An Understanding of Work-Related Self-Directed Learning: Study in a Private Organization in Indonesia

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Abstract:

Many scholars highlight the importance of work-related self-directed learning (WRSDL) in the workplace, which brings benefits for the employees and the organization. Hence, the purpose of this study is to investigate WRSDL practices among staff and managers from various job fields in order to get in-depth understanding and ways how to cultivate it in the organization. This study was conducted in a prominent motorcycle-manufacturing company in Indonesia by using qualitative method in order to get an in-depth understanding of WRSDL phenomenon. In this company, improvement and innovation had always been the central issues and become a
way of life ingrained among the employees. A total of thirty staff and managers were purposefully selected and interviewed by using semi-structured questions. Data collected were analyzed using content analysis approach. Results of this study have indicated several influencing factors that essential in the emergence of WRSDL and ways how to cultivate WRSDL also notified. In general, this study provides a deeper understanding of WRSDL and has identified some good contribution and recommendation to the body of knowledge, practitioner as well as for future research which explain later.

Keywords: Self-Directed Learning, Work-Related Self-Directed Learning, Organizational Learning

Background of the Study
The phenomena of globalization, tight competition and uncertain eco-sociopolitical circumstances have brought drastic changes to the way organizations conduct their business. In these circumstances, employees at all levels are required to change their mindset about the way they develop their competencies; the way they learn in the workplace (Junaiah, 2008). The employees need to realize that organizations require people who are not just well aware of the importance of learning but they must have initiative and willingness to take learning as their own responsibility (Garger, 1999).

Even though the employees naturally have self-initiative to learn (Cross, 2006; Knowles 1975), yet some of them are prominent in taking initiative to learn but some of them depending on other’s direction. Therefore, the self-directedness of the learners is become a significant factor that should not be ignored. A common label assigned to this approach of learning is self-directed learning (SDL) which is defined by Knowles (1975) as a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes. Each of employees needs to empower his/herself as self-directed learner in order to meet the demands of the rapidly changing business environment (Guglielmino & Guglielmino, 2006).

Statement of the Problem
The self-directed learners are those who have self-concept as independent and active learners (Knowles, 1975), demonstrate a greater awareness and motivation to take responsibility in making learning meaningful (Garrison, 1997), view problems as challenges, ready to change and enjoy learning (Taylor, 1995). Other characteristics such as curiosity, self-disciplined, self-confident, goal-oriented, confidence, commit, and critical reflection (Brookfield, 1986; Candy, 1988) are also essential for self-directed learner. However, these notions have not led to a strong consensus regarding factors that drive the emergence of WRSDL.

According to some researchers (Candy, 1991; Confessore & Bonner, 1997; Kops, 1997; Song & Hill, 2007), there are some organizational factors recognized that could enhance the emergence of WRSDL. Self-directed learning does not occur in a vacuum (Ravid, 1987). Learners may perform different levels of self-direction in different
learning situations (Candy, 1991; Song & Hill, 2007). Setting a supportive learning climate such as providing the availability of resources (both human and non-human), establishing fluent communication could enhance the tendency for self-directed learning to emerge (Kops, 1993, 1997). Interesting notion stated by Fouche & Brezet (1997) that nature of works which are familiar with constant change, have proved WRSDL as a natural learning mode. Again, these notions have not reached a solid consensus about what factors and how these factors take role in cultivating the emergence of WRSDL (Damianoff, 2010; Knight, 2012; Noor Fitriyati, 2009).

Regarding the ways how to cultivate WRSDL, it is still lack of comprehensive research that explain how to cultivate it (Chou, 2012; Junaidah Hashim, 2008; Li, Tancredi, Daniel, John, & Daniel, 2010; Merriam, 2010). By understanding WRSDL in-depth, this study is expected to contribute to the development of body of knowledge and the improvement of HR practitioner. Therefore, this study conducted to identify the factors that influence the emergence of WRSDL and to provide suggestion on how to cultivate it at the workplace.

Methodology
This qualitative study was conducted in a biggest motorcycle manufacturing company in Indonesia where improvement and innovation had always been the central issues and become the way of life ingrained among employees. Participants of this study were selected using purposeful sampling technique. They meet the criteria which had minimal one year working period with the current company and perceived as prominent in practicing WRSDL by their supervisor. Thirty staffs and managers were interviewed semi-structured in order to get their experience in carrying out WRSDL. Data collected were analyzed using content analysis approach.

Result and Discussion
This study found that there were various factors that need to be there to drive the emergence of WRSDL. These driving factors divided into three categories which consist of personal characteristics, organizational factors and family support.

Personal Characteristics
Motivation
Employees were self-directed to do work-related learning in order to satisfy intrinsic and/or extrinsic motivation. People are triggered to learn when they know they will receive some kind of rewards intrinsically or extrinsically (Kim & Park, 2011). This is relevant with Houle (1961)’s study that some learners participate in learning activities merely for the sake of learning; they are motivated to learn merely for the acquisition of knowledge, skills and abilities. Intrinsic motivation occurs when internal drive to carry out self-directed learning exists (Dunn & Dunn, 1978).

Learners also carried out learning as reaction to a triggering event or situation in order to solve problem, improve work process, make work more efficient, propose new ideas to get some credit points, win the competition, get career development or increase financial income. This is also relevant with Houle (1961)’s study as he identified this learning motivation drive the self-directed learners to fulfill extrinsic reward.

Curiosity
The learners carry out WRSDL because of the spirit of curiosity or willingness to
deepen their knowledge related to their field. This curiosity could be internally driven based on their reading or observation or past experience. Some learners also triggered by external factors, such as by getting new information from colleagues they were triggered to know more. This is relevant with some previous study which curiosity was identified as important factor that need to be exist to drive self-directedness in learning (Guglielmino, 1977; Nursyamilah Annuar & Roziana Shaari, 2014; Yang, 2004). Moreover, Tough (1979) urged that satisfaction of curiosity is the second most frequent reason for adults to involve in learning project.

**Personal Mastery**

In this study, it is prominent that the participants showed awareness of who they are, their life purpose, vision, values and commitment. They also showed confident of taking steps towards continual development in achieving what they stated in their vision or objective. Archer and Seevak (1998) named it as personal mastery orientation; those who strive to develop their competences in doing their task and try to work hard to achieve it. The learners who have high personal mastery orientation perceived their workplace as a place to develop personal growth by utilizing their intellectual potential. They will set learning objective in a high level (Ames & Archer, 1988; Dweck & Leggett, 1988) and take the learning task as interesting and important (Dweck & Leggett, 1988).

**Self-Directed Learning Skills**

Participants showed their ability to do system thinking where they can see themselves as part of a complex unity which every single action taken will bring impact to the larger systems. They seek the inter-

connection between their works with others so that they can improve their own work that can facilitate other’s works. This finding is relevant with Candy (1991) who mentioned that in order for self-directed learner to be effective; he/she must be able to think critically to question rules or norms of what he/she is doing. Other scholars also emphasized the importance of cognitive skills of the emergence of WRSDL in terms of deciding learning goals, selecting learning strategies and materials, and implementing evaluation (Cranton, 1996; Taylor, 1995; Cho & Kwon, 2005). As Artis and Harris (2007) and Garrison (1997) stated that self-directed learners get benefit from having core learning skills such as reading, comprehension, arithmetic, critical thinking and problem solving.

**Responsibility**

The learners take responsibility to do WRSDL based on their awareness of the important of deepening or enhancing their knowledge, skills and abilities to ensure they can achieve the goals set or solve problems. This is relevant with Hiemstra (1991) which he stated that self-directed learners assume ownership of the tasks assigned and take it as personal responsibilities for completing it not because they were given the task by their supervisors. The self-directed learners demonstrate a greater awareness and willingness to take responsibility in making learning meaningful thus making them more effective learners (Garrison, 1997; Guglielmino & Guglielmino, 2002; Knowles, 1975).

**Self-Efficacy**

Self-directed learners are learners who are ready to take initiative and control of their learning, they are not waiting to be directed and helped by others such as supervisor or
trainer (Knowles, 1975; Raidal & Volet, 2009). The participants had a clear understanding of their own personal learning needs, they are confidence and able to locate learning resources and know when they would need them. They took difficult tasks as challenges not obstacles to be avoided because they believed if they learn they will be able to perform whatever needed. Self-efficacy was recognized as important component of self-directed learning pursuits (Brookfield, 1986; Candy, 1991; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007; Taylor, 1995) and self-efficacy helps improve the level of self-directed learning (Appelbaum & Hare, 1996). Furthermore, Fisher and King (2010) asserted that the learners who have a high self-efficacy are more successful in carrying out self-directed learning compared to learners with low self-efficacy.

Autonomy/Independent

Participants confidently stating that they were very independent with what they did. This is in line with what Knowles (1975) mentioned that the self-directed learner is a person who has self-concept as independent and active learner, they are motivated by internal incentive. In self-directed learning the locus of control is in the hands of the learner and not the supervisor or trainer (Artis & Harris, 2007). The heart of WRSCL is issues of power and control and access to resources (Brookfield, 2000). Therefore, the self-directed learners are autonomous and independence in their learning (Guglielmino & Guglielmino, 2002).

Adaptiveness/Flexibility

When the participants were exposed to very severe problems where they were not sure about the solution they strive to survive by holding to the belief that they were the ones who were capable in learning and able to adapt or change into various situations. Participants perceived every challenging circumstance as trigger and motivator for them to learn. This is relevant with Knowles (1975) who stated that the initiative to learn derives from the adaptation to changes. The initiative to learn is the means for survival. However, learners may perform different levels of self-direction in different learning situations; the higher the level of self-directedness the more ready the learners to adapt to the situation (Candy, 1991; Song & Hill, 2007).

Knowledge Sharer

Participants stated that updating their current knowledge means making the knowledge up-to-date and applicable into their related field-work. They were not only updating, they were willing to share. They had a strong belief that through knowledge sharing their knowledge will be multiplied driven by the questions or discussions occurred. Therefore, they believe that knowledge sharing is beneficial in helping them to develop and generate knowledge. The interesting finding of this study that most of the participants love to be a teacher, love to disseminate their knowledge, they are knowledge sharers that make them remain resourceful.

Interest and Passion

Participants stated that their personal interest and passion provide a significant influence in driving them to carry out WRSCL. Their interest and passion made them willing to spend their spare time voluntarily, or invest on their own money to provide learning resources. This is in line with what Nursyamilah Annuar and Roziana Shaari (2014) stated that factors of interest, curiosity, love of learning encourage learners to think critical and enhance their self-directed learning.
Values (Knowledge is more valuable than material things)

Participants highlighted the importance of values as principles that is used as a reference for a person to determine what is important in their life. The participants believe that the values of knowledge they learn will be far more worthwhile than material things. Knowledge will remain forever for themselves and it will multiply and bring something positive. Feeling honored due to the knowledge they have was believed as important and guided them in carrying out continuous learning.

Organizational Factors

Organizational Culture that Supportive toward Learning

Participants perceived that management put serious effort in encouraging learning as they provide various learning facilities, training opportunities, availability of experts as references, and reward system. Management encouraged exploration, research, experimentation, learning from errors and builds a conducive learning environment by promoting smooth communication, dialogue and discussion so that everyone in the company continually do learning and makes it as a compulsory habit. In this organizational culture each employee will feel left behind if he/she does not pursue the rate of learning as their surrounding. Bates and Khasawneh (2005) mentioned that organizational culture is learned by individuals and groups concurrently when they work, interact, solve problems and face challenges.

Clear Expectations of Outcome that Align with Organizational Goals (Shared Vision)

The employees need a clear picture of what need to be achieved which will be embedded in their heads and hearts thus forming a sense of purpose. Shared vision allows employees to stay on track and align their effort with the organizational vision (Kops, 1997). These circumstances will make the employees able to take decision to plan, strategize, monitor and evaluate their learning toward achieving the objective. Therefore, for the management, acknowledging the importance of sense of purpose in work is significant and the work will be more intrinsically motivated if the employees are clear about the purposes of the job (Thomas, 2000).

Allocation of Discretionary Time for Learning and Provision of Resources that Support Learning

Participants perceived that organization has provided sufficient learning resources either by providing hardware or software, human or non-human resources. The availability of expertise where the senior workers are very open and welcome in sharing their knowledge with fellow workers perceived as encouraging learning. This is relevant with Spear and Mocker (1984)’s study that the easy access to learning materials strongly influences self-directedness of the employees to carry out their learning. As well Kops (1997) asserted that the availability of resources enhances self-directed learning and the lack of certain resources diminishes it.

Promoting of Leader as Agent of Learning

The participants perceived their leader or supervisor as role model that inspire them to go into higher level of achievement. Leaders enlivens employees’ learning by showing example such as reading and knowledge
sharing as a habit, encouraging to try new things, and build comfortable relationship so that employees feel free to ask questions without fear to be judged as fool. Leaders must become a model of WRSDL behavior, they need to inspire and motivate others in learning (Vaill, 1999). WRSDL is a critical skill for leaders (Vaill, 1999).

Nature of the Company/Work

The nature of job that requires rapid adaptation, deep analysis and critical thinking requires the employees to do a lot of higher order thinking. Moreover, the natures of work that allows flexibility of action where creativity required in solving problems, also perceived as trigger for learning. Freedom on how the employees learn and work has become vital in generating new ideas, innovations and continuous improvement. This nature of works have driven them to carry out WRSDL, to always keep with up dated knowledge. This is relevant with what Skiff (2009) mentioned that WRSDL is particularly relevant when learning must be done fast in response to the unexpected changes. Therefore, organizational environment play a role in affecting WRSDL activities (Raemdonck, Leeden, Valcke, Segers, & Thijsen, 2012).

Family Support

The findings of this study showed that family support is a significant factor in motivating employees to take the initiative to always do self-improvement. Some of the participants come from educator family background, where the mother or father or both work as the principal or teacher in school. This is relevant to that expressed by Brockett and Hiemstra (1991), Brookfield (1993), Cho and Kwon (2005), Candy (1991) that family background influences the emergence of WRSDL. Since childhood they have been inculcated by their parents about the importance of learning and trained to get used to learn as daily life activities.

Conclusion

This study provides a deeper understanding of WRSDL as a kind of natural learning in the workplace context. Every individual has the potential to be self-directed in his or her learning. This study suggested that in order to cultivate WRSDL, managers or human resource practitioners need to build awareness of the importance of learning, help employees to improve their learning skills and ensure shared vision. Urging the employees out of the comfort zone has been identified as factors that encourage initiative and willingness to do WRSDL. Therefore, in order to cultivate WRSDL, managers or human resource practitioners need to use a dynamic approach so that employees are always alert to the external challenges.

This study asserted the importance of accordance between interests and work. This is important to drive personal mastery orientation and WRSDL. Hence, managers and human resource practitioners need to recognize the interests of their staffs and place them accordingly, provide them with appropriate assignments and workload to provoke and stimulate a deeper curiosity in their field. This study perpetuates a very familiar principle: “put the right people in the right place with the right load and the right time”. Since research has shown the benefits of WRSDL to individuals and organizations, managers or human resource practitioners need to place concerted effort to cultivate WRSDL as part of the organizational culture.

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