

Effects of Decision Making Process among Top Management Staff in Nigerian Polytechnics: The Role of Informal Learning

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ABSTRACT

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Over the years, focus on how to improve employee performance had been centered mostly on formal learning with less attention on informal learning. In this study, the importance of informal learning is examined. The conceptual review reveals that informal learning among organization's top management staff creates an atmosphere that encourages radical innovation, and effective decision-making process through experience and of course, day-in-day-out unstructured conversations. With these, some propositions that will be tested empirically were made regarding the effectiveness of decision-making among Top Management staff in Nigerian polytechnics.

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1. Introduction

Philosophers believed that human beings are the most complex machine to manage. Meanwhile, the coming together of humans with different level or status of biasness constitute an organization [1] which needs to decide and work for a common goal through decision making by some biased minds. The ability to reach a common goal and make effective decision is regarded as the heart to organisation success. Thus making an effective and accurate decisions over these "complex machines" becomes an issue. In this sense, to make accurate, efficient and effective judgement becomes a tedious task for the top management of an organization. Although, virtually every organization have some protocols in which decision-making process follows. However, in recent times, it is observed that the influence of globalization effect is not limited to trades, and government trade policies. With the rapid adoption of internet and social media among organizations, the flow of information is also being influenced and enhanced [2]. Thus, organizations are exposed to vital and tangible information via informal settings and not only the predefined formal learning protocol set out by organizations' constitutions. With this, it can be opined that informal learning in organisations cannot be undermined.

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Informal learning was acknowledged and confirmed by earlier literatures to influence positively managerial processes through effective knowledge transfer, motivation and encouragement, effective organizational decision-making through flexible information gathering, efficient management of information and employees' competencies capable of satisfying organization needs. [3,4]. In spite of these, informal learning is relegated and considered as just the best alternative to formal learning [5,6].

With this, the objective of this paper is to conceptually examine the effectiveness of informal learning in decision making among organizations and relate it with the practice among Top Management staff of Nigerian polytechnics.

2. Review: Decision-Making among Top Management staff of Nigerian Polytechnics

Decision making in Nigerian higher institutions especially the polytechnic sector is regarded as highly formal where only the Top Management staff has the right and authority to give order. A study by Theresa [7] acknowledge this and as well remarked, little are the contributions of Head of Departments (HOD) towards polytechnic decision making process. The author further states that, information flow from subordinates to the top management is minimal.

Despite the strict adherence to formal protocol, researchers such as Mamman *et al.*, [8] tries to assess management strategies embarked upon by Top Management staff of Nigerian polytechnics. The authors argued no clear path for managerial strategies among the Top Management staff of Nigerian polytechnic thus, the assessment cannot be made. However, a strong indication on the effectiveness of informal learning on decision making in Nigerian higher institutions is the study of [9] where the result of their findings indicated a significant relationship between students' involvement (informal learning) in managerial decision making and leadership, therefore, suggesting a provision that will give room to students' active involvement in decision making process.

In the light of these few studies, one can simply argue that, Top Management staff of Nigerian Polytechnics gave no room for informal learning in decision-making process. Conferring to the studies of Mamman *et al.*, and Oni *et al.*, [8,9], it can easily be deduced that, encouraging informal learning during decision making process in polytechnics will give room for managerial innovation, effective and efficient decision making that will have significant influence on all stakeholders.

2.1 Organizational Decision Making

Organizations are referred to as complex political systems that comprise individuals with incompatible visions moulded by status ambitious biases [10] as seen in Papamichail [1]. These individual incompatibilities therefore make decisions making in organizations a tedious task. Decision making is termed as the nucleus of management [11] as it helps in recognizing organizational issues, implement managerial functions, plans and policy formulations, evaluation of several alternatives and helps managers to operate successful organizations [12] by utilizing the available scarce resources effectively and efficiently thus, achieving its objectives [12]. Therefore, to make accurate and effective decision in any organization, the decision maker(s) must be innovative enough to explore all the alternative channels which include informal learning process.

2.2. Concept of Informal Learning

According to opinion expressed by Eraut [13], in most cases, informal learning is regarded as adult education because allows greater flexibility for learners, allow learners to learn from other peers and

require individual socialization. In a more technical description, Eraut [13] concludes informal learning to include experience, tacit knowledge, knowledge transfers and intuitive practice. Informal learning from the notion expressed by Rogoff *et al.*, [6], differs across organizations. Nevertheless, the scholars argue the importance of informal learning to be same across organizations. As evidence from the work of Rogoff *et al.*, [6], the importance of informal learning includes building up learners' initiatives, entails guidance to newcomers through social interactions with structured or semi-structured activities and collaborating activities and solo activities. Despite all these benefits of informal learning, it was reported and treated as an alternative to formal learning [6]. Whereas, Galanis *et al.*, [14] argued informal learning to complement formal learning. May be, because it results as work-related learning, leisure activities and or family [15]. Meanwhile, García-Peñalvo *et al.*, [16] concludes that informal learning is one of the key ways in which employees' competencies can be enhanced in organisations from external context.

An in-depth work on informal learning in organization can be found in the work of Grip [17]; according to the author, informal learning is rated higher than formal learning and it is regarded as automatic learning process that allow new employees to adapt and steep up their performance during their first year of employment. In addition, informal learning helps in updating it as one of the skills required to keep up with the technological and organizational changes and innovations.

As evidence from earlier literatures, informal learning is a complex structure and there is no basic path to it. The authenticity and unpredictability of informal learning has led most organizations to encourage formal learning over informal learning process in decision making [5]. This could be limitation, and why as of today, it is considered as an alternative to formal learning [5].

According to the review made by Grip [17] it is noted that although, there are works on informal learning in organizations, there are few studies that really examined informal learning in organizations, gave less attention to informal learning at the workplace, talked less of its importance in decision making among top managerial positions in academic world especially in Nigerian polytechnics.

Some available literature on how informal learning can influence decision making among organization is that of [4], where it was acknowledged that, it is possible to make organizational decisions based on informal knowledge because it allows decision flexibility to satisfy the majority needs of the organization. In a similar view, an earlier investigation by Werquin [18] published by OECD remarked, sustainability and human capital reliance centered on informal learning. Thus, relating this to organizational decision-making process, it can easily be concluded conceptually that informal learning enhances decision making process.

Recently, informal learning has become one of the vital soft skills required to successfully manage organization, particularly, in the context of decision making. As explained by Manuti *et al.*, [19], the rapid and radical changes in political, economic, social and cultural environment makes skills and competencies become rapidly outdated, thus, to catch up with this rapid change, by increasing competency, informal learning is encouraged [20]. However, García-Peñalvo *et al.*, [4] suggest the consideration of informal learning decision flexibility to supports organizational needs. Conferring to the context of this study, the author of this research work thus, makes this proposition that will be tested and confirmed in later study:

2.3. The Use of Informal Learning in Decision Making Process Enhance Effective Decision Making

Based on the above discussions pertaining to the effectiveness of informal learning on decision making process among Top Management staff of Nigerian polytechnics, the flow of the perceived relationship which is to be empirically verified is thus presented in Figure 1.



Fig. 1. Relationship between Informal learning and Decision making Process

Using social identity theory proposed by Tajfel [21] “a group in which a person belongs is a source of their pride.” Relating this into this research context, engaging other employees through informal learning means gives pride and sense of belonging to them. Therefore, they feel inclusive. Their inclusion feeling led to innovativeness and positive competition that gear organizations towards goals and objectives [7,8,12]. Besides, informal decision making process depends on five factors as argued by Donato [22] these are: organizations culture, employees’ interpersonal relationship, knowledge sharing capabilities in the organization, autodidactic and facilitating factors that might encourage or inhibits informal learning. Meanwhile, Donato [22] attests that it is a difficult task to solely depend on informal learning in decision making process but they acknowledge the fact that it does help organizations in making near accurate decisions with higher success rate. Concerning this, World Bank [23] through a development report identifies three pillars of human decision making by employing social and psychological underpinnings of human behaviour. The report concludes that individual simplify problems by automatically think and evaluate situations based on their surrounding or perceptions on previous experience. Furthermore, the report argue that people think socially based on their social network influence and lastly, World Bank [23] report concludes that individuals uses their mental model to perceive the world around them.

3. Discussion

As evidence from the conceptual review, informal decision making had been a major decision-making channel employed among several organizations in which Top Management staff of Nigerian polytechnics are among. However, it is now being noted that the formal decision-making channel employed to make decisions are not being air to employees of lower levels, that is, their plights are at several times left out in decision making process. Therefore, to make effective decision that brings about win-win situation which, gives room for innovativeness and creativity, this study argues in favour of informal decision learning inclusion.

4. Conclusions

In summary, conceptual suggestion reveals that inculcating informal learning process into decision making among Top Management of Nigerian polytechnics will encourage employees’ innovativeness, by giving them sense of inclusion as with this, efficient and effective decision making in organizations can be achieved for the entire improvement of the system.

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