

New Perspectives for Learning - Briefing Paper 30

Learning Environment within Companies

Context of the Research

Throughout the European Union, countries are investing heavily in lifelong learning due to the need to address issues like an aging workforce, the rapid technology changes and increased challenges to competitiveness as a result of globalisation of firms. There is also a growing recognition that structural unemployment and poverty can only be addressed through a holistic approach to education, training and personal development.

Unpredictable and constantly changing job situations that require more individual adaptability have also led employees to increasingly seek training, continuous professional development and lifelong learning throughout their working lives. The extent to which companies use training and development to improve their workforce will affect their overall success in a global market.

This Project has studied the learning environments and strategies for learning, training and development in knowledge intensive and innovative units of companies in Denmark, Sweden, The Netherlands, Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom.

Key Conclusions

The following conclusions were reached:

1. Changing job situations are the driving force for the take-up of lifelong-learning and training.
2. Certification should not be considered as more important than the learning or the competencies involved.
3. Learning opportunities are highly valued by employees and many chose the jobs that offered more opportunities for learning, training and development, because of this, their learning motivation was very high.
4. However, opportunities to pursue educational programmes that lead to recognised qualifications are limited for employed people. This is due to:
 - a) External educational establishments providing the programmes.

- b) Time - full time or part time (evenings) courses do not fit around employment and clash with travel, time, family, and work commitments.
- 5. Although, most companies have training for new employees, this generally involves mentoring but is not generally followed by continuous and innovative learning.
- 6. Without adequate time for learning, employees' knowledge becomes fragmented on an individual and a collective level.
- 7. In addition, deadlines and a hectic work pace leads to spontaneous problem solving and learning but time constraints do not allow for any reflection, integration or incorporation of what has been learnt.
- 8. Learning environments are created to a large extent by line responsibility, access to mentors and the organisation of work in teams and projects.
- 9. The most important factors for learning environments are:-
 - a) Work and the organisation of work.
 - b) An open culture for sharing information and knowledge through mentoring.
 - c) Collaboration in projects/teams.
 - d) Networks – face-to-face and though ICT.
- 10. In addition, important learning conditions involve having the time to learn effectively and the ability to prioritise what needs to be learnt.
- 11. The benefits of learning networks/environments are: -
 - a) Problem solving without involving units, managers or other channels of command/structural barriers. This relies on each employee being aware of each other's strengths.
 - b) Speeding up learning and creative processes by matching creative people with each other, facilities and resources.
- 12. However, companies are not currently interested in evaluating learning, training and development.
- 13. Learning alliances between universities/research institutes and companies are considered helpful in updating companies with technological developments.

Key Recommendations

The project made the following recommendations: -

1. Priorities for lifelong learning should include: -
 - a) Expanding access to education and training.
 - b) Increasing access to suitable programmes for adults who wish/need to update their occupational skills and/or personal development.
2. Courses need to be more flexible and greater economical support must be made available to employees for lifelong learning.
3. Additional co-operation between research, education and certification is needed to meet the needs of training, as regular courses are not covering the needs of employees.
4. Governments and educational institutions should support organisation-specific and internal training activities for knowledge intensive organisations.
5. Alliances between companies, university and research institutes should be stimulated and competency frameworks should be implemented. This could potentially unify corporate culture.
6. European Union policies should concentrate on ensuring transparency for qualification equivalents and encouraging the free flow of information to encourage international employability.
7. Business strategies should be based on creative learning at work, which in turn, should be based on actual and possible business strategies. Communications between business management and employee learning also needs to be improved.
8. The management of learning needs to be supported and integrated as a valued part of the organisation. It should involve the learner, the planners (teachers/trainers) and colleagues.
9. Learning opportunities also need be closely related to work to ensure they are relevant to work and the development of work.
10. Time is critical for successful learning, therefore time for learning should be considered as fundamental for employees' development.

11. There also needs to be more time for reflection and for the integration of new knowledge and skills into personal competence and the company.
12. In addition, an open learning climate is needed to encourage learning and innovation from all employees, including those who are not responsible for innovation.
13. Eventually, organisations may need to move away from a competitive culture to a sharing culture to develop effective learning environments.
14. There is potential for further research on: -
 - a) The relationship between business strategies and learning, training and development as a basis for development.
 - b) The increased responsibility for line managers, team leaders and project leaders to create good learning environments and develop into educational leaders.
 - c) How culture and forms of co-operation at work forms a basis for learning. The impact of teamwork, innovative work and support on the success of a business and a personal level. The varying character of mentoring is a particularly interesting area of research.

Further Information

The full title of the project and final report is “Learning Environments of Knowledge Intensive Company units in Five European Countries” (2002)

[Full report](#), [Abstract](#), [Summary](#), [Partner details](#)

Contact Person

Prof. Lennart Svensson
Lund University
Department of Education
221 00 Lund
Sweden

Tel: +46 46 2228728

Fax: +46 46 2224538

Email: lennart.svensson@pedagog.lu.se

Visit <http://www.pjb.co.uk/npl/index.htm> for more information about other Briefing Papers on “New Perspectives for Learning” or contact pjb Associates pjb@pjb.co.uk Tel +44 1353 667973