

Chapter 30

Self-Directed Learning in Organizations and Institutes of Higher Learning: Implications on Technology, Practice, and Organizational Culture

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses Self-Directed Learning (SDL) and its current use in various types of organizations. A review of theories, literature, and current practices lead to the exploration of what deficits are limiting the use of SDL today, as well as what skill sets are needed to better support and expand the usage of SDL tomorrow in a multitude of environments. Suggestions for ways to increase SDL skills in the general population are also discussed. Major implications for adult educators, human resource development (HRD) professionals, and other practitioners are examined, paying special attention to technology and organizational culture.

INTRODUCTION

Self-directed Learning (SDL) is currently utilized in a multitude of organizations and institutes of higher learning as leaders endeavor to educate and develop their constituents. However, there exists many opportunities to better support the use of SDL. This chapter has three primary objectives. The first objective is to discuss common ways

in which SDL is currently used in a variety of organizations and institutes of higher learning. The next objective is to explore deficits in the existing support for SDL that need to be addressed and remedied for SDL to be fully supported. The final objective is to explore some of the major implications for practitioners in adult education, human resource development (HRD) and other related fields.

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BACKGROUND

This chapter is anchored on the adult learning lens of Self-directed learning (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Candy, 1991; Knowles, 1975; Long, 1992). Self-directed learning (SDL) is an adult learning theory which allows for freedom within individuals' learning experience. SDL can be described in terms of goals, as a process, or as a personal attribute. Our exploration of the issues will focus primarily on SDL as a process. SDL as a process involves the learner and how the individual learns on their own within the context of their environment. Examining SDL as a process includes planning, execution, and evaluation of the learning experience. Tough, Knowles, Garrison and Brockett & Hiemstra all proposed SDL as a process (as cited in Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). However, Knowles and Brockett & Hiemstra also did acknowledge attributes of self-directed learners.

When viewing SDL as a process, there are three primary types of models: linear, interactive and instructional. Although each type affords the learner freedom and flexibility, they each have a unique and specific description. Linear models of SDL still require learners to go through a sequence of prearranged steps. Interactive models of SDL are not as strictly planned as linear models. Interactive models form modules of SDL by focusing on a couple of key factors which are necessary to achieve agreed upon learning objectives. Lastly, instructional models provide sufficient directions for the models to be used in formal settings, yet still allow sufficient flexibility for the learner to exercise freedom. Table 1 summarizes some of the key SDL theories.

Learning to learn requires individuals to develop learning strategies. We see this concept in Knowles definition of self-directed learning (1975, p. 18):

Table 1. Key SDL Theories

SDL Theorists	Theory Description
Tough (1967, 1971)	Linear process built on Houle's work (1961, 1988). This process first gave a comprehensive description of SDL and termed self-planned learning. Defined learning project as deliberate attempts to gain knowledge, consisting of thirteen steps, and totaling at least 7 hours of participation.
Knowles (1975)	Linear process consisting of six key steps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate setting. • Diagnosing learning needs. • Formulating learning goals. • Identifying human and material resources for learning. • Choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies. • Evaluating learning outcomes.
Candy (1991)	Theory focused on autonomy. Built on Chene's notion (1983) of the autonomous learner by adding strong personal values and beliefs and termed autonomous people.
Brockett & Hiemstra (1991)	Theory produced the interactive process model - Personal Responsibility Orientation (PRO) model and termed self-direction in learning which includes both self-directed learning and learner self-direction. Their model recognizes personal responsibility, context and situational factors.
Garrison (1997)	Multidimensional and interactive process which includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-management or "control." • Self monitoring or "cognitive responsibility." • Motivation or "entering task."
Brookfield (2000)	Goal of SDL is to foster transformative learning. Political perspective focusing on issues of power and control.

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