Organizing Effective Competence Development: Towards an Integrated Model

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HELIX Excellence Centre

- A ten year research and innovation programme
- Organized as a partnership between the university, companies, public sector and labour market organizations
- Based on a multi-disciplinary and interactive research approach
The Concept of Competence

Defined here as:

• the potential capacity of an individual (or a collective)
• to successfully handle certain tasks (or situations)
• according to certain formal or informal criteria, set by oneself or by somebody else
The Concepts of Competence and Qualification

Competence
- Formal Competence
- Actual Competence
- Competence In Use

Qualification
- Employer Demand for Competence
- Competence Required by the Task/Job

V I N N   E x c e l l e n c e   C e n t r e
Potential Effects of Competence Development

• Improved organizational performance (e.g. in terms of quality, delivery on time, productivity)

• Increased ability for problem-solving, idea development and practice-based innovations (”everyday innovations”)

• Improved work related health and reduced risks for stress

• Individual development and lifelong learning
Main Forms of Competence Development

- Training and development through formal learning activities, e.g. courses
- Non-formal learning activities, e.g. seminars, conferences, supervision programmes
- Informal learning activities, i.e. learning in and through daily work
Four Levels of Outcomes

- Satisfied participants
- Learning of e.g. new knowledge or skills
- Increased competence = capacity to put knowledge to work
- Improved organizational performance in terms of e.g. improved quality or delivery on time

(adapted after Kirkpatrick, 1998)
Too Much Confidence in Training as a Magic Bullet

Training (e.g. courses)

 Increased individual competence and organizational performance
Effects of training are not achieved automatically

- Training through internal or external courses
- Knowledge
- Skills
- Attitudes

Learning Environment
- Support for learning: management attention and encouragement; internal supervisors

Informal learning through the use of knowledge and skills in daily work

Increased individual/collective competence, i.e. capacity to handle certain situations or tasks
Actors in an Integrated System of Workplace Learning

- First-line managers
- Internal Supervisors/Educators
- Teachers/Educational providers
- Participants (employees)
The Importance of the Workplace as a Learning Environment

- The effects of competence development depend to a large extent on the opportunities for knowledge use and further learning in and through work

- And thereby on the workplace as a learning environment
Two Types of Learning Environment: Constraining and Enabling

A workplace offers a constraining or an enabling learning environment depending on:

- the learning potential of the tasks (e.g. complexity, task variety, scope of action/control);
- opportunities for feedback and reflection;
- management attention, encouragement and support for learning at work;
- employee participation in problem handling and development activities;
- cultural aspects, e.g. openness and trust
- available time and other resources for learning
Constraining and Enabling Learning Environments

Traditional Organization
- Detailed management control
- Passive routinized employees

Knowledge-Based Organization
- Active employees with space for improvisation and problem-solving
- Development oriented supportive leaders

V I N N  E x c e l l e n c e  C e n t r e
Enabling Learning Environments Require a Balance Between Two Logics

The Logic of Development:

• reflection, alternative thinking, experimentation, risk taking;
• tolerance of ambiguity, variation, and mistakes;
• critical analysis;
• creative (innovative) learning

The Logic of Performance/Production:

• high demands on efficiency;
• problem-solving through avoidance or the application of given rules or instructions
• a focus on consensus, and stability – a low tolerance of variation
• reproductive learning
Leadership for Learning: What does it mean in practice?

**Development Oriented Leadership**

- Issues related to training and development are understood as an integrated part of the duties of being a manager
- First-line managers attend to, encourage and support the co-workers’ learning activities at work (clarify expectations, create necessary resources, follow up on activities)

**Administratively Oriented Leadership**

- First-line managers do not view issues related to training and development as part of their duties as managers – these issues are delegated to others
- A main focus on administrative issues, operations, and everyday work
Effective competence development at the workplace presupposes:

• Training activities (e.g. courses) that are properly planned, designed, delivered, and evaluated

• But sending employees to courses is not sufficient for achieving effects in terms of improved competence and organizational performance

• What is equally (or even more important) is to create enabling learning environments that provide “good soil” for further learning at work

• In practice, this might require an active partnership between educational providers and companies.
Selected Publications


Thank you for your attention!