

Non-Conventional Training for Employee Development; the Mediating Role of Employee Relations at Work

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Abstract: *There is growing agreement that the non-conventional methods of employee development can well influence employee development. The focus of this paper is to identify the non-conventional methods of staff development and how they enable development of employees at the work place with employee relations as the mediator. The study has reviewed literature with regard to employee development, non-conventional methods to employee development and the employee relations. The study findings reveals that the nonconventional methods of employee development like mentoring, coaching, counselling feedback and feedforward are very crucial in fostering staff development, however it was also found out that without a good employee relation at the work employee development would be very difficult to achieve as good employee relations encourages the sharing of knowledge and a peaceful atmosphere for learning at the work place. This study therefore concludes that the use of feedforward influences the non-conventional methods of employee training in the achievement of employee development with employee relations as a mediating factor at the work place today.*

Key Words: *Non-conventional training, Employee development, Employee relations at work.*

I. Introduction

There is growing agreement that the non-conventional methods of employee development are very convenient and easy to implement than the conventional methods with high results in bringing about a change in employee development, Mizintseva, Sardarian & Chavykina (2019). The survival of businesses in today's global arena be it public or private enterprise requires a close look at the nature of training being offered to the employees and as to whether the training methods can help the organisation achieve employee development, Wijayanti, Setini, Darma, Purwadi & Alka (2020). There must be avenues to constantly help individuals and groups informed of knowledge and skills to be able to perform better, Zakaria, Yaso, Ghazali, Ibrahim & Ismail (2017). It is very important that the organisation is well organized and its human resources are put to good use as well as well managed for better human resource development. Rodriguez & Walters (2017), says that a situation where the organisation fails to adequately training their members of staff will result into extinction of ideas to move the organisation to the next level. Employee relations management seems to play a mediating role between the implementation of the nonconventional methods of training and the achievement of staff development.

Employee relations at the work place will involve ideas and practices that encourage people to work together including the policies that help in directing this relationship. The essence of relations is to make sure that employee work together as a group and avoid selfish thinking which will damage group cohesion in the organisation and in the process encourage learning among the organisational members, Rani & Merga (2016).

II. Statement of the problem

Employee training has become a matter of strategic importance to all organisations so as to achieve a competitive aged over others amid stiff competition. There has been much attention put on the relationship between training and employee development mainly by focussing on the conventional training with different mediating variables in the various studies yet there seems to be a mediating role of employee relations in this relationship. In the study conducted by Fletcher, Alfes & Robinson (2018) about employee training and development with a mediating role of work attitude, Jerez-Gómez, Céspedes-Lorente & Pérez-Valls (2019) in their study about high performance human resource practices and performance had its mediating role of

organisational learning. None of these studies have focused on the role of employee relations as mediating factor in the relationship between employee training and employee development.

Yaokumah, Walker & Kumah (2019), in their study about security behaviour studied employee relations as mediating variable but did not focus on training and development. Gumilar, S. (2020), in his study about leadership and employee performance with employee relations as a mediating variable did not look at employee training and development. This therefore suffices to say that this study is looking at the relationship between employee training and employee development with employee relation as a mediating variable.

III. The Main Objectives Of This Study

To examine the mediating role of employee relations on the effect of non-conventional training and employee development.

3.1 Specific objectives

- a) What is the effect of nonconventional training on employee development?
- b) What is the mediating role of employee relations on the effect of non-conventional training and employee development?

3.1.1 Research questions

- a) What is the effect of nonconventional training on employee development?
- b) What is the mediating role of employee relations on the effect of non-conventional training and employee development?

IV. Methodology

This paper examines the effect of nonconventional training on employee development with employee relations as a mediating factor and the systems theory as the theory underpinning the study. The researcher has conducted a literature search under the terms nonconventional training, employee development and employee relations and the systems theory. Evidence from literature reviewed links very well this relationship. The discussion and conclusion of this study gleans from the literature reviewed.

V. Literature review

5.1 Non-conventional training

Employee training is an organised activity, Khan & Baloch (2017), aimed at providing employee with specific knowledge and skills which can enhance their work performance Training may also be defined as that in which organisations make ways to update their employee knowledge, skills and attitude to enhance their performance in the organisation. It will involve the design of learning activities that will lead to a change in employee performance, Gerpott, Lehmann-Willenbrock & Voelpel (2017). Non-conventional training is the training activity that is mainly work based which is a shift from the common method of training that we normally call the class room learning. Non convectional training takes the form of role playing, mentoring, coaching, and counselling among the many methods. These activities are aimed at enhancing training that is not class room based. Training as a learning activity will involve many ways aimed at making the individual capable of performing his tasks well as expected, Cole (2002), mentioned in his book Personnel Human Resource Management, that training is more of a learning activity to acquire better skills and knowledge needed to perform a task. In reference to this study the researcher looked at three non-conventional methods of training namely mentoring, coaching and feedback.

5.2 Employee development

Human resource development has been defined as a set of systematic and planned activities designed by an organization to provide its members with the opportunities to learn necessary skills to meet current and future job demands which focuses on training, education and other types of development for workforce after they are employed by a company, Jiang & Gong (2019). Throughout the years it has been established that organizations are made of people and the organizations rely on people's expertise to archive organizational goals and objectives. It is also believed that human expertise is developed and maximized thru HRD Process, organizations are human-made entities that rely on human expertise in order to establish and achieve their goals. According to Armstrong (2006), human resource development is essentially a business led approach to managing people within a strategic frame work. Storey (1989) cited in by Collings, et al (2018) describes what human resource management is and says that the employees or the workers are a resource that is important for organizational competitiveness, this is where human resource development comes in to provide the necessary knowledge and skills required to bring about this competitiveness in the organization.

Training concerns application of formal processes to impart knowledge and help people to acquire the skills necessary for them to perform their jobs satisfactorily, Armstrong (2006). Wang et al. (2017) define human resource development as any process or activity that, either initially or over the long term, has the potential to develop adult work-based knowledge, expertise, productivity, and satisfaction, whether for personal or group/team gain, or for the benefit of an organization, community, nation, or, ultimately, the whole of humanity. Dash & Pati (2018) postulates that, training enhances employees' capabilities which are instrumental in improving overall organizational performance

5.3 Feedback and employee development

Lee, Idris & Tuckey, (2019), says that feedback during performance review is a means by which feedback provider helps employee to identify gap in this knowledge and skill. The good feedback process facilitates to deliver high quality information to employee, encourages motivational beliefs and self-esteem, and clarify what good performance is i.e., goals, criteria, and expected outcome. Good feedback comprises not just commentary about what has been done, but suggestions for what can be done next, Lee, Idris & Tuckey, (2019). Supervisory coaching and performance feedback are pivotal leader behaviors that help organizations to create a competitive advantage, Albrecht, Bakker Grumen, Macey, & Saks, (2015).

It has been found that role-playing teaching increases the efficacy of the learning experience and makes it more grounded in reality. The player goes into the shoes of the concerned entity and that reveals the expectations to the other party. The method brings to the surface real factors which need to be addressed in a learning situation which is effective in making future managers and learning is strongly facilitated by this method. Role playing is very good at delivery of learning as Beenen, Pichler., & Levy, (2017), commenting on efficacy of role-playing teaching, says that integrating experiential learning activities in the classroom increases interest in the subject matter and understanding of course content.

5.4 Feed forward and employee development

The concept of feedforward started way back in the 1990s, Khalil (2017), following the discussion between Marshall Goldsmith and Jon Katzenbach in which they showed their resentment about feedback which was not giving good results during the performance management in organisations. They actually found out that feedback would be more meaningful if it were combined with feedforward. Feedforward is a nonconventional method of training employee that focuses on the future that is within our control but with a conventional feedback. It is about employees and their development and being positive to the personal development process of the employee. The advocates of feedforward say you have to use knowledge of the system to control the changes that will occur. A feedforward-controlled method works on an action in advance. Carver (2020), say that when there are errors in the system, a feedforward can reduce the effect arising from this error.

Kluger & Nir (2010), says feedforward focusses positively on the future rather than focussing on the failures of the past performance. It focuses on recent success stories to improve individual and organisational performance in the future. The idea behind feedforward is that it draws it bases on the positive thinking that is increasingly influencing the subject of management. It emphasizes a focus on the positive side of everything and it is that that will keep one going in the right direction and bringing out success stories, Budworth, Latham & Manroop (2015), will help in coming out with new ideas that will support future performance.

5.5 Mentoring and human resource development

Non-conventional training also includes mentoring. Mentoring is either informal or non-informal. Oxford learner online dictionary (2018) sees mentoring as a progression whereby a knowledgeable person in an organization or educational institution counsels and trains new students or employees. On the other hand, a mentor is explained as a person with more experience in a given area who takes responsibility for helping someone with less experience to develop needed knowledge and skills, medical dictionary (2017).

The Mosby's medical online dictionary (2018) defines mentor as one who is more experienced, trusted adviser or counsellor who offers helpful guidance to less experienced colleagues. The common one in organizations is the formal method structured mentoring program, yet informal mentoring is much more common. Formal mentoring is planned, intentional, and supported. It occurs when relationships are formalized by matching the mentor with the mentee. The mentor and mentee agree to meet regularly over a period of time to participate in skills or career-related activities. Formal mentoring tends to be more broadly based and systematic by helping the mentee acquire skills and attitude required to do work. Mentoring facilitates the transfer of cherished values and cultural icons, which helps to build employee development.

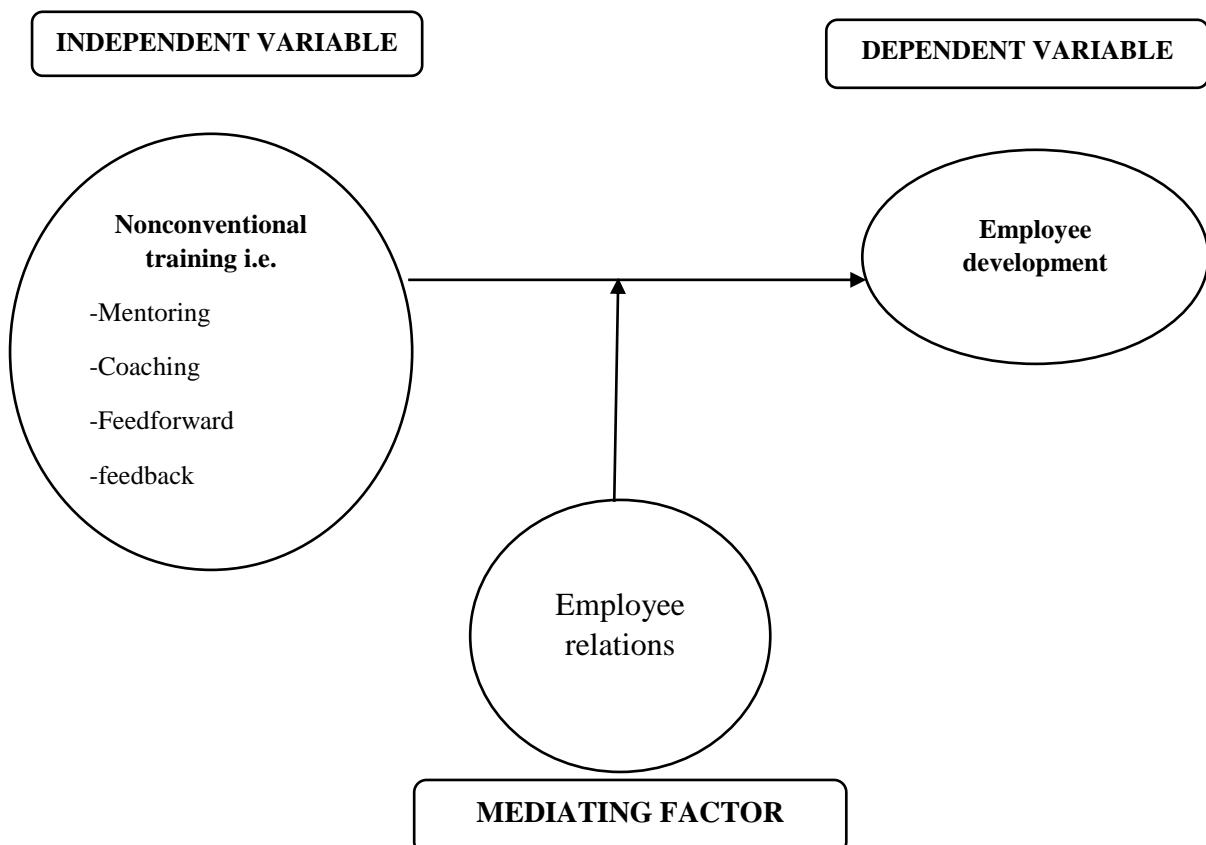
5.6 Coaching and human resource development

The other non-conventional method of training that is good in employee development is coaching. Coaching is one on one instruction normally done by an experienced person to the less experienced. The coach is the more experienced and the coachee is the less experienced. The coach encourages the coachee to reach their full potential by encouraging self-belief and self-development. Self-belief gives coachee the drive to achieve their potential. Self-development gives them the means to succeed in their work, Ying & Abdul (2015). Therefore, the coach does not need to have knowledge of the specific job role of the coachee but encourages deeper thought and reflection from their coachee by appropriate questioning and listening. This approach is based upon a confidential, professional relationship being formed between the two individuals with minimal involvement from a third party

Management ability to coach and adequately provide support to employees may lead to greater employees' motivation in organization, Pousa & Mathieu (2015). Therefore, the support from an immediate supervisor helps the employees to increase their confidence in implementing the actions, Pousa & Mathieu (2015), and results from previous research showed that a highly supportive management can enhance employees' engagement and performance in performing their tasks, Rekalde, Landeta & Albizu (2015). In a study about lecturers at three polytechnics in Malaysia, Ying & Abdul (2015). The outcomes of these surveys indicated that the readiness of the management to play appropriately the roles as a coach and prepare a full support to the employees can increase their self confidence in performing tasks, and indirectly improve their performance. Coaching therefore is assumed to help in the development of human resource in the ministry of public service.

VI. Conceptual frame work

The figure 1 below show the conceptual frame work of the study



Source: Researcher

The conceptual frame work shows the interrelationship between the variables. The nonconventional methods namely, mentoring, coaching, feedforward and feedback as dependent variable will lead to employee development. However, this relationship is mediated by employee relations which if not taken care of employee development is not likely to succeed.

VII. Theoretical framework

This study is underpinned by the systems theory that explains the mediating role of employee relation in the training and development of employee.

7.1 System theory

According to systems theory, people's behaviors are affected by internal and external inferences. A system has a boundary that contains many subsystems and that also separates the system from its environment McLean, (2006) in Boreum (2019). Systems theory is less of a management methodology as it is a way of analyzing and thinking about organizations. It puts forth the premise that organizations are like living organisms, are made up of numerous component subsystems that must work together in harmony for the larger system to succeed. Systems theory states that organizational success relies on synergy, interrelations and interdependence between different subsystems. As arguably the most valuable component of a company, employees make up various vital subsystems within an organization. Departments, work groups, business units, facilities and individual employees can all be considered component of the systems in organizations. On the other hand, Ruona (1998) in Boreum (2019), defined a system as "a collection of elements where the performance of the whole is affected by every one of the parts and the way that any part affects the whole depends on what at least one other part is doing. To combine those two definitions, a system is a composite of subsystems in which every part affects the whole. When looking at this theory, researchers and practitioners take interest in "understanding systems with a particular emphasis on the inter-dependencies and dynamics of the parts, how they are organized, and how they work together to produce results, Swanson & Holton, (2009). In employee training, a system is considered "a collection of elements ie employee, employer, and the organizational set up where the performance of the whole is affected by every one of the parts and the way that any part affects the whole depends on what at least one other part is doing, Ju (2019). He continues to say, there are four principal components within a system or subsystem: input, process, output and feedback. Input affects process, which affects output. Output affects feedback, and feedback affects input. Thus, the loop continues. From input to feedback and again from input to feedback. While managing human resource one may consider a systems-theory approach when he or she is planning for the development of human resource in an organization.

7.2 The systems theory and employee relations

The system theory has been well appreciated for making easy for managers to interpret and understand organisational functioning, Jacobs (2014). The system theory helps managers to understand and approach employee relations which helps managers to know that employee are part of the system of organisational functioning rather than thinking that employees are only cost centres in an organisation. In the subject of human resource management, employee relations looks at that relationship between the employee and management and the relationship among employees. The relations must be cordial and it talks about all the ways that can be employed in enhancing this relationship, Rani & Merga (2016), which can help in fostering learning at the work place. The systems theory helps managers to analyse organisations and it presupposes, that organisation are like living organisms, Jacobs (2014), and are made up many components in the system which must work together for the greater system to succeed. Therefore, the success of an organisation lies on interrelationships and interdependence of the different subsystems, Jacobs (2014). Human resource who are the employee make up a big part of the system within an organisation in addition to capital, machines, furniture and fittings and all other components that are required to do work. While ensuring employee relations management the interrelationships that exist in the relationship is the foundation of the systems theory, Jacobs (2014). The employer and the employee rely on each other while at the same time the employee will rely on the fellow employee in the accomplishment of his/her tasks, Otoo & Mishra (2018). Good employee relations create an environment that can enhance learning as employees feel free to ask their superiors about what they do not understand, this can well extend to departments and the entire organisation. Employee relations enables team work within the organisation which helps to promote productivity within the organisation. Everyone feels is part of the other and works towards the achievement of a common goal which is a component of the systems theory. Organisations that encourage good employee relations have greater creativity and innovation which encourages learning at the work place which promotes employee development.

Huning, Bryant & Holt (2015) says that the biggest part of the work in an organisation is accomplished through social relationship which tells us that maintaining good employee relations at the work place is important for employee learning and development. The most important aspect the facilities informal learning at the work place lies in social participation of those involved, Huning, Bryant & Holt (2015), therefore social participation is a driver for employee development in organisations today.

Employees can relate in an organisation in many ways and one of them will be the informal groups. Informal groups can support learning which can well be understood by looking at how social networks work in an organisation. Normally a social network is a set of people with defined characteristics that tend to bring them

together. Within these set ups management can identify channels that can help to support learning within the organisation, Mitchell, (1969) in Huning, Bryant & Holt (2015).

VIII. Findings And Discussion

Research question one: What is the effect of nonconventional training on employee development?

The findings indicate that feedback allows leaders to communicate performance standards and expectations, thus reducing job ambiguity for employees and increasing the understanding and clarity of work goals, Beenen, Pichler, & Levy (2017). Lee, Idris & Tuckey, (2019). say that role-playing has been used as a pedagogical approach for many years, predominantly in sports education, theatre, history and other social science disciplines. Utilizing the techniques of drama, role-playing teaching is a holistic teaching method that inculcates the process of critical thinking, instigates emotions and moral values, and informs about factual data.

In a feedforward, Rice (2017), normally the first step is to identify times of better performance and their success stories which will allow a deeper discussion on the personal and organisational factors that supported the success in question while putting forward new ideas for the future. The examination of these stories allows the manager to explore issues or factors that explained this success and how they helped both the employee and the organisation. In the process management will identify gaps in terms of performance and ways of how these gaps can be closed, Meutia & Bukhori (2017) through the feedforward technique. Therefore, feedforward creates a positive self-discovery and the greater part of the conversation is about how performance can be improved in future.

According to Janssen, Tahitu, van Vuuren & de Jong (2018), mentoring relationships that last longer are more likely to have positive outcomes because the benefits of mentoring emerge over a relatively long period of time. Quality mentoring produces significant, lasting, positive outcomes. According to Bush, Coleman, Wall & West-Burnham (2018), mentoring, as part of a general development and training strategy can improve both individual and organizational performance. Alexandre further states that mentoring aids the mentee's success through addressing strengths and weaknesses as well as increased confidence thus allowing a mentee to develop and learn faster through continuous exchange of information.

Employee coaching is good for managers who want to improve employee performance, (Carr 2016). Coaching has its own challenges and most important is that the coaches will succeed if they are knowledgeable, Ling, Kho, Neo & Abdullah (2020), and can well communicate with employees about their performance and have the will to help employees improve on their performance. The coach or manager needs to well engage his employees, good engagement will influence how employee learn during the coaching process which helps to get a deeper understanding of what the coach is talking about, Ling, Kho, Neo & Abdullah (2020).

Research question two: What is the mediating role of employee relations on the effect of non-conventional training and employee development?

In today's business arena, the consideration of human relations is very important in the managing of business today, Samwel (2018). Employee relations explains the relationship between employee and management. This relationship consists of social networks that can support learning in an organisation. The social networks will tell you how people relate within the organisation and different social groups within the organisation. These social networks will influence positively or negatively the way employees learn in an organisation, Vohra & Thomas (2016). Good employee- employer relationship is good for the organisation and the training function because it inspires employee to learn and interact well with each other which, Ali, Lei & Wei (2018), which creates a better learning environment than in a situation where there is poor employee- employer relationship.

Torrington & Hall (1998) in Pesik, Pangemanan & Tumewu (2019), are of the view that employee-employer relationship is as a result of justice within the organisation embedded within the culture and values of the organisation. Issues like satisfaction at the job can only happen if there is a good working relationship between the employee and management, Liu & Wan (2020). An organisation may have a well-qualified staff but with poor work relations, this will greatly affect the performance of employee. All organisation will have to have employee who can live in harmony with each other and work towards the achievement of organisational goals and objectives, Nechanska, Hughes & Dundon (2020). The factors that explain good employee relations at work includes employee involvement, employee empowerment, a grievance handling procedure, collective bargaining, employee training and teamwork, Schweitzer & Lyons (2008) in Ilyas, Shaari & Alshuaibi (2018), they continue to say when you empower employees you increase on their ability to display their skills which enhances their ability to learn and to perform.

Having mutual trust and confidence building are foundations of good employee relations, and this helps in building associations of any kind within the organisation which helps to promote learning in the organisation,

Nechanska, Hughes & Dundon (2020). In improving the relationship to help inn fostering learning within the organisation, it is very important that employee interests are well aligned with organisational goals which in turn will improve learning environment and interest in learning by the employees, Pesik, Pangemanan & Tumewu, (2019). In the process of alignment of employee's interest and organisational interest, employees are given knowledge that helps them for their personal development while at the same time the organisation is improving in terms of productivity due to the knowledge acquired. This relationship will help to foster learning than in a situation where the interests of the two have not been well aligned, Kaufman, Wilkinson, Barry & Gomez (2019). There must be a policy frame work in place that governs this relationship that will help employee have a greater participation in what concerns them directly at the work place.

Business success requires that organisations are able to create new knowledge in a continuous manner, Siktin (1991) in Caniëls & Baaten, (2019). Employee relations will involve having an environment which facilitates interaction between employee themselves and between themselves and management, Ford (1992) in Wentzel (2018), this will support employee to be more creative because it is the knowledge that will help to add value to organisational product and services. It is therefore important that the organisations support group and individual learning for the purpose of creation of knowledge, Conrad, Dierberger & Isaacson (2019), and its transfer through teams, this can happen when there are good employee relations within the organisation.

An environment in which there is trust, Men, Fong, Luo, Zhong & Huo (2019), can enhance the exchange of knowledge and its creation can well happen if there is good employee relation in the organisation. The emotional climate that will facilitate the exchange of knowledge through teams and individuals can only be created where there is good employee relation, Karim & Majid (2019, and where there is good relations even mistakes can be tolerated when team members or individuals are trying to learn and work out new ideas.

Conclusion

This paper has been able to conclude that employee relations have a mediating role they play in the provision of training and development of an employee. Human relations are a social network, Nechanska, Hughes & Dundon (2020). These social networks will influence positively or negatively the way employees learn in an organisation, Vohra & Thomas (2016). Good employee- employer relationship is good for the organisation and the training function because it inspires employee to learn and interact well with each other which, Ali, Lei & Wei (2018), which creates a better learning environment than in a situation where there is poor employee- employer relationship. Business success requires that organisations are able to create new knowledge in a continuous manner, Siktin (1991) in Caniëls & Baaten, (2019). Good employee relations create an environment in winch employee are more creative and social which encourages the exchange of ideas thus encouraging learning than in an organisation where there is poor employee relations.

Areas for further research

This paper thought to establish the mediating role of employee relations in the achievement of employee development through training. The study recommends a further study of the mediating role of technology in the achievement of employee development through training.

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