Informal Learning in Continued Professional Development Context: A Missing Link

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ABSTRACT

Talent management is a critical component of Human Resource Management (HRM) especially in the increasing world of globalization. Organizations are investing huge amount of money in attracting, developing and retaining the right human capital. In this context, Human Resource Development (HRD) as one of HRM component that focuses on 'nurturing' employee's knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA) plays a vital role in achieving the above objective. HRD does not only focus on development of skills but also focuses on the personal development of employees and organisation development at a broader range. HRD as a discipline has moved to embrace the concept of Continued Professional Development (CPD) that promote continuous or lifelong learning to develop and to ensure the up-to-date KSA among organisational members. CPD calls upon organisation to encourage, support, and provide favourable environment for employees to engage in continuous learning as to combat 'professional obsolete syndrome' or diminution of employee competency. This is important for the employees to remain relevant and current as well as for organisation to remain competitive. Literatures on CPD suggested that learning can take place in three dimensions i.e. formal, non-formal and informal learning. However, discussion on the third learning component which is informal learning is still vague and under-researched and always forgotten. While formal and non-formal learning focus are mainly on institutional structure and considered as traditional approaches to CPD and can be outsourced when appropriate; informal learning on the other hand, is centred on learner and has no boundary. Studies show that informal learning has a great potential to fills in knowledge and skills gap that are not covered by formal and non-formal learning. Though research has shown that informal learning is generally effective, little is known about the informal learning in CPD or lifelong learning context. There is an urgent need to ensure that informal learning component is embedded in the context of structured CPD or lifelong learning. Given the above context, the aim of this paper is to explore and identify key CPD components in the literature review especially informal learning. In addition it explores the missing link between informal learning and CPD.

Keywords: *Informal Learning; CPD; HRM; HRD; Employee Competency.*

Introduction

The development and organisational practice of HRM has significantly improved through research in this field. Empirical work over the last 20 years depicted that the link between the practice of HRM and organisational performance resulted in higher levels of skills, improved employee commitment, lower levels of absenteeism and turnover, and this consequently contributes to higher productivity, enhanced quality and efficiency (Dessler, 2008; Golding, 2010; Maimunah, 2011; Mathis & Jackson, 2003; Mondy, Noe, & Gowan, 2005; Snell & Bohlander, 2013). In managing human resources, there are five critical components that require attention of HR professionals i.e. staffing; HRD; compensation and benefits; employment and labour relations and lastly safety and health (Mondy et al. 2005; Snell & Bohlander, 2013; Dessler, 2008; Maimunah, 2011; Mathis & Jackson, 2003). The focus of all aspects of HRD is on developing the most superior workforce so that individual employee can accomplish their work goals and organisation can gain and sustain competitive advantage (Chiangmai, 2005; Dessler, 2008; Maimunah, 2011; Mathis & Jackson, 2003; Mahathir, 2005; Umar, 2005). HRD commitment towards enhancing competencies relies on employees to embrace the knowledge philosophy and its underlying values so that it becomes the core behaviour. To remain competitive, organisations and their members are required to learn consistently (Palan, 2005; Senge, 1990) thus a continuous learning process in the organisation is necessary (Chiangmai, 2005; Rabiah et al., 2007; Scruggs, 2005; Umar, 2005). Chiangmai (2005) noted that organisational competitiveness and sustainable development rely on the organisation's ability to develop people and manage knowledge.

Since HRD is essential thus professional development among employees through CPD or continuous learning helps organisation to have a steady competent manpower for competitive advantage. CPD calls upon organisation to encourage, support, and provide favourable environment for employees to engage in continuous learning (Faizah & Hazadiah, 2006; Hazadiah & Jamiah, 2006; Jamiah, 2006; Putri, 2005; Tan, 2005) as to avoid 'professional obsolete syndrome' among them (Latham & Wexley, 2001; Tan, 2005; Umar, 2005). This is important for the employees to remain relevant and current as well as for organisation to remain competitive. For professionals, lifelong learning is crucial to remain relevant and to ensure their KSAs are up-to-date. Literatures on CPD suggested that learning can take place in three dimensions i.e. formal, non-formal and informal learning (Briggs & Sommefeldt, 2002; Garrick, 1998; Smith, 2011; Thomas & Anderson, 2006). However, discussion on the third learning component which is informal learning is still vague and under-researched (Garrick, 1998; Thomas & Anderson, 2006) and always forgotten (Smith, 2011). Studies show that informal learning fills in knowledge and skill gap that are not covered by formal and non-formal learning (Briggs & Sommefeldt, 2002; Garrick, 1998; Heijden, Boon, Klink, & Meijs, 2009; Smith, 2011).

Therefore, this paper will examine the role of CPD as an important means for competency development thus contributes to an excellent organisational performance. This paper also discusses on the missing link between informal learning and CPD. The need to integrate informal learning in a more structured CPD assessment in enhancing employee competencies will also be discussed in the final section of this paper.

Literature Review Analysis

The world is changing rapidly as technological advances enable faster and more dynamic interaction between individuals, groups and nations (Graetz, Rimmer, Lawrence, & Smith, 2006; Maimunah, 2011; Snell & Bohlander, 2013). The nature of work has also changed enormously with the shift from an *industrial economy* (where commercial products were the main business focus) to a *knowledge economy* (where service and expertise are the main business outcomes) (Debowski, 2007; Garavan, 1991; Maimunah, 2011; Snell & Bohlander, 2013). To survive and flourish, organisations need to respond to many new pressures to generate the best outcomes from their most valuable asset: human resources (Garavan, 1991). Managing highly skilled and talented employees requires in depth understanding of the factors that attract and retain, surpassing the typical concern of wages and return of productivity. An organisation needs these highly skilled and talented employees to accelerate its vision (David, 2011). However, this valuable resource particularly professional workers today are now facing the "professional obsolete syndrome" (Latham & Wexley, 2001; Tan, 2005; Umar, 2005). This syndrome occurs due to many reasons such as technological changes, changes in nature of work and rapidity of new knowledge discoveries over the years (Latham & Wexley, 2001; Snell & Bohlander, 2013; Umar, 2005). Hence, the KSA (regardless of either explicit or tacit) belongs to professionals in general are relatively obsolete within five years (Latham & Wexley, 2001); or within two years for an engineer (Umar, 2005) if there is no action taken to enhance or to retain this KSA or also known as competencies.

More and more organisations realised the importance of human resources in creating wealth. To get better people, organisations are prepared to recruit new staff with higher knowledge and skill level or through developing the knowledge of existing manpower (Thurairajah & Lees, 2010). This is the challenge that HRD must take up by strengthening CPD efforts via continuous learning among employees (Burns & Chisholm, 2003; Garrick, 1998; Putri, 2005). White (2005) in Hearle, Morris, & Lawson (2012) described CPD as the activities pursued by professionals in order to maintain their competence to practice, enhance their knowledge of practice and extend their professional expertise. It is seen as the systematic maintenance, improvement, broadening of knowledge and skills of developing personal qualities necessary for the execution of personal duties throughout working life (The Chartered Institute of Professional Development, 2014). Guskey (2000) emphasised that CPD is a deliberate, intentional, ongoing and systematic process and activities designed to enhance the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of professionals, guided by a clear vision of purposes and planned goals. To update old skills and gain new ones to improve work performance is one of the major reasons why professionals embark on CPD activities (Adanu, 2007, p.302)

Employees should acknowledge the importance of CPD, and should no longer be viewed as something "I'll do if I have the time". This is because CPD foster a culture of on-going learning and commitment to personal and professional growth (Briggs & Sommefeldt, 2002). Employees must recognise the personal and organisational benefits of adapting to the concept of CPD particularly for competency enhancement. CPD will enable employees to remain focus on the skills and knowledge enhancement necessary to provide a cost effective and efficient service that benefits the client and the organisation. Maimunah (2011) pictured CPD as the conscious updating of professional knowledge and the improvement of professional competence throughout a person's working life. It is a commitment to being professional, keeping up to date and continuously seeking to improve. It is the key to optimizing a person's career opportunities, both today and for the future. Briggs &

Sommefeldt (2002, p.10) noted that CPD is a lifelong learning process in which the learning is a purposeful activity whether formal, non-formal or informal, has no age limit and is based on people access to knowledge and learning. It also covers within the whole range of different contexts – formal learning at school and at the university, non-formal learning at the workplace and informal learning through literature and life experience.

Organisation that promotes life-long learning eventually becomes a learning organisation (Adanu, 2007; Palan, 2005; Scruggs, 2005) thus it will create 'community of practice' among organisational members (Smith, 2005) to continually embark on knowledge discovery. It is important to note that lifelong learning or learning organisation does not necessarily take place in the formal context of education but it can also be integrated with the experience gained informally (Leader, 2003). Encouraging lifelong learning or continuous learning lead to a better workforce development (Adanu, 2007; Putri, 2005; Young, 2005) thus produces competent, talented and skilled workforce. It is after all a boost to the professionalism of the professions (Noon, 1994; Young, 2005). Organisation should encourage continuous learning among employees and improves its capabilities by leveraging the KSA of each employees through (1) formal learning such as study sponsorship or scholarship (Adanu, 2007; Young, 2005); or (2) non-formal structured training (Noon, 1994; Putri, 2005) or (3) through informal learning (Garrick, 1998; Leader, 2003; Putri, 2005). This makes the concept of learning organisation work well. The following section discusses the features of formal learning, non-formal learning, and informal learning as essential components of CPD.

Formal Learning

Formal learning according to Briggs & Sommefeldt (2002) and Garrick (1998) is referred to as public education such as post graduates programme, professional certificate from community college, community college credit courses, community college non-credit courses, university courses, university credit courses and university non-credit courses. Public and private institutions play a major role in promoting lifelong learning to adult workforce to equip and to upgrade themselves with the latest knowledge and technology (Hazadiah & Jamiah, 2006; Rabiah et. al., 2007). Formal education in which educational institutions are responsible to depart and deliver good knowledge must keep in mind the need to produce graduates that later create competitive advantage to the organisation with the latest knowledge (Hazadiah & Jamiah, 2006; Hua, 2011). To cater to adult learners for their self and professional development, many institutions of higher learning provide more accessible entry requirements such as off-campus programmes, distance learning, and flexible learning (Habibah, 2006).

In view of formal learning, research showed that there is a significant relationship between formal learning and types of skills required in performing job task (Tina, 2007). Formal learning through universities and colleges provides workforce with tertiary education to meet skills requirements of the new industries and become more competent in their skills (Rabiah et al., 2007). Organisation that encourages continuous learning actively send their employees for formal learning through study sponsorship or scholarship (Putri, 2005; Young, 2005). This is pivotal to develop their competencies and also serve for professional development. Hoffman (1999) observes that for higher level employees, off-the-job learning serve them well due to complex jobs thus practising skills while working proved harder for them. He further argued that the education process provides higher level employees learning

about development of knowledge and skill based as well as learning on more technical aspect (p.284). Formal learning institutions that denote adult learners' vehicle for their CPD need to recognize that adult learners have greater amount of experience thus make them 'rich resources in the classroom'. This suggested that their experiences determine who they are hence create their sense of self-identity in which they enter for learning institutions to be equipped with more specific and immediate plans for applying newly acquired knowledge and they want to put to immediate use of what they learn (Faizah, 2006).

Non-Formal Learning

Non-formal learning refers to programmes or courses organized and intended to increase employee competencies. It is also known as workplace learning (Briggs & Sommefeldt, 2002; Garrick, 1998; Kie, 2010; Young, 2005). Non-formal learning as a learning medium is also known as training and development and frequently used in a planned organisational socialization programmes (Hill & Jones, 2009; Thomas & Anderson, 2006; Tina, 2007). Training has gaining its popularity as a means to improve employee competencies since 1950s (Zadel, 2006). Quoting Evans, Hodkinson, Rainbird, & Unwin (2006) study, Nägele & Hasler (2010) stated that the training is highly context-dependent which mean the training is highly systematically structured due to the curriculum that need to be followed. Non-formal learning includes in-house training programmes, mentor/coach, on-the-job training by peers, and vendor training sources through training outsourcing (Briggs & Sommefeldt, 2002; Dessler, 2008; Maimunah, 2011; Mathis & Jackson, 2003; Mondy et al., 2005; Rabiah et al., 2007; Snell & Bohlander, 2013; Tina, 2007; Young, 2005).

With regards to current HRD practices, many organisations noted that trainings are intended to remedy skills and knowledge deficiencies which have a strong link to individual and organisational performance (Chong, 2005; Hill & Jones, 2009; Zainal, 2005). Conducting continuous improvement effort to ensure employees are competent in their area of specialization hence add values to the organizational competitive advantage (Feridah, 2005; Rabiah et. al., 2007; Snell & Bohlander, 2013). Research depicts that there is a significant relationship between non-formal training and types of skills needed in performing job task (Feridah, 2005; Putri, 2005; Tina, 2007) which also contributed to improved financial success of the organisation (Chong, 2005; Young, 2005). Study by Kim-Soon & Molukin (2011) on HR best practices (i.e. training, result-oriented appraisals, employment security, participations, job descriptions, profit sharing, and internal consistency) and its relationship with firm business performance revealed that investment in training influence organizational performance prior and after the financial crisis. Thus, this further confirmed that training as one of the HR best practices components accumulates competitive advantage through competence workmen.

Informal Learning

Informal learning is a learning which is not provided by a formal educational or training institution and typically does not lead to certification. Informal learning results from daily, social life activities related to education, work, socialising with others or pursuit of leisure activities and hobbies. Informal learning may be structured or non-structured in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support. Informal learning may be intentional or non-intentional (incidental) from the learner's perspective' (Smith, 2011). Garrick (1998)

interpreted informal learning as 'internal dialogue' of workers engaged in their daily work or operations while Wain (1987) defines informal learning is the truly lifelong process whereby every individual acquires attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from daily experience and the educative influences and resources in his or her environment from family and neighbours, from work and play, from the market place, the library and the mass media. Hager as cited in Adanu (2007) noted that informal learning is at its best and is accurately described as a form of lifelong learning (p.295). Informal learning as claimed by Cheetham & Chivers (2000) infact is widely used by a more experienced professionals then formal education which mostly used during early stage of acquiring competency. Clearly, the application of tacit knowledge and reflection is more on applying insight, common sense and instinct which clearly leaned heavily on experiences encountered along tenure of service. The next section discusses about informal learning as a missing link in CPD by highlighting the importance and key roles of informal learning towards CPD in- more in- depth manner.

Informal Learning: The Missing Link

In view of the literature with regards to CPD, much attention is focus on formal and non-formal learning as means to improve employee competencies (Garrick, 1998) and these are mainly referred as traditional CPD activities (Briggs & Sommefeldt, 2002). Organisations will allocate funds for employee development through formal education and training and development (Fuller et al., 2003; Kie, 2010; Putri, 2005; Young, 2005). Nonetheless, Nägele & Hasler (2010); Burns & Chisholm (2003); Fuller et al., (2003) and Umar (2005) stated that formal learning clearly can never be enough to meet the growing demand for skill requires at work. For instance, Fuller et al., (2003) argued that relying on education (formal learning) and training (non-formal learning) to determine performance are inadequate to capture the whole spectrum of performance and unlikely to capture the relationship between learning and performance too. Newton (2010) too agreed that traditional boundaries between school, higher education and workplace training are being blurred, with universities being positioned as a servicing industry through the development of transferable and life-long learning skills. Furthermore, as deliberated by Burns & Chisholm (2003, p.180), "traditional models of on-campus CPD are no longer relevant and much of the learning required is within the implicit environment of the organisation especially in relation to the tacit knowledge and advance knowledge skills development. The acquisition of essential new competencies is functionally dependent on developing relevant knowledge within the workplace environment".

Literatures that discuss extensively about the informal learning in the workplace are often neglected and vague (Thomas & Anderson, 2006) and less focus is given to informal learning as a powerful way of learning for employees to increase their competencies (Fuller et al., 2003; Garrick, 1998; Heijden et al., 2009). Informal learning is deemed to be influenced by people experience thus it shapes how they view the reality about their work and workplace practices (Garrick, 1998). Informal learning has gained numerous attentions from qualitative perspective (i.e. Burns & Chisholm, 2003; Wijetunge; 2012; Fuller et al., 2003; Smith, 2011); however the empirical research on informal learning is relatively still understudied (Heijden et al., 2009). Informal learning has become part of competency literature which skills acquisition is learned informally for competitive enhancement (Garrick, 1998). In a broader context this also covers transferability of KSAs through informal learning (Briggs & Sommefeldt, 2002). Similarly, Heijden et al., (2009) in their research has found positive correlation between formal learning and employability, however they also found that employability also contributed significantly by other aspect of learning that is informal

learning. Garrick (1998) argued that due to the complexities of informal learning, it appears less suitable for competency-based assessment in industry and education sectors. However, he deliberated further the debate about the use and benefit of informal learning in the workplace to the employees and organisation.

Literature reviews supported that informal learning occurs through the sharing of experience at the workplace (Briggs & Sommefeldt, 2002; Chiangmai, 2005; Garrick, 1998; Kie, 2010; Torres, 2004; Wain, 1987, 1993) thus experience is often the best teacher (Roth & Kleiner, 1997). Everyday experience at work and workplace practices has greatly influenced one competency in their job. Experience that is constructed and recognized is what determines learning. Informal learning involves intuitive and individual judgment that helps to understand work better (Grønhaug & Ottesen, 2007). Torres (2004) too noted that live-experiences and peer collaborations are vital in professional development. Literature on knowledge sharing suggested that knowledge that are shared internally and externally have found to have significant effect on organisational learning (Chong, Chong, & Gan, 2011; Pan & Wang, 2010; Easterby-Smith, Lyles, & Tsang, 2008; Almeida & Kogut, 1999; Madsen, Mosakowski, & Zaheer, 2003; Gruenfeld, Martorana, & Fan, 2000). Research done by Pan & Wang (2010) revealed that shared context moderated the effect of knowledge on knowledge transfer especially the process of information pooling and organisation has gained advantage of personnel mobility in terms of knowledge sharing. This is because the unique contribution from each member will be integrated and considered. Chong, Chong, & Gan (2011) in their study reported that out of eight types of knowledge areas for organizational success, three internal knowledge areas scored higher than external knowledge. Therefore, it can be claimed that knowledge gained internally plays important roles in organization success. When what have learned informally been measured or observed for the purpose of employee development, therefore this context is featured by what we called as learning organisation. It means that whatever learnt informally at the workplace can be seen, tangible and utilized to gain organisational objectives.

Informal learning has a significant impact and can break the power of formal education plus seek to align education and work (Garrick, 1998). This is due to the notion of the dissimilarity between theory and practice and to perform the job it can be done in multiple ways and this can be learnt informally through experience and knowledge sharing (Briggs & Sommefeldt, 2002). This view has been tested by a famous business tycoon Donald Trump in his popular series of "The Apprentice" where those with excellent formal education was name as "book-smart" while those with years of experience was name as "street-smart". Interestingly, another studies also revealed that employees mostly learn in the organisation through sharing experience among themselves (Bui & Baruch, 2011; Chiangmai, 2005; Fuller et al., 2003; Garrick, 1998; Heijden et al., 2009; Tan, 2005; Thomas & Anderson, 2006; Wain, 1987, 1993; Young, 2005). For instance, Wain (1987, 1993) argued that informal learning is characterized by learning that takes place unintended by the learner in which people pick up attitudes, values, skills and knowledge by simply interacting with other people or being present in a particular social context. Hence, it can be said that informal learning in the workplace in particular is constituted through and embedded by discrete influences (Young, 2005) from various resources such as supervisor, leader and colleagues. An interesting assumptions about informal learning by Garrick (1998) are i.e. (1) informal learning are indeed rich sources of learning in day-to-day practice situations; and (2) what is learned from experience is dynamic and open to multiple configurations. For instance experience learned among HR practitioners in negotiations, dilemma, conflicts, success and failures open for rich and dynamic sources of learning.

There are many ways and stories can be told to explain informal learning. Garrick (1998) in his study interviewed few HRD practitioners to understand how informal learning occurs and identify problems associated with informal learning in the organisational context. Informal learning is mainly characterized by learning from experience of self and others (Briggs & Sommefeldt, 2002; Hill & Jones, 2009; Smith, 2011). Not only that, it is communicated, understood and reapplied or re-modified when necessary and it influenced on one's values and attitudes and certainly competence. This process of learning occurs informally and the experience is shared, communicated and stored on one memory. Garrick (1998) strongly believed that informal learning is indeed very rich sources of learning in daily job context and subjected to numerous configurations. Informal learning is a learning that occurs outside formally structured or institutionally sponsored classroom-based activities, taking place under non-routine conditions or in routine conditions where reflection and critical reflection are used to clarify the situation (Grønhaug & Ottesen, 2007; Marsick & Watkins, 1990); in which the critical reflections enable one to 're-frame' problems they may be experiencing and to realize that a particular situation can be defined and solved in many different ways (Mezirow, 1990). It also occurs without participation in externally planned programmes of instruction in the subject area concerned (Candy, 1988).

In reality, what have been learnt during formal education at formal learning institutions are not the same with the experience encountered at the workplace. Usually we have framed with what we have learnt and get caught with dissimilar experience at the workplace practice thus created tension (Garrick, 1998; Kie, 2010). Experience gained from workplace practice due to exchange of information and experience sharing among peers do shape how people learn. This is what we called as 'informal learning'. Learning at work or work-based learning as argued by Lee (1972) in Garrick (1998) is a complex process of negotiating a path way through the circulating discourses which produce the possibility of meaning….for the world and for the 'self'. Workplace learning thus facilitate learning organisation (Marsick & Watkins, 1990; Smith, 2011) and vital for competency development of employees. This further exhibited by Benedek & Erdei (2007) that indicates 'learning by doing' in the workplace is the most significant kind of learning for employees. Learning from 'true to live-experience' is seen personally significant, meaningful (Briggs & Sommefeldt, 2002; Garrick, 1998; Hill & Jones, 2009; Smith, 2011) and has an impact on employee competency in which they have gathered, synthesized and make own reasoning for their action as well give meaning to their experiences. Informal learning is continuously shaped what employee knows and how they know it. It is a process of learning the skills required for a job that occur informally, in which one person trains another and the new skills are being acquired without legitimating a formal training period (Rainbird, 1988 in Garrick (1998).

Implications

Though formal learning institution and its roles are recognized to impart knowledge for professional development; one problem with the educational institutions that questioned by many scholars is whether they can keep pace with the advances of the new knowledge and technology and able to impart current and ever expanding knowledge to the students (Rabiah et al., 2007; Umar, 2005). Besides good support system, institutions of higher learning also face challenges such as to cater the needs, expectations and differences among adult learners who have vast working experiences that may contradict with academic discourses (Faizah & Hazadiah, 2006; Hazadiah & Jamiah, 2006) and that have great influence on their learning styles and strategies (Sohaimi, 2006). Furthermore the spoon-feeding approach practiced by

many formal learning institutions have created pedagogical approach that imbue with a sense of passivity to learning on the part of the students (Young, 2005). Working adults also face difficulties in coping with the demands of academe as compared to their younger counterparts. Quoting Knowles (1990) study, Hazadiah & Jamiah, (2006) agreed that institutions of higher learning do not make distinction between adult learners and traditional learners and therefore adult learners are considered as 'neglected species'. Hazadiah & Jamiah (2006); Shireen et.al. (2006); Habibah (2006) thus call institutions of higher learning as formal learning providers to provide good support system for the development of adult learners (working persons) by becoming more flexible, inclusive and accommodative to their adult students. Support needed by adult learners who return to higher learning institutions for professional development is critical if they are to succeed thus help to smooth their development process. Not only that, formal learning as a means for CPD also poses some challenges to adult learners in terms of personal challenges (i.e. family matters, house chores); professional challenges (i.e. juggling between family, student and work roles) and academic challenges (i.e. assignments, examination, coursework presentations etc.). She further deliberated that these challenges prove to be the significant factors that contribute towards the degree to which they excel in their self and professional development (Habibah, 2006). Adanu (2007) and Umar (2005) also argued that to keep abreast with new knowledge and skills, relying on one-time education can no longer be regarded as an option if one wishes to survive due to rapid changes in technologies. He further suggested that a person leaving educational institution may need periodic upgrading and retraining at least five times in their working life. Thus, non-formal learning via training is seen as a complimentary way of learning to overcome the drawbacks of formal learning (Feridah, 2005; Kie, 2010; Thomas & Anderson, 2006; Tina, 2007).

In one hand, even though non-formal learning is considered as the most popular form of fulfilling required continuing education, however some argued that this does not lead towards applying and practicing learning at the workplace (Kie, 2010; Tan, 2005; Torres, 2004). There is a serious gap between knowing and actually doing it (Ong, 2005) in which in non-formal learning, trainers tend to be driven by the curriculum (Briggs & Sommefeldt, 2002) and hence break into continuous lecture due to so much content to be covered in training session. This situation makes it less effective especially to adult learners (working persons) which is more on learner-driven (Ong, 2005) that tends to relate to workplace application. Nägele & Hasler (2010 p.2) too agreed that the transfer of knowledge and skills between the learning places (school, company) is far from being optimal. This is due to the fact that from learners point of view an important factor related to their competences is the trust they have in their trainer. Trust is based on a perception of the trainer as a pedagogical competent person, with high job and task related expectations, but at the same time allowing the learner to make own contributions and encouraging them to experiment and develop own solutions. Hoffman (1999) stated that on-the-job-learning is useful to ensure that employees conform to the standard requirements needed to get work done but this is particularly suitable for a simple job. He further added that for more complex job, off-the-job learning may be a better option for organization (p.284). The education (formal learning) and training system (non-formal learning) therefore need to work closely to match the gap that exists (Rabiah et al., 2007) and offers learning using learner-driven methods (Ong, 2005) which suggest the importance of informal learning. Apart from that, non-formal learning which is mainly characterized by learning interventions, identifying training needs and "sending" people on courses (Sambrook, 2004, p.616) also created a serious gap between knowing and actually doing it (Ong, 2005) and not learner driven (Briggs & Sommefeldt, 2002). In addition to it, quoting studies done by Ponzurick, France and Logar (2000) and Wang & Newlin (2000); Kie (2010)

demonstrates that the effectiveness of non-formal learning has proven less significant towards competencies. Besides, study by Heijden, Boon, Klink, & Meijs (2009) has confirmed that most learning does not occur in formal situations, yet mainly contributed through informal way, both in and outside the workplace thus shows informal learning fills in the gaps that are left out by formal learning and non-formal learning. The result of those studies indirectly proved that formal learning and non-formal learning may not be the only remedy of CPD to develop employee competencies; thus suggested that informal learning bridging the gap created by formal and non-formal learning.

Based on arguments above, it is important to recognize that there is a gap or blind-spot that needs to be acknowledged between formal learning, non-formal learning and informal learning. The clear links between formal, non-formal and informal learning that helps to improve employee competency shall be established as all play important part. Several other scholars (Andy Smith, 2011; Briggs & Sommefeldt, 2002; Burns & Chisholm, 2003; Fuller et al., 2003; Heijden et al., 2009; Kie, 2010; Nägele & Hasler, 2010; Ong, 2005) urged organizations to integrate informal learning in employee development as it also contributes significantly towards betterment of work performance and employee competency. In addition to it, CPD shall also accentuate the significance of informal learning, shall be recognized and valued equally with other forms of learning (Jones & Fear, 1994). As argued by Garrick (1998); Marsick & Watkins (1990); Wain (1987) informal learning is 'non-intentional' kind of learning and learner focused while formal learning and non-formal learning are 'intentional', constructed activities and institutional structures focused. Learning process that occurs naturally and unintentionally is merely focused on learner centred thus andragogy theory that helps explain how adults learn is very much practical to be applied here. Informal learning also provides a good platform for the newcomers to speed up the organisational socialization process, gaining new KSA, improve relationships and development of sense-making framework to culture and work practices within organisation (Thomas & Anderson, 2006; Young, 2005) and very tacit in nature (Chiangmai, 2005; Wijetunge, 2012). We can lean to the facts that these experiences gained from informal learning shapes one's identity. And the meaning gained from experiences construct our understanding of realities or termed as 'learn and link' by Chiangmai (2005). In an informal learning, the operational knowledge is more privileged as argued earlier. There are many ways on how to do things or to do a job and there is no one best method or way that can be claimed as the best. This is what we called as tacit knowledge which characterized the unique way of "know-who, know-how, know-what and know-why" (Chiangmai, 2005; Debowski, 2007) in which informal learning offers possibilities for improving the learning capabilities of complex organisation. There are no defined sets of curricular aims in informal learning. Everything we learnt at the workplace will affect us in many ways and does influence our understanding about our jobs and help improve our competency (Young, 2005). The good thing about informal learning is organisation can also encouraged an informal learning among employees and it can take place despite the environment being in-conducive (Marsick & Watkins, 1990).

Furthermore, one of the major key elements in informal learning is learning gained through experiences. Informal learning recognizes the importance of experience as a powerful tool of learning via sharing of experience among employees in the form of daily interactions. Daily interaction that occurs among employees does involve knowledge transfer informally. This is where most of the learning process takes place in the organisation. This is supported by Tan (2005) who believes informal learning provide opportunities to capitalise on the competency of the staff through sharing of cumulated knowledge, skills and experience among them. Interestingly, researches have confirmed that peers and supervisors are more useful sources of knowledge and support than formal programmes conducted by organisation

(Bui & Baruch, 2011; Thomas & Anderson, 2006). Chiangmai (2005) too calls for more research of the know-how and know-who that can make organisational members learn fast and help organisation to remain competitive. Quoting studies done by few scholars namely Livingstone & Eichler (2005); Borghnas et al., (2006); and Lave & Wenger, (1991) Heijden et al., (2009) reported that 82% of respondents are involved in job-related informal learning with an average of six hours weekly. Meaning to say, they spent much of their working time with informal learning rather than formal or non-formal learning in which indirectly indicate that the acquisition of knowledge and skills can only be mastered by active participation in the workplace itself. The intangible components of learning can be captured through informal learning such as sharing of experience and tacit knowledge which occurs freely and less interventions among employees. Through an informal learning, employees learn effectively by talking about what they have learnt, engaged and involved in the learning process, relating that to the past experience and applying it to their daily work-lives (Ong, 2005).

While formal and non-formal learning focus are mainly on institutional structure and considered as traditional approach to CPD (Briggs & Sommefeldt, 2002) and can be outsourced when appropriate (Rabiah et al., 2007), informal learning on the other hand, is centred on learner and has no boundary (Garrick, 1998). Hence, informal learning has a great potential to fill in the gap between formal and non-formal learning. Studies by Smith (2011) and Heijden et al., (2009) revealed that informal learning can occur and often recognized as a means of supporting formal education. Quoting Trinder et. al. (2008) study, Smith (2011) too agreed that informal learning differ than formal learning and non-formal learning where the former is characterized by learner's perspective and takes place anywhere, everywhere and not confounded by structure and environment. Livingstone & Eichler (2005) in Heijden et al., (2009); Borghans et al., (2006); Burns & Chisholm (2003) have reported a unique contribution of informal learning to job relevant competencies thus proves the pivotal role of informal learning in CPD. The literatures talks how formal and non-formal learning contribute in facilitating employee development and to an extent suggested that it should be made compulsory (Noon, 1994). However, literature is silent on the kind of treatment for informal learning in CPD activities. In spite of the importance in the role of informal learning in the workplace, research on the effect of informal learning which is heavily tacit in nature is relatively neglected due to the notion of measurement difficulty (Garrick, 1998).

Conclusion

The important outcomes of CPD through learning are numerous. Amongst others is competency development and enhancement among employees (Adanu, 2007; Palan, 2005; Putri, 2005; Tan, 2005; Young, 2005). This is pertinent because employee competency is vital to gain and sustain competitive advantage. Improvement of employee competencies due to CPD activities have also found to produce significant organisational performance such as organisational profits or revenues (Asree, Zain, & Razalli, 2010; King, Fowler, & Zeithaml, 2001; Rose, Kumar, & Abdullah, 2006); and increase in employee engagement and career development (Adanu, 2007; Levenson, 2005).

As a conclusion, this study contributes to the CPD literature as an effective tool to develop employee competency at workplace in a number of ways. First, this study highlighted the components of CPD which focuses on employee learning. Second, the study depicts that discussion on the third learning component which is informal learning is still vague and under-researched and always forgotten due to a number of reasons. Finally, this study

highlights the need to integrate informal learning in a more structured CPD assessment as it is proven as highly effective to develop employee competency. This is crucial due to the fact that informal learning as critical component has a great potential to fills in knowledge and skills gap that are not covered by formal and non-formal learning.

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