Chapter 14
Analyzing How Cultural Norms Affect Learner Preferences in Organizational Learning Programs

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ABSTRACT

Offering organizational learning programs that engage employees within the culture may help them implement strategies learned within the organization. The current theoretical research scope was performed to bring a greater understanding of the effects of cultural norms upon learner preferences in organizational learning programs along with self-leadership strategies and general self-efficacy due to the possible effects of individual characteristics upon the overall organizational performance. Due to the intrinsic motivation and biological makeup of the individual, a learner style may be skewed simply because their perception of the cultural norms and effectiveness of the organizational learning program. Cultural norms may have an effect upon learner preference within organizational learning programs; however, the magnitude and direction affects learner preference may be dependent upon self-leadership strategies and the level general self-efficacy.

INTRODUCTION

Cultural norms affect learner preferences in organizational learning programs in various and significant ways. Cultural norms may either encourage or inhibit the preferences available to learners when transformative learning practices are employed. Depending upon the organizational norms, individuals may feel that the organizational learning programs are trustworthy, helpful, or useless. The success of organizational learning programs are ultimately determined by how well they use transformational learning practices; independently or collectively.

This chapter proposes avenues organizational learning practitioners can use to evaluate and improve the organizational cultural norms that affects learner preferences through the lens of the transformative learning theory, general self-efficacy beliefs, and self-leadership strategies. Also, this chapter addresses how the employment of these methods hold the propensity to increase the effectiveness of an organization's performance. Here, cultural norms, learner preferences, organizational learning programs, and transformative learning practices are defined and intertwined into a cohesive ideology. The influences of self-efficacy and self-leadership strategies upon cultural norms, organizational learning programs, and transformative learning practices will be discussed to determine possible independent and collective effects upon learners' preferences.

Cultural Norms

One must research each construct independently to understand the influences of self-efficacy and self-leadership strategies upon cultural norms, organizational learning programs, and transformative learning practices. First, it is vital to understand the potential leading variable in this equation—cultural norms. Matsumoto (2007) defined culture as a set of principles and beliefs that individuals engage in to survive. This is comparable to Darwinism, whereby only the strongest and healthiest survive into the next generation. However, in contemporary society, survival can include being part of the latest fashion trends, living in the best neighborhoods, obtaining the highest level of education, growing a business record annual profits, etc. Even though the worldviews that include survival for livelihood and survival through social status seem totally different, only the latter determines an individual's professional success. For example, not knowing or understanding the dress code for a major law firm can cause an associate to not be taken seriously when the opportunity for promotions arises. Even more, such ignorance leads to a lack of growth and professional achievement within that organization, resulting in that individual never reaching full potential.

Even though culture may be defined as a set of survival skills, it may also be defined as cross-cultural communication (Matsumoto, 2007; Hofstede, 1980). Hofstede (2011) defined culture as "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others" (p. 3). This belief, even though seemingly weak, is very much alive and well in present day society. Often times, a group of individuals have the same thought process as the rest of the group; however, there are a few that challenge the pronounced general thought (Janis, 1982). However, having too many different thoughts can create chaos and inconsistences within the group. With this as one of the primary focuses, Hofstede's (1980) described culture with four dimensions: (1) individualism versus collectivism, (2) power distance, (3) uncertainty avoidance, and (4) masculinity versus femininity. The first dimension, individualism versus collectivism, may be contrasted by each person's internal motivation. For example, an individualistic person will engage in behaviors that seek to benefit him or herself, alone. However, in the same situation, a person with a collectivist's viewpoint is more likely to engage in behaviors that will benefit those around them. Within the second dimension, Hofstede describes culture as power distance: the perception of inequality of power distribution by the members of the low-class community. This dimension focuses on inequality in the areas of physical disabilities, mental abilities, characteristics, social status, prestige, wealth, power, law, rights, and rules. The third dimension is uncertainty avoidance which is determined by a culture's tolerance of uncertainty and/or ambiguity. Lastly, Hofstede (2001) described the fourth dimensions as masculinity versus femininity. Masculinity is defined as the roles in which men are more assertive, tough, and focused on material success (p. 297). While on the other hand,

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