Building Sustainable Workforce through Informal Learning

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Abstract: In today's scenario where there is market instability, rapidly technological advancement, unpredictable situations, and scarcity of resources it's tough for organizations to maintain sustainability. Sustainability of an organization totally depend on sustain resources such as technical, financial, natural, and most important human resources. Human resource plays a vital role in the organization's sustainability therefore organizations are investing huge on the development of employees through various innovative techniques, methods and programs to gain competitive advantage. Nowadays Organization's and HR practitioners are moving from conventional learning to more practical learning, innovative and informal learning which make employees productive, engaged and responsible and ensures longevity of organization. This paper main aim was to identify the major informal learning ways at workplace which help in to develop sustainable workforce. The study has explored the learning model for sustainable workforce through data collected from secondary data through various research papers, books, journal, articles, learning websites and related work done in this field. Afterwards that learning model has been tested by researcher through appropriate statistical tool. The main finding of the paper is that employees learn from various informal ways that exist at workplace and also intensify the attributes of sustainable workforce in them.

Keywords: Informal learning, Organization, Sustainable, Workforce, Workplace.

I. Introduction

To flourish in long run in this competitive era, each business has to be sustainable in terms of its growth. An organization's sustainability is reflected by its growth and positive impact in the global market. Organization's sustainability is a dynamic dimension and lot of factors plays role in making organization sustainable. Among all the primary or key factor responsible for the sustainability is the "Personnel" or its "workforce". For this it is due important that all the employees at workplace should be skilled professionally i.e. Technically and socially. But research

shows that 85% employees work below their potential and not get engaged at work (Gallop, 2018). They also make enormous investment on employee's training & development, talent management and employee engagement through conducting formal training/programs to skill them as per the requirement of job but still they fail to make employees skilled, productive, engaged and also lacking in developing social ethics. As we all know that organization & HR focus more on formal learning which is a one-time and time-consuming process and it does not show the impact on continuous learning, instant learning and it is also monotonous for employees to grab all the stuff in one time. For sustainable learning of employees there is a need for continuous learning which can be gathered through informal learning activities in daily routine like informal conversation with co-workers, unstructured learning pattern, spontaneous learning, hands on training i.e., learning by doing. Therefore, nowadays organizations need to follow informal pattern of learning. This paper focus on role of informal learning at workplace in building sustainable workforce.

II. Sustainable Workforce

Substantiality of employees ensures balanced employee who work with full positive attitude, motivation, skills and enthusiasm for their own and organization's growth. Sustainable workforce defines as "one who have the positive energy, ability, liveliness, and skills to meet current and future organizational performance demands while sustaining their economic and mental health on and off the job" (Kossek, E. E., Valcour, M., & Lirio, P., 2014).
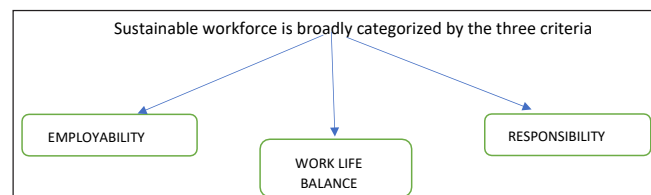

Fig. 1: Attributes of Sustainable Workforce

- *Employability:* Which means the right kind of skills, knowledge, attitude and aptitude which help employee in to carry task successfully.

- *Work Life Balance:* The balance between work life, social and family life of an employee.
- *Reasonability at Workplace:* Means employee should be ethical, punctual, committed and answerable for all his working.

These characteristics altogether defines sustainable workforce which is a necessity of today's organization. The prosperity of any organization and nation depend upon the productivity of its workforce. In today's scenario business houses are using sustainable workforce as strategic instrument to become a leader among competitors.

III. Informal Learning

"Informal learning is the main driver of human capital development at workplace" (De Grip, A. 2015). Unlike formal learning, the learning which is not structured not based on a set of formulas or a guideline is called informal learning. "Learning can happen at work, in order to help organizations, operate more efficiently, the occurrence of non-structure, which is a way of learning outside the classroom activities informal learning" (Garrick, 1998). Informal Learning at workplace is self-directed learning or learning from own experience which happens outside the formal learning or structured training. Though there are regular formal training programs for the capacity building of employees, at the workplace most learning take place in an informal way and happens under the line invisible which is hard to recognize and to understand.

Table I: Ways of Informal Learning

Self-Learning	Learning from Others
Experience	Leader Member Exchange
On – Job Learning	Water Cooler Talks
Trial & Error	Job Shadowing
Temporary Assignments	Attending "brown bags"
Visiting Fairs and Conferences	Huddles
Using Computers/Internet	Buddy-Up

IV. Objective of the Study

- To identify the role of informal learning at workplace in building sustainable workforce.

Research Methodology: Describes how researchers systematically analysis the data and ensures reliable and valid results that fulfil the research objectives.

Table II: Research Methodology

Research Design	Particulars
Nature of the Study	Descriptive and Analytical.
Tools for Data Collection	Primary & Secondary Data.
Primary Data	Questionnaire & Interview.
Secondary Data	Research Paper, Books, Journal and related work done in this field.
Target Population	Employees working in different sectors at the lower-middle and upper-middle level in Jaipur Region, Rajasthan, India.
Sample Size	30 Employees.
Analytical Tools	Correlation, Mean, and Descriptive Statistics.

Table II, shows the research design which is arrangement of the overall strategy chosen by researchers for the collection and analysis of data to bring out the purpose of the research. It is the blueprint for collection, methods, tools analysis of data.

V. Literature Review

Conlon, T. J. (2004) the study concluded that informal learning plays a considerable role in developing professional experts at workplace, and in personal life too. Dhivya, A. S. and Sripirabaa, B. (2015) the findings of the study prove that the influence of leader member exchange and personal characteristics positively impact the work engagement and employee's performance. Donato, A. *et al.* (2017), in this study researcher considered that informal learning is not easy to define and also indicated the facilitators and inhibitors of individual learning. Enos, M. D. *et al.* (2003) the result of study says that proficiency is the product of the informal learning; organization should promote informal learning and should focus on to increase metacognitive abilities of managers as irrespective of spending on formal training. Jeske, D. and Robnagel, C. S. (2016) the result of study showed that asking for help from others and professional self-efficacy are the positive factors of informal learning at workplace. Marsick, V. J. and Volpe, M. (1999) in their study they concluded that employees need to work with others to create new solutions for problems and challenges which they face in daily routine work. Van der Klink, *et al.* (2012) the main results of the study say that majority of the informal learning outcomes are skill based, generic and which are applicable to all kinds of jobs. West, H. (2011) the study highlighted that the practice of informal learning activities can improve organization's productivity and effective transformation of information. Tews, M. J. *et al.*

(2017) study says that there is "all work and no fun", employees can lose their interest and learning the new things which can at last have negative impact on performance and on organization's ability to remain competitive.

VI. Building Sustainable Workforce through Informal Learning

To remain in competition and to cope up with the technological advancement, organizations conduct formal training to keep employees well informed. But still there is gap in organization's and employees' expectations. Employees expectations from their work are also changing they are looking for advanced ways for learning, more flexibility, better career opportunities and sustainability. This gap can be filled if employees are provided with innovative way of learning at workplace. Learning methods from which they can learn at their job, conversing with colleagues, during lunch box time, in tea breaks sessions, while stand up/short meetings, through unscheduled sessions of learning, self-learning and more by the way of informal pattern style learning. Some of the informal learning practices at workplace which help in to develop sustainability attributes among workforce are:

Self-Directed Learning: This self-learning practices make the workforce more accountable, improve aptitude of employees, managed, brings more flexibility and satisfaction in their working by learning in their own way (Tews, M. J. *et al.,* 2017). Some of self-directed learning ways are reading, trial & error, experience, observation, social media etc.

Leader Member Exchange (LMX): The informal relation of seniors and subordinates lead to healthy work environment, concern for welfare of co-workers, enhanced responsibility and efficiency in workforce (Dhivya, A. S. & Sripirabaa, B., 2015).

Conversation with Co-Workers: Is the way to learn informally through informal conversation between employees during the breaks. This practice not only helps into learn technical skills, help in to build good employee's relations, brings harmony among workforce, respectable environment for each other which reduces stress at workplace, reduce conflicts, develop interest of employees towards work and satisfy social needs of employees.

Job Shadowing: Job shadowing is like on the job training where an employee get an opportunity to work alongside with the more experienced colleague, so they can learn and develop their skills without any formal training or classes. Employees able to:

- Reflect and learn from others about work and work culture.
- Get opportunity to discuss things, get deeper knowledge about the organization, job roles and career opportunities.
- Become skilled and upgraded in his/her task.
- Job shadowing approach make employees employable, trained and respectable & responsible towards each other.

Huddles/Stand-Up: Informal meeting or conversation on regular basis between leader/senior, with team members and subordinates regarding work, issues in work, feedbacks and sharing of best practices to do a job. In this way any huddles for which employee is struggling and get solved on time.

Buddy-Up: This approach is followed by many organizations where one junior or a new joiner and his/her immediate senior work together, where senior employee helps junior in to learn and develop skills and facilitate to do work more efficiently and effectively. This approach makes employees knowledgeable and responsible towards task and co-workers which help employee to balance their work life and personal.

Rope Courses/Offsite Meetings: Are outdoor learning from games, fitness activities, personal challenging and physical demanding task which help an employee to improve focus, boosting self-confidence, team spirit, communication skills, enhance leadership qualities and resourcefulness which make them sustainable.

The bulk of researches reveals that informal learning lies at work place due to employee's initiatives. Informal learning is more approachable and practice because it is a 360° degree learning where an employee learns from all the ways at workplace.

VII. Findings of the Secondary Data Analysis

After reviewing and analyzing various researcher papers on informal learning at workplace and their impact on employee's sustainability. It is found that directly or indirectly informal learning is a part of the employees learning and proliferate their performance. An effective, satisfied, healthy, and responsible employees is called sustainable workforce which ensures organization's sustainability and also shown in Model 1.
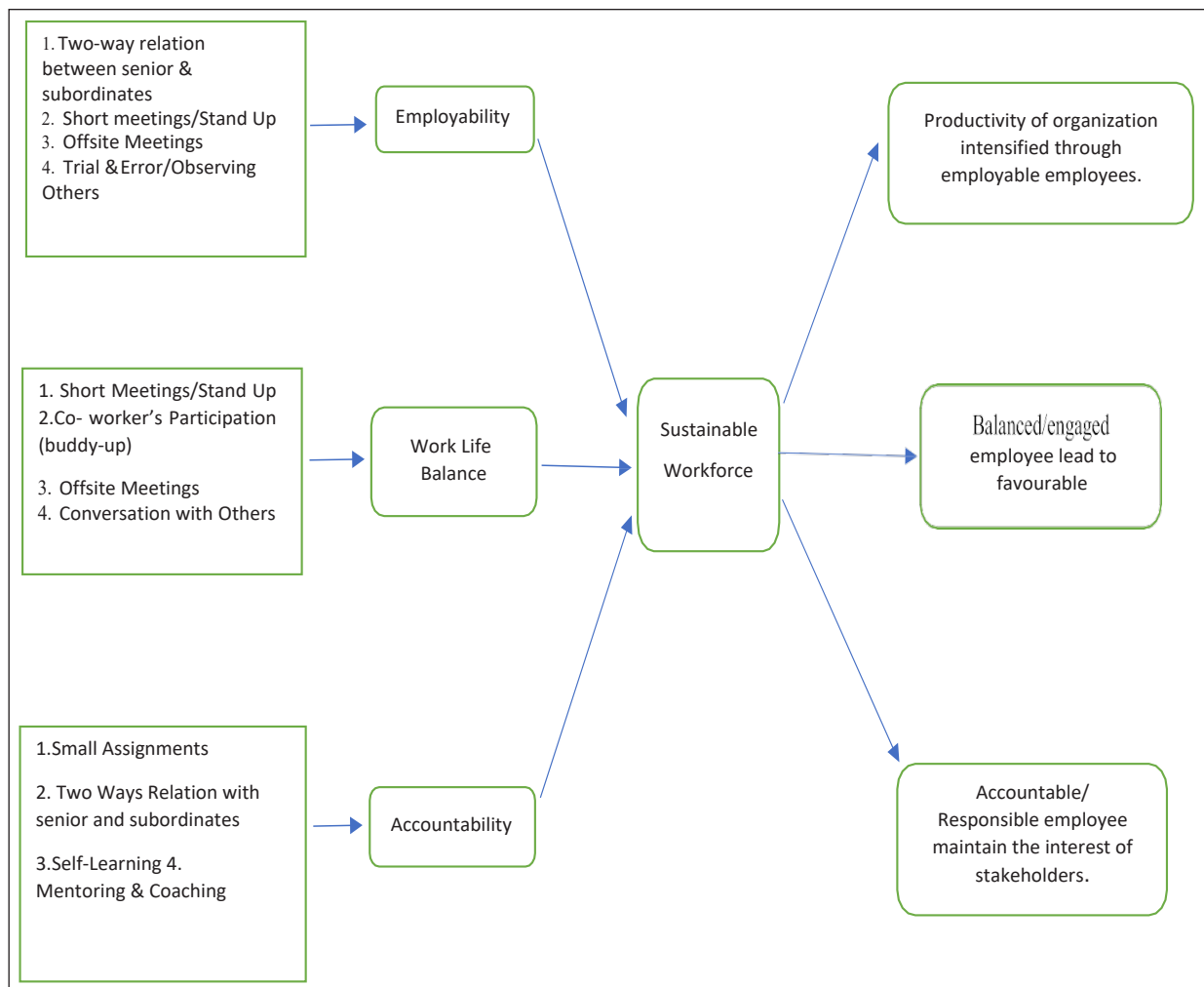
Model 1: Sustainablity Model

Model 1, shows that informal ways of learning at workplace supports in developing the sustainable workforce which is summarized after analyzing different studies on informal learning and sustainable workforce.

VIII. Analysis of Data using Statistical Test

After concluded the secondary data study has come out with model and to test that model researcher has conducted preliminary study to check the reliability and validity of model. Collected data analysis is done through with the help of statistical tool compare mean, ANOVA, correlation and percentage in SPSS software. Questionnaire is distributed randomly among employees working at middle and upper middle level in different sectors. The questionnaire has been distributed through google form doc online and it is divided into three parts.

Table III: Questionnaire Mapping

Objectives	Questions
To identify the informal ways of learning through which employees learn and enhanced their sustainability qualities.	Q1 & Q33
To know impact of informal learning on employee's sustainability.	Q2 to Q14
To know the impact of sustainable workforce on organization's sustainability.	Q15 to Q32

TABLE IV: DEMOGRAPHIC DIMENSIONS

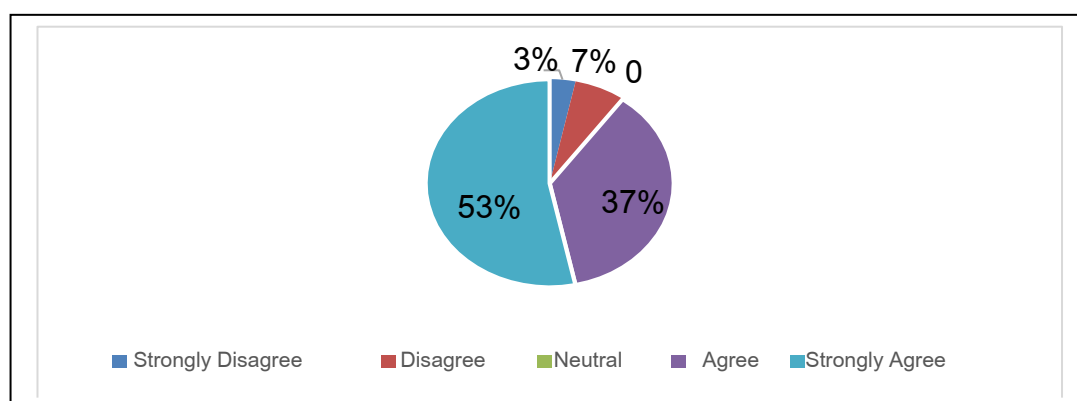| Designation		Gender		Age		Qualification		Working Experience (in Years)	
Lower Level	35%	Male	70%	18-22	2%	UG	0%	>1	3%
Middle Level	35%	Female	30%	23-27	23%	G	16%	1-5	35%
Upper Middle Level	30%	-		28-32	36%	PG	38%	6-10	35%
-		-		33-37	38%	PD	46%	11-16	24%
-		-		38-42	0%	-		17-22	0%
-		-		43+	1%	-		23+	3%

Fig. 2. Employees of Learning at Workplace

Sub section of Q1. From 1.1 to 1.10 where employees asked to tick the informal ways from which they learn and get skills to perform a task.

TABLE V: EFFECTIVE INFORMAL LEARNING WAYS

Types of Informal Ways	Agreed Respondent	Total Respondent	Percentage %
Social Media	21	30	70%
Trial & Error	25	30	83%
Reading Manuals and Documents	24	30	67%
Observing	20	30	77%
Temporary Assignments	20	30	67%
Mentoring & Coaching	22	30	80%
Buddy-Up	22	30	75%
Huddles	23	30	77%
Conversation with colleagues/Juniors/Seniors	27	30	90%
By Attending Off-site Meetings	25	30	67%

TABLE VI: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS (Q2-Q14) INFORMAL LEARNING PRACTICES ENHANCES ATTRIBUTES OF SUSTAINABLE WORKFORCE

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Employability	4.5000	.57235	30
Work Life Balance	4.5333	.50742	30
Accountability Variable	4.2000	.92476	30

TABLE VII: RELATION BETWEEN INFORMAL LEARNING (IV) WITH EMPLOYABILITY, WORK LIFE BALANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY DV (ANOVA)

Particulars	Sig.
EMP	.007
WLB	.030
ACA	.019

Table VII shows that significance value of all three attributes (employability, work life balance, and accountability) with informal learning which is independent factor is less than 0.05 p value. It means there is significant relationship between informal learning and sustainable workforce. When informal learning activities increases attributes of sustainable workforce also develops in the employees.

TABLE VIII: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS SUSTAINABLE WORKFORCE RESULTS INTO SUSTAINABLE ORGANIZATION

Sustainable Organization	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
IP (Increase Productivity)	4.4333	.56832	30
FE (Favorable Environment)	4.4667	.68145	30
IG (Improve Goodwill)	.2333	.72793	30

TABLE IX: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SUSTAINABLE WORKFORCE (IV) AND SUSTAINABLE ORGANIZATION (DV) (ANOVA)

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig. Value
Between Groups	7.859	2	3.929	9.464	.001
Within Groups	11.625	28	.415		
Total	19.484	30			

*Sig Level is 0.05.

Table IX, shows that significance value of sustainable organization with sustainable workforce which is independent factor is less than < 0.05 p value. It means there is significant relationship between sustainable workforce and sustainable organization.

TABLE X: CORRELATIONS BETWEEN INFORMAL LEARNING AND BARRIERS INFORMAL LEARNING (PERSONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL)

	Particulars	ILP	PB	OB
ILP	Correlation Coefficient	1.00	-.415[*]	-.004
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.	.011	.491
	N	30	30	30

Table X shows the relation between informal learning practices and hindrances to informal learning which is at personal level barriers and organizational level. The responses have analyzed with the help of correlation coefficient which represents that informal learning practices have negative correlation with both the hinderances personal (r = (-415)) and as well as organizational (r = (-004)).

TABLE XI: INFORMAL WAYS THROUGH WHICH PARTICULAR ATTRIBUTE OF SUSTAINABLE WORKFORCE GET INTENSIFIED

Informal Ways of Learning	Employability	WLB	Accountability
Social Media	30%	36%	23%
Trail & Error Approach	62%	0%	42%
Observing Others	65%	28%	70%
Temporary Assignments	42%	28%	65%
Mentoring & Coaching	65%	50%	65%

Informal Ways of Learning	Employability	WLB	Accountability
Buddy-Up	30%	65%	30%
Conversation in free times with colleagues	58%	60%	53%
Huddles	35%	52%	50%
Offsite meetings	35%	28%	20%

IX. FINDINGS OF THE PRIMARY DATA ANALYSIS

After analysis of primary data, it is found that informal learning play major role in employee's learning at workplace. Statistics says that employee's quality to be sustainable workforce get improved when they experience informal learning at workplace. It is also found that there is significant positive impact of informal learning on all three attributes of sustainable workforce. Result of the study says that improved employability enhances the productivity of an organization, Balance employee results into favorable environment where employees can work for long time and accountable employee extent the interest of others in organization and build goodwill of organization. Study revealed that there is significant positive impact of sustainable workforce on sustainable organization. Employees don't experience any personal or organizational hindrances which ceases them to learn informally except obsequiousness and non-recognition of informal learning.

The results of the study also showed that from which particular ways of learning help in to improve which particular attribute of sustainable workforce:

Attributes of Sustainable Workforce	Informal Ways
a) Employability	Trial & Error Approach
	Mentoring & Coaching
	Observing Others
b) Work Life Balance	While Conversing with other colleagues in free time
	Buddy-Up
	Huddles
c) Accountability	Observing Others
	Temporary Assignments
	Mentoring & Coaching

X. CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY

After analyzing the study also drawn that informal learning is an innovative and continuous ways to keep employees updated, engaged, motivated, flexible towards, managed, ethical, punctual which lead to an employee towards sustainable workforce. Through sustainable workforce an organization can also sustain in long run which is the major objective of today's

business houses. These daily informal learning practices are more fruitful and less costly than the formal training program conducted by generally organizations.

Whereas informal learning at workplace is normally not recognized, although it is an important tool for learning. Most of the organizations are aware of informal learning but they do not know how to make use of informal learning to improve the performance and productivity of employees. So, study figure out that informal ways can be the approach for the organizations & business houses to make employees employable, balanced and responsible through which they can sustain in long run.

XI. Limitations of the Study

The study is concluded from small sample size. This study has focused on over all informal practices not on particular informal way. This research is on general workforce not on particular defined population or area.

XII. Recommendations and Suggestions for Further Study

The study suggest that informal leaning is an innovative, less expensive and effective way for the employee's growth & development. Organizations can include it in their training and development policies as an important tool. The further study can be done with large sample size and can research on impact of different informal practices on individual characteristics of sustainable workforce.

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