

Role of Learning Theories in Training While Training the Trainers

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Abstract

The importance of training and cost of training are obvious. The question forcing the executives in organization is that how organization can make these training programs more effective. This paper discuss the role of learning theories in guiding and development of effective training programs, as organizational performance depends upon the employees' skills, knowledge and experiences. It means that individual makes the organizational performance better by utilizing their knowledge and skills consequently organization offers training for development of its employee performance to achieve required goals. This study highlights the importance and applications of learning theories and how these theories could prove to be of most effective in trainings. As training are only effective if it promote learning.

Keywords: learning theories, training, organizational behavior, individual learning

Introduction

People are the critical component of the organizational system (Hayes, Wheelwright and Clark, 1998). Superior performance is ultimately based on the people in an organization, the right management principles, systems and procedures play an essential role. The capabilities that create a competitive advantage come from people, their skill, discipline, motivation, ability to solve problems and their capacity for learning (Telley, 1968). Strength of any organization depends upon the knowledge and skills of the people it employs, but all employees are not equal in the same settings. To bring them upto the required level the organization offers different training and developing programs. Every year organizations invest huge budget on training as (Training magazine, 2007) mentioned overall U.S organizations shelled out \$58.5

billion for training in year 2006. The figure/situation forcing the executives that how organization can make these training programs more effective. Organizations ultimately learn via their individual employees, hence theories of individual learning are crucial in training. Through research studies and experiences, psychologists produced different theories of how individual learn thus the required objectives of this study is to highlight the applications of these important theories and how these theories prove to be of most effective in trainings? As training are only effective if it promote learning.

Learning and learning theories

Learning is “Relatively permanent change in behaviour produced by experience”, (Bass and Vaughn, 1968). Learning covers all virtually behaviours and is concerned with the acquisition of knowledge, attitudes, values and emotional response (Mckenna, 2006). This behaviourist approach to learning is considered to be more influential which is derived from classical conditioning and operant conditioning.

Classical conditioning

Ivan Pavlov the famous Russian psychologist discovered the relationship between the stimulus and response (Hill, 1985). Pavlov investigated the tendency in response to stimulus, called reflex action (McKenna, 2006). He further discovered, that this response could be strengthened (Mullins, 2005) if the stimulus is constantly repeated with the response and would diminish to extinction level without repeated connection. Braton et al, (2007) asserts that Ivan Pavlov is often referred to as the father of behaviourism, Pavlov held that all kind of learning could be explained by the phenomenon of classical conditioning. For Pavlov learning is a long chain of conditioned reflexes relating these experiments to behaviours at work, like when body responds more quickly than mind, initial panic reaction to a situation without realizing. Hill, (1985) found that classical conditioning works with the advertising , like many beers ads prominently feature attractive young women wearing bikinis, the young women (unconditioned stimulus) naturally elicit a favorable mildly aroused feeling (unconditioned response)in most men. Perhaps the strongest application of classical conditioning involves emotion (Hill,1985). Experience and research both confirms that human emotion conditions very rapidly and easily, particularly when the emotion is intensely felt or negative in direction, it will condition quickly (Mullins, 2005).

Operant conditioning

Skinner, well known advocate of behavioural psychologist made an important contribution to the understanding of the learning process and produced theory of operant conditioning (Braton et al, 2007). Operant conditioning theory is based upon the idea that learning is a function of change in overt behaviour. Operant conditioning refers to a systematic programme of rewards and punishments to influence behaviour or bring about desired behaviour. Mullins (2005) asserted that Skinner explained human behaviour in terms of the phenomenon of operant or instrumental conditioning and he believed reinforcement was a necessary part of this process;

an operant is a response that has some effect on the situation or environment. Fincham and Rhodes, (1999) emphasize that operant conditioning deals with learned not reflexive behavior and it works by enforcing (rewarding) and pushing behaviour based on the consequences it produces. Reinforcement is used to increase the probability that behaviour will occur in the future, whereas punishment aims to decrease that probability. Mckenna (2006) suggested that factors like attention, praise, approval, success and money are major reinforcers for the humans. Braton et al (2007) found Skinner who believed that reinforcement operates either positively or negatively, positive reinforcement is an event that strengthens an operant response if it is experienced after that response occurs, while negative reinforcement and punishment led to avoid an unpleasant situation. According to Mckenna (2006) a great deal of attention was given to schedules of reinforcement and their effects on establishing and maintaining behaviour. To Braton et al ,(2007) a simple schedule is a continuous reinforcement that is every desired response behaviour is followed by a reward and the complex schedule involves intermittent reinforcement, which involves applying the reinforce after fixed intervals. Fincham and Rhodes, (1999) found these schedules of reinforcement can explain a number of workplace phenomenon, motivation, absenteeism and the effect of different payment systems. Here the removing of reinforcement from an act is called extinction. As (Hinken and Schrieshiem, 2004) found in their study that those employees who received feedback whether positive or negative/corrective feedback, showed improved performance. Their study also found that omission of commentary on good performance diminished worker effectiveness and reduced worker satisfaction. This supports the theory of operant conditioning which suggests a behaviour that is totally ignored will eventually be extinguished. Huit, (1994) found that operant conditioning has been widely applied in clinical settings (i.e. behaviour modification) as well as teaching (i.e classroom management) and also (programme instruction) for the instructional development.

Cognitive learning

Mukokoma, (2008) noted that behaviorism cannot easily explain the natural curiosity that individuals have the great desire to learn, to make sense of the environment and to feel competent in activities. Thus cognitive factors have to be taken into account to understand how people learn not only by association rewards but by having knowledge of their results and by receiving feedback. So cognitive learning is about the change in what the learner knows rather than what he/she does. According to Ormord, (1999) cognitive theory focuses on an observable change in mental knowledge. While Braton et al, (2007) noted that the origins of the cognitive approach to learning can be traced back to research by three prominent European psychologists Max Wertheimer, Wolfgang Kohler and Kurt Lewin, known as the Gestalt theorists, proposing that human consciousness cannot be investigated adequately by unscrambling its component but only by investigating its overall shape or pattern. (McKenna, 2006) identified that insight learning and latent learning are the two components of cognitive learning. Braton et al, (2007) suggested that mental process of (trial and error) gives the insight learning, as individual evaluates results compare it with logical alternatives and chooses option that is likely to aid decision making. To Hartley, (1998) cognitive learning results from inferences expectation and making connections instead of acquiring habits, furthermore

learners acquires plans, strategies and their prior knowledge is also important. Hartly, (1998) identified some principles of learning associated with cognitive psychology like instruction should be well organized and clearly structured, perceptual features of the task and prior knowledge is important, difference between individuals and cognitive feedback about success or failure of task. Ormord (1999) found cognitivism is about to study of how learning occurs from a change in mental state cognitive psychologist contend that learning cannot be described in terms of a change in behaviour learning occurs whether or not there is an observable change in the learner like behaviourists, cognitivists also believe in reinforcing they (cognitivists) reinforce the learner through a process of retrieving existing knowledge, and presentation of new information, through out learning process the instruction is initiated through a kind of mental stimulation , not behaviour modification. Gagne, Briggs and Wagger, (1992) found a number of some educational implications produced by cognitive theory like cognitive process influences learning, as children grow they become capable of increasingly more sophisticated thought, people organize the things they learn new information is most easily acquired when people can associated it with things they have already learned and people can control their own learning.

Social learning theory

Braton et al (2007) explained social learning theory of Bandura which emphasizes the importance of observing and modeling the behaviours, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others, it means that people learn from observing other people. Merriam and Caffarella, (1991) have said that basically the idea of learning by observing produced by behaviourists but the later researcher Albert Bandura looked to interaction and cognitive processes, and noted that observation let people to see the consequences of other's behaviours, resulting that people can gain some idea of what might flow from acting in one way or the other. In social learning theory, interval cognitive processes are said to have some effect on behavior as examined by (Mckenna, 2006) that person's expectations about the outcome of a particular behaviours reflects these effects. To attend, remember and rehears would be key aspects of observational learning as noted by (Merriam and Caffarella, 1991) and showed the most common examples of social learning situations are television commercials. Like, using a particular hair shampoo will make as popular and win the admiration of attractive people, customers may model the behaviour shown in the commercial and buy the product. Students often learn a great deal simply observing other people.

Learning theories provided some key principles of learning so that implication of these principles in training may provide opportunities of trainees' motivation and facilitating their learning. This section (literature review) provided a solid body of knowledge about how individual learn the different processes of learning involved and significant factors that affects individual learning. This literature can significantly contribute to the training plans and program alike.

Discussion

Training is practical process not theory training is an art and science as well, there is no training theories, one can manage and use some appropriate methods for effectiveness of training process. According to Daniel, (1993) Training is a process through which individual learning advances organizational learning. By clear understanding of this (individual learning) trainers can actively manage the learning process to make it consistent with an organizational goals, vision and values (Fincham and Rhodes, 1999). Learning refers to the internal processes and brings changes in performance; performance is said to be the observed effect of learning on behaviours. The idea of training is closely bound up with the distinction which is made between training and performance, learning can occurs without any formal training but (Gagne, Briggs and Wagger, 1992) asserted that use of the training (process) is to make effective the process of learning by arranging conditions so that trainee could learn more rapidly and effectively. Bass nad Vaughn, (1968) explored that the real significance of attempts to develop the training technology is that analysis of human behaviours helps in the identification of real conditions which are relevant and necessary in bringing about specified changes in performance. Learning theory deal with the human behaviours, changes occurs in behaviours and the effects of environment on these behaviours. Learning theory examines the human behaviour and gives some instructions (conditions) of learning. Gagne, Briggs and Wager, (1992) found learning theory provides hierarchy of instructions for learning conditions (training) like stimulus recognition, response generation, procedure following, use of terminology, discriminations, concepts formation, rule application and problem solving. Instructions are helpful in the identifications of prerequisites and to facilitate learning at each level, the hierarchy also satisfies and provides necessary conditions for learning and serves as the basis for designing instructions and selecting appropriate media for training. In short all learning theories permeate the dimensions of training and provides trainer with options to choose the one most appropriate. Depending upon the trainees and training approaches, different learning theory may apply. All Learning theories carry some basic concepts that trainer needs to understand which are more helpful in analyzing behaviour and the learning processes particularly in training for example;

Motivation

Mullins, (2005) asserted that motivation is a pivotal concept of learning theory; it is closely related to attention, anxiety and feedback. Trainee needs to be motivated enough to pay attention while learning, anxiety can decrease motivation to learn, by receiving reward/feedback for an action usually increases the likelihood that the action will be repeated. Behavioural approaches to learning tended to focus on extrinsic motivation (i.e. Rewards) as noted by (Wiener, (1990) while cognitive theories deals with intrinsic motivation (i.e. Goals). Bass and Vaughn, (1968) consider two classes of motivation are primary and secondary, primary drives (motivation) are unlearned and secondary drives (motivation) are learned. Primary drive may still play a role in industrial training under developed countries and security (primary drive) is need everywhere, trainers in advance economies is more likely to be

concerned with secondary drives like recognition, information, social status and personal satisfaction (Wiener, 1990).

Memory

Mckenna,(2006) explained memory as one of the most important concept in learning , if things are not remember no learning an take place. Learning and memory are interconnected learning has more to do with acquisition whereas memory has to do with retention of whatever is acquired, trainer need to understand the role of memory in the learning process. In training memory could be dependent on factors related to the person, the information to be learned, the learning instructions given to the person and the question chosen to test memory (Jenkins, 1974 as cited by Mckenna, 2006).

Feedback/reinforcement

Feedback and reinforcement are the two most important concepts in learning as put forwarded by (Mckenna, 2006), feedback involves providing learners/trainees with information about their responses where as reinforcement affects the tendency to make a specific response again, (Braton et al 2007) noted that positive feedback increases the responses and negative feedback decreases the responses behavioural approach to learning focus on the role of reinforcement in motivating the individual to behave in certain ways.

Decision making

Decision making skill is ability that anyone can learn (Parcon, 2006). He further provided the important function of this ability that one can sufficiently reduce the uncertainty and doubts about the alternatives and thus a good choice can be made. Braton et al, (2007) confirm that learning theories accept the idea that decision making process consists of a number of steps as, recognition, formulation, producing some alternatives, the cognitive processes such as memory, reasoning and concept formation play a primary role in decision making. Bazerman, (1986) presented that learning theories are relevant to decision making because they emphasizes the role of experience and personal strategies in learning. Learning theory of Argyris “double lop of learning” is considered to be most relevant to decision-making skills as it has focused on analysis of the assumptions and implied rules underlying the learning processes. Braton et al, (2007) stated that in training there is a great deal of learning involves acquiring or changing attitude, attitude change is especially relevant to management and sales training, furthermore apart from these above mentioned factors, problem solving attention, perceptions, concepts, anxiety and creativity etc. are also concepts that interrelated to learning processes.

Literature has reviewed the concept and principles of learning theories by examining its application in industrial training which could be helpful for the trainers in changing or maintaining the trainee behaviours, for examples;

To develop new behaviour

Mullins, (2005) put forward that behaviours could be shaped through a series of small but successive steps with rewards given for those responses the desired end results. Shaping a management trainee's behaviour is difficult but the important factor is to understand and control the relevant reinforces (Bass and Vaughn, 1968). Training a trainee to perform in a particular way in which he has seldom or never behaved before reward sequential steps to the final behaviour. To train a trainee to develop a new behaviour that he (trainee) has not previously showed trainer needs to arrange for an immediate reward after each correct performance (Braton et al, 2007).

To strengthen a new behaviour

To inspire a trainee to continue performing an established behaviour with few or no rewards as noted by (Mullins, 2005) that it progressively requires a longer time period or more correct responses before a correct behaviour is rewarded. For improving the trainee performance in a certain activity trainer requires to provide the trainee with a recurrent reward.

To maintain an established behaviour

If it is needed to maintain an established behavior by trainee, Bass and Vaughn, (1968) emphasized that change reinforces when a previously effective reward is no longer controlling behavior.

To stop inappropriate behaviour

Mckenna , (2006)and Braton et al, (2007) explored that how to stop trainee from acting in a particular way, trainees may be rewarded with an alternative action that is inconsistent with or cannot be performed at the same time as the undesired act. By delivering an aversive stimulus immediately after the actions occur trainee will stop acting in that certain way.

To modify emotional behaviour

To teach a trainee to avoid a certain type of situation because of his/her emotions, trainer need to simultaneously present to the trainee the situation to be avoided (some representation of it) and some aversive condition.

Conclusion

Organization performance depends upon the employees' skills, knowledge and experiences. It means that individual makes the organizational performance better by utilizing their knowledge and skills consequently organization offers training for development of its employee performance to achieve required goals (Daniel, 1993). An effective training in organization is a challenge and need attention of professional trainers, learning theories provides a better deal

of instruction and principles to trainers, by utilizing them trainers can easily make an analysis of individuals and can select effective method of training, in short the understanding of learning theories is inevitable in training.

As a recommendation there is a need for empirical research to see the role of these learning theories in guiding and development of effective training program. And also to see whether trainees engaged in these training are best learning. There is more relevant learning theories can identify different aspects of individual learning processes that may help in training.

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