaction.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The total participants of this study were 195 property executives in several property consulting firms in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor in Malaysia. This research applied probability sampling with simple random sampling technique. The determination of who will end up in the sample is determined by unsystematic and random rules. Therefore, the chance of the sample truly represents the population is great (Salkind, 2009). Data collection was carried out via survey method with face-to-face and e-mail approach.

The Small Business Workplace Learning Survey (SBWLS) was used to measure informal workplace learning (Rowden & Ahmad, 2000). There are 17-items in this questionnaire which asking the respondents to rank the most frequent informal workplace learning

activities engaged in the workplace from 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree. This instrument has high internal reliability with Cronbach's alpha value of 0.85. Meanwhile, the job satisfaction variable was measured using Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) (Spector, 1997). This 27-items instrument asking the respondents to answer all questions using 6-point scales ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree. The Cronbach's alpha for the instrument was 0.7. Data analysis was carried out using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The regression analysis is conducted to identify the impact of informal workplace learning towards job satisfaction among property executives.

■4.0 RESULTS

Majority respondents of this study are female property executives (52%) and single (60%). Most of the respondents have one to three years of working experience (32%), followed by four to six years (28%), seven to nine years (21%), more than nine years (11%) and less than one year (8%) of working experience.

Result from regression analysis shows that the informal workplace learning has a significant impact on job satisfaction. Based on Table 1, the overall informal workplace learning was found to explained 73% variance of the respondents' job satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.72$, $F(3, 193) = 169.220$, $p < 0.01$). This study suggested that informal workplace learning is highly contribute to the job satisfaction among property executives.

Table 1 Result of regression analysis for impact of informal workplace learning on job satisfaction

Model	Informal Workplace Learning		
	β	t	p -value
IWL Past Episode	0.37	6.27	0.00**
IWL Current Experience	0.39	5.96	0.00**
IWL Future Behavior	0.18	2.67	0.00**
R	0.85		
R ²	0.73		
F	169.220**		

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

IWL = Informal Workplace Learning

a. Predictor: IWL

b. Dependent: Job Satisfaction

Most interestingly, the impact of the three components of informal learning to job satisfaction was found to be positively significant. The results from Table 1 indicates that the increment of 1 unit of learning based on past episode will predict the increase of job satisfaction by 0.37 unit ($\beta = 0.37$, $p < 0.01$). Meanwhile, the increase of 1 unit of learning based on current experience will predict the increase of job satisfaction by 0.39 unit ($\beta = 0.39$, $p < 0.01$). Finally, the increase of 1 unit of learning based on future behavior will predict the increase of job satisfaction by 0.18 unit ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < 0.01$).

■4.0 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study aims to identify the impact of informal workplace learning towards job satisfaction among property executives. The informal workplace learning was found to be a significant predictor of job satisfaction. These results come in accordance with study conducted by Rowden and Conine (2005) which found that workplace learning has a significant impact on employees' job satisfaction. Accordingly, learning in the workplace allows the employees to achieve appropriate skills when performing their task. Thus increasing the satisfaction of employees in achieving their jobs' target (Chiang & Wang, 2008). Informal learning provides opportunities for employees to experience meaningfulness of work, responsibility and knowledge on the outcome of work activities. It increases employees' job intrinsic motivation which is one of the situational characteristics that lead to higher level of job satisfaction (Quarstein, 1992; Judge & Klinger, 2008; Renn & vandenbergh, 1995).

Past episode informal workplace learning was found to have a positive impact on job satisfaction. Thus accepting the H1 of the study in which the increase of past episode informal workplace learning will increase the job satisfaction. Indicating that the property executives were engaged with incidental learning in the workplace, where they learn from past mistake and adapt to the organization's culture through the process of trial and error on the task. The incidental learning will help the employees to adapt themselves to the workplace environment and organizational goal which in turn increase their job satisfaction. As mention by Nekoranec and Nagyova (2014) that employees adaptation to working environment is the result of the learning process by which can contribute to the satisfaction of employees towards their engaged working behavior. This study support previous research by Rowden and Ahmad (2000) which proved the positive association between informal learning and job satisfaction, where some variance of job satisfaction were accounted by the learning from past incidents.

The results of this study also led to the acceptance of the second hypothesis (H2) of the study. Informal learning based on current experience was found to be a significant predictor of job satisfaction among property executives. In other words, the increase of learning based on problem-solving, exchanging opinions, ideas and decision making through networking, mentoring and coaching especially when work in a team will increase job satisfaction among employees. This study comes in accordance with some of the previous study which found that informal learning through shared vision and team learning have a significant impact on employees' job satisfaction (Erdem,

Ilgan & Ucar, 2014; Razali, Amira & Shobri, 2013). This connection represents the learning interaction between employers and employees in the workplace which is important to create employees' job satisfaction (Stello, 2011).

As evident from Table 2, the regression result also supporting the third hypothesis (H3) of this study. The job satisfaction of property executives was found to be significantly predicted by informal workplace learning based on future behavior. The increase of learning based on future behavior will tend to increase employees' job satisfaction. The implicit learning of future behavior is a continuous learning which involves the unconscious expectation of employees with recognition of possible future learning opportunities (Eraut, 2004). Thus, positive expectation of future behavior and learning opportunities will enhance the positive experience as well as the satisfaction of employees towards their job. In other words, employees' continuous learning in the organization will increase their job satisfaction (Laatinainen, 2014).

This study brings about several recommendations for the property consulting firms to increase job satisfaction among their employees. Organizing periodical meetings for employees to discuss problems and current issues faced while carrying out tasks can be beneficial to the firm. It can improve the work quality and allow employees to learn by sharing their experiences and knowledge with their superiors and colleagues (Razali et al., 2013). Property consulting firms can also use modern technologies such as email and online platforms or database in order to provide relevant information and share the organizational goal or future expectation with employees. Organizational goal is one of the important elements which determine the commitment of employees as well as to predict the employees' job satisfaction (Houten, Cabrita & Vargas, 2014).

There are certain areas arising from the present study that may be addressed by future researchers. Firstly, the proposed model of relationship between informal workplace learning and job satisfaction should be tested in other small and medium size industries such as manufacturing, logistics and transportation, also in well-established companies such as oil and gas, healthcare and retail business. Immediate work environment differs significantly in different industrial sector (Houten et al., 2014). Hence, the predictive characteristic of informal workplace learning may vary across sectors. Secondly, the current study involves two major variable that is, informal workplace learning and job satisfaction. Workplace learning can be informal or formal (Malcolm et al., 2003). Therefore, the future research could also take into account the formal learning in the workplace and its impact on employees' job satisfaction. Finally, future researchers may also study the factors and antecedents which relate to the informal workplace learning in order to explore potential predictor that can boost individual motivation to learn as well as job satisfaction.

5.0 CONCLUSION

To summarize, this study found that informal workplace learning which consists of past episode, current experience and future behavior has a significant impact on job satisfaction among property executives. Informal workplace learning has been proved to be a positive predictor of job satisfaction which is an important attitudinal factor in the workplace. It further underscores that learning opportunities in the workplace can enhance the level of job satisfaction. As for these results, it is suggested that employers should create policies and practice that encourages participatory learning process in the workplace in order to improve the employees' satisfaction towards their job. It involves the opportunities for employees to learn based on past, current and future experiences and behaviors through schedule meetings and up-to-date internet facilities and shared drive system. This study concluded that better learning produce a good job satisfaction which in turn increase organizational achievement and performance.

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