

Management PhD Research Topic

Career Development in the 21st Century

Associate Professor Janice Redmond and Dr Hossein Ali Abadi

Abstract

Career development is continuous, dynamic, and is constantly changing in response to the unprecedented transformation that is happening in the 21st Century. This environment requires individuals and organisations to take a more flexible approach to how, where, and why career goals can or cannot be achieved immediately or in the longer term. This environment also offers both challenges and opportunities for individuals and organisations that will have critical impacts on their future success as well as contributing to the creation of more meaningful work, personal growth, and new learning. One opportunity that arises is research which supports improvements in career development.

Further Details

There are many diverse topics in which research can support individuals and organisations to manage pathways to achieve success individually and collectively. The emerging topic of the role and practice of informal learning in supporting individual and organisational learning is a critical option due to it being a low-cost option for many individuals and organisations. Informal learning is typically characterized as non-didactic; based on learning from experience; highly socially collaborative; embedded in an organizational context and meaningful activity; initiated by the learner's interest or choice; and enhanced by pro-activity, critical reflection, and creativity (e.g., Callanan, Cervantes, and Loomis 2011; Kyndt and Baert, 2013; Watkins and Marsick, 1992). How skills and knowledge are acquired, maintained, and transformed through informal learning processes in organizations are matters of significant interest to researchers and policy makers. The importance of learning in highly competitive and rapidly changing environments, and increasing reliance upon informal learning processes, suggests managers within can play a key role as facilitators of employee learning (Nolan and Garavan 2016a). Managers can have a significant impact on informal learning in the workplace through developmental interventions such as coaching (Beattie et al. 2014) and through creating conditions in the work environment that are conducive to learning (Ellinger 2005).

The development and use of informal learning in organisations will have many impacts and therefore research questions which may form the basis of a PhD project.

Research Questions

1. When does informal learning contribute to individual career and organisational success? Under what conditions does this occur? Under what conditions will informal learning hinder individual career development and organisational success?
2. How do managers create informal learning environments that support talent retention and development? What role does HR play in investing in employee informal learning and career development? What drives shifts in the workplace learning and how do they influence informal learning practice?

3. To what extent is informal learning able to stand alone? How does formal learning interact with social and informal learning to create an environmental ecosystem which supports career development adaptability in response to the shifting goals of individuals and organisation in the 21st Century?

These are just some examples of interesting research questions that relate to how informal learning can be explored to understand its impacts in the 21st century. A review of recent journal articles may suggest other interesting potential topics.

Methodologically, most work in this area has been qualitative in nature (i.e., case studies, interviews) with few quantitative and mixed method studies.

Possible journal articles to build an understanding of the field include the following. A number of the papers are by the supervisors to allow candidates to understand their background work in this field. Links are provided where available to the article via the title of the paper.

References

Ali Abadi, H., Coetzer, A., Roxas, H. B., & Pishdar, M. (2023). Informal learning and career identity formation: the mediating role of work engagement. *Personnel Review*, 52(1), 363-381.

Coetzer, A., Redmond, J., Sharafizad, J., & Lundy, J. (2022). Enhancing learning in small businesses. *Human Resource Management Journal*.

Coetzer, A., Wallo, A., & Kock, H. (2019). The owner-manager's role as a facilitator of informal learning in small businesses. *Human Resource Development International*, 22(5), 420-452.

Garavan, T. N., Morley, M., Gunnigle, P., & McGuire, D. (2002). Human resource development and workplace learning: emerging theoretical perspectives and organisational practices. *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 26(2/3/4), 60-71.

Garavan, T. N., O'Brien, F., Duggan, J., Gubbins, C., Lai, Y., Carbery, R., ... & Grant, K. (2020). Definitions and the Evolution of Learning and Development Research and Practice. *Learning and Development Effectiveness in Organisations: An Integrated Systems-Informed Model of Effectiveness*, 7-22.

Kodom-Wiredu, J. K., Coetzer, A., Redmond, J., & Sharafizad, J. (2022). Informal learning research in hospitality and tourism: A systematic literature review. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 52, 13-28.

Short, H. (2019). Learning in SMEs. *Human Resource Development International*, 22(5), 413-419.

Susomrith, P., & Coetzer, A. (2019). Effects of informal learning on work engagement. *Personnel Review*.