

Creating and Managing Expansive Workplace Learning Environments

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Innovation and Learning in Enterprises
Cedefop Workshop November 2011

Workplaces as Sites and Catalysts for Learning

- Why are some workplaces better environments for learning?
- How can work be better organised to stimulate and support learning?
- How might learning stimulate and support innovation?

Time for an Inter-disciplinary Approach?

- Social Theories of Learning + Concepts from Economic Geography and Business/Organisation Studies
- Territorial Innovation Models
- Territorial Knowledge Dynamics

Worlds within worlds: where does the workplace sit in the productive system?



Productive Systems

- Interlinked social networks through which economic activity is organised - goods and services produced and consumed
- Encompasses micro businesses to multi-nationals
- Patterns of power and control exercised at different layers of the STAGES and STRUCTURES of production
- Public sector in UK very 'top heavy' - squeezing out space for autonomy/discretion

Creating an environment for learning

- Organisation of work
- Level of discretion and trust
- Physical (and virtual) environment – spaces for sharing and creating knowledge
- Use of everyday artefacts as catalysts
- Japanese concept of ba – harmony/integration

Working with Diversity

- Workplaces are different - employers are different
- Learning environments at work exist on an 'expansive' – 'restrictive' continuum
- Learning is part of everyday workplace activity – but environment can turn this into vehicle for innovation and growth

Expansive-Restrictive Framework

Workforce development aligns organisational and individual goals	Individual moulded to fit organisational goals – ‘learning’ seen as an ‘event’
Employees have dual identity: worker and learner	Fast track to productive worker
Expertise widely distributed: multi-dimensional concept of expertise	Expertise narrowly defined and confined to top level – ‘need to know basis’
Manager’s key role to support learning – supported by mentors	Manager’s role to meet targets – rhetoric of mentoring

Workers given discretion to make judgements and contribute to decision-making

Participation in different communities of practice is encouraged – job/team boundaries can be crossed

Planned time off-the-job for reflection and deeper learning beyond immediate job requirements

Discretion limited to key workers – no employee involvement in workplace decisions

Participation restricted to immediate work team/area – boundary crossing discouraged – isolated workers

All training/development on-the-job and limited to immediate job requirements

Managers as 'Teachers' and Agents of Change

- Key to maintenance and sustainability of learning environment
- But - affected by productive system to act in certain ways - exerting 'agency'
- Constructive feedback key motivator for employees - concept of the 'tutorial'
- Forms of managerial support need building into model of learning - mentors, coaches, appraisers/reviewers

Better Jobs, Better Learning?

- “I think most of us are looking for a calling, not a job. Most of us, like the assembly line worker, have jobs that are too small for our spirit. Jobs are not big enough for people.”

(Nora Watson, quoted in Studs Terkel's, *Working*, 1972, xxiv)