

**Question:** Explore the learning in the context of workforce from the perspective of individual behaviour.

**Paper type:** Journal Article Review

**Keywords:** Learning, workforce, individual behaviour, innovation, work environment, motivation,

**Reviewed Article:** Behaviours linked to high levels of hotel managers' work-related learning

**Authors:** Annmarie Nicely, Radesh Palakurthi, A. Denise Gooden

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Learning is acquiring knowledge or modify what has already been learnt. The processes and methods could be varied but results are same – an individual attains new height in knowledge and wisdom compared to what he or she had had earlier. Unless an individual does not add extra knowledge to his/her understanding, it is not plausible to consider the person to have learnt. The basic way of effective learning is doing – generally we say it practical. The more we do, the more we learn. The learning process is interwoven with a person's daily activities either at home, office or in playfield. The learning-by-doing theory in economics[1] conceptualised by Kenneth Arrow not only applies in economics but in every aspect of the human activities. To borrow the words of Clark and Geppert (2002), quoted by the researchers of the paper under review, "Learning" could simply be defined as both the transfer and transformation of knowledge".

The journal under review uses this theory to find out the level of learning among the hotel managers in Jamaica and re-application of the learning into their job. The article is purely an empirical and not based on the theory already formulated by some other researchers. The researchers tried to find out relationships between four behaviour constructs (instructive motivation towards learning, perceived risk taking ability, attitude towards learning and attitude towards industry) and the hotel manager's level of learning from their job.

To ensure they remain within the scope of their study, the researchers of this paper have specifically focused on five variables of learning:

- (A) Extent intrinsically motivated to learn
- (B) Perceived risk-taking ability
- (C) Attitude towards learning
- (D) Attitude towards the industry and
- (E) Management self-reported work-related learning

The writers of the research paper under review have made good efforts to bring in the originality in the research they have conducted. The learning behaviour among managers of different industries and different geographical regions can be different. Thus, the writers maintained that specific behaviour of the hotel managers in Jamaica remain the focus of their research rather than cite generalised principles from similar researches carried out in other regions and other industries.

That does not mean, the paper has inadequate literature review. Contemporary literature exhorts the manager to practise new ways of thinking which place learning at the centre of the organization and encourage employees to develop their potential[2]. The researchers have done a fair amount of literature review and included the latest available research outcomes to compare their results.

However, there are areas for the researchers to improve the reliability and authenticity of the paper. The research is not enough in itself and can be improved a lot if the researchers had looked at other aspects of the learning processes.

The paper concludes that motivation to learn and attitudes towards the industry are not significant factors for learning. Rather, writers conclude, individual risk taking ability of the employee in the workplace is the only major factor for high level of learning among the hotel managers. This has narrowed down their research outcomes and left rooms to question the ascertain results are perfect. The writers failed to look at other motivational factors such as incentives and friendly working environment that have immense impact on learning process of employees in any industries.

A survey conducted in 2012 concludes that there is strong relation between learning and working environment. Individuals have differing characteristics about the environment they work and learn but most learn through incentives and friendly environment[3]. That's why most big companies these days prefer to make the working environment friendly, fun and socially healthy. Such environment not only makes employees retain in the company for years but also encourages innovation and creation in the job.

The researchers have not mentioned anything about environment (both physical and mention) for innovative thinking within the company of the managers they included in the survey. The level of learning among employees also depends on the kind of environment company provides for innovation and creative thinking. Some companies ask employees to work based the principles and procedures set by the management while others let the employees work and build new innovation.

Human learn through fun. Graduates prefer to work with Google just because it has built the office in such a way that employees love to stay at office working off hours instead of going home. Google's officers are so comfortable that executives occasionally remind staff at building code regulations against making the office their permanent home[4].

The paper under review mentions nowhere whether the companies where those participating managers work promote independent thinking and innovation among the employees.

Letting the employees to work independently and encourage them for innovation within their work form the significant basis for motivation and retain the employees. Moon and Na (2009) also found a significant positive relationship between motivation and workplace learning[5].

The writers also failed to look at the family structure and its impact on the learning processes. Family environment and work-family life conflict often have impact on the level of learning in an employee. Happy and cooperative members in family induce individuals to learn more while conflict in family distracts individuals to learn at their work. The organizational context, the unique work environment, influences hotel company, individual employee, and employee family outcomes via work-life conflict and facilitation.[6]

There is no mention about the future plans of the managers. Finding out future plans of the managers should have been necessary in terms of determining their level of motivation towards the job. People who have utmost desire to build their life long career obviously give greater interest towards the job and thus bring in innovation into their workplace. They tend to spend their time to learn more about their profession to sharpen their professionalism and widen their prospects of getting better job in the industry. Those looking to try their luck in other industry or profession obviously spend less time to learn about the industry they are in. In this particular paper, the researchers have not asked whether the managers wanted to continue their career in hotel industry or seek alternative career paths – thus leaving one aspect of their source of motivation to work and subsequently learn more of the industry.

The researchers of the paper under review rightly said the information must be retained, internalised and owned by the actors for it to be assessed as learnt. Learning generally gives two major outcomes – resolve the problems related to the profession and innovate in the workplace. Consequently, learning is knowledge application and in the workplace there are two general, though not necessarily mutually exclusive, facets of this:

- (1) the use of knowledge to solve work-related problems; and
- (2) the transformation of knowledge through experimentation [7, 8]

Despite the writers agreeing to experts that, motivation to learn could impact individual learning[9] and by extension organizational wisdom[10] and innovation, their conclusion states the level of risk an employee takes determines the level of learning in him/her.

The writers of this journal adequately cites experts' works such as Hays and Hill[11], who in their cross-sectional empirical study, found a positive relationship between the motivation to learn as displayed by their organization's

constituents and their customers' perception of service quality, but their research did not reflect any role motivation has played in learning among the hotel managers in Jamaica.

Each casework is different and every research produces slightly differing results. This applies to this paper as well. The researchers have used the most useful methodology to generate information and analyse them. This is a research based on evidence – its not just articulating principles based on others' research rather draw conclusion through their own conduct. Thus, they have solid evidence to prove what they concluded could be right.

The casework is not absolutely unusual. The conclusion they have drawn can be applicable in other cases as well – that individual risk taking ability can incite the level of learning among working people.

The hotel managers who participated in the survey for the research represented only 5 percent of the whole hotel industry in the island country. And only 61 percent (mostly women) among this number actually responded to the survey questionnaire. This vacuum leaves space for speculation whether learning habits and ability are equal among male and female managers.

The researchers concluded that just love of learning is not enough, taking risk is important in the process.[12]

This paper contributes towards understanding managerial leaning in the sense that managers must be given a level playing field to take risk so they learn skills to address the problems of the industry in critical hours. But that will push the industry towards risk because the research has mentioned nothing about positive impact of the managers' learning towards the industry. New researches must be conducted whether taking risk would only gives opportunity for managers to learn or it will bring positive return to the industry in terms of human resource development and widening income streams.

The research was conducted when the world was facing critical financial crisis. The writers mentioned that results would have been different if the situation was normal. Thus, this would just be speculation to say the hotel managers would take similar level of risk during the normal economic and business conditions. As such, the conclusion of the research is not replicable for normal conditions.

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## Additional reading

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