

SUPPORTING EMPLOYEE LEARNING THROUGH EFFECTIVE WORKPLACE LEARNING SYSTEMS AND PRACTICES: LESSONS FROM SINGAPORE

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ABSTRACT

Employees today must engage in continuous learning to adapt to frequent job and skills changes. Increasingly, organisations are embracing workplace learning as a means to equip their employees with competencies to take on new work.

For effective learning to occur, it is essential to establish a work setting that is conducive to the acquisition and application of knowledge and skills. This is where employers play a crucial role, through interventions such as implementing effective policies, systems and processes. This study examines the systems and practices put in place by Singapore employers to establish a work setting that fosters employee learning, and its impact on learning outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

Workplace learning is an effective form of learning as it enables the employee to establish connections between new and pre-existing knowledge, allowing for better understanding within the relevant context and improved retention and skills utilisation (Marsick & Watkins, 1999).

For learning to be effective in the workplace, the conditions within the workplace must be supportive of employee development (Billett, 2004). Employees in workplaces that are supportive tend to apply learned skills more readily on the job. On the contrary, an unsupportive work environment was identified as the greatest inhibitor to skills utilisation (Gilpin-Jackson and Bushe, 2007). Organisations can create supportive learning conditions by means of policies, systems and practices (Marsick & Watkins, 1990).

The National Centre of Excellence for Workplace Learning (NACE), set up in 2018 by SkillsFuture Singapore and Nanyang Polytechnic, developed the National Workplace Learning Framework ("Framework") to serve as a holistic guide for organisations to create conditions at the workplace that foster employee learning. This presentation highlights exemplary workplace learning systems and practices aligned to the Framework which organisations can adopt to cultivate a conducive work setting that nurtures employee learning.

THE NATIONAL WORKPLACE LEARNING FRAMEWORK¹



Six components of the Framework to guide the establishment of a work setting that fosters learning.

Strategy: Develop strategic learning and development initiatives that support business goals.

Leadership: Cultivate leadership practices that foster a learning-friendly culture.

Planning: Arrange workplace learning activities systematically and purposefully.

Training Needs Analysis: Consider the needs, costs, benefits and suitability of learning solutions.

Environment: Establish a positive learning environment that caters to the diverse needs of learners at the workplace.

Implementation and Processes: Implement a variety of workplace learning solutions, evaluate learning outcomes and continuously improve on plans and interventions.

Organisations that have exhibited a discernible workplace learning culture through the implementation of policies, processes, and practices aligned to the six components of the Framework can be recognised under the National Workplace Learning Certification.

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METHODS

Qualitative: On-site observations of workplace learning practices and interviews were conducted with over 200 individuals, including senior leaders, line managers and employees from nine organisations recognised under the National Workplace Learning Certification.

Quantitative: A questionnaire was administered to 397 employees three months after they had completed a Continuing Education and Training course in Singapore to collect data on skills utilisation and four workplace learning practices aligned to the Framework. The study analysed the correlation between skills utilisation and the four measured parameters. A 7-point Likert scale was used, with 1 indicating the lowest level of agreement and 7, the highest level of agreement.

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Employees found learning to be effective with the following workplace learning practices in place:

1. Promoting learning and knowledge sharing through platforms such as newsletters, learning festivals, hackathons and communities of practice.
2. Leaders taking on the roles of being role models for continuous learning and mentors to guide employee development.
3. Acknowledging the learning efforts of employees through rewards and recognition.
4. Identifying employees' interests and learning gaps periodically or when new competencies are required based on the growth plans of the organisation.
5. Empowering managers to coach employees to help them in acquiring and applying new knowledge and skills.
6. Providing the opportunities and resources, such as equipment, tools and time, to apply acquired skills in performing work tasks.
7. Deploying a variety of workplace learning solutions across a range of platforms to suit the diversity of learners.

Holistically these activities foster a strong workplace learning culture over time.

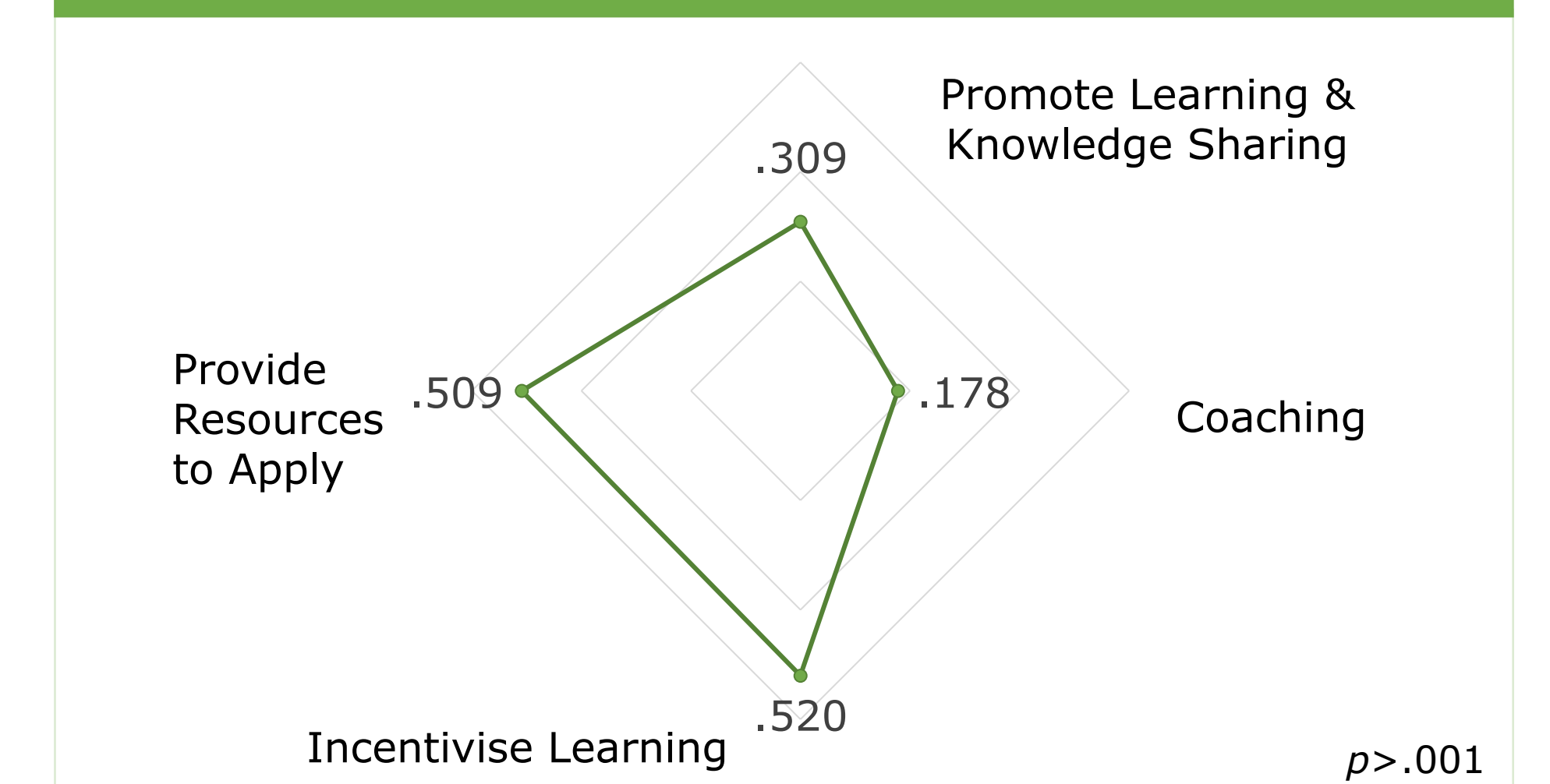
QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

The data revealed that:

1. Employees reported moderate skills utilisation and some supportive workplace learning practices within their organisations. However, a notable majority disagreed that they have been incentivised for applying newly acquired skills.
2. Significant positive correlations exist between supportive workplace conditions and skills utilisation, suggesting that employees at workplaces with effective learning systems and practices are more likely to apply acquired skills to their jobs.

Parameters	M	SD
Skills Utilisation	4.80	1.27
Promote Learning & Knowledge Sharing	4.85	1.17
Coaching	4.81	1.32
Incentivise Learning	3.14	1.46
Provide Resources to Apply	4.53	1.56

Correlation with Skills Utilisation



CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significance of conducive work settings in facilitating employee learning. While there are organisations with good workplace learning practices, there are others that would benefit from improvements. The Framework guides organisations to develop effective systems and practices to promote continuous learning and enhance outcomes. Organisations seeking to equip their workforce with competencies may wish to consider adopting the practices implemented by exemplary organisations certified under the Framework.

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