

# How do employees learn at work ?

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## SUMMARY

Organizations have turned to employee's continuous professional development to increase the responsiveness towards ongoing change and the ability to foster innovation. Especially, workplace learning is an issue of emerging interest. In this context, informal learning in the workplace in contrast to formal learning has become a major component for acquiring and developing knowledge and skills that are important in organizations to stay competitive and increase quality. However, the concept of informal learning has been difficult to explain as it is undecided in which kind of informal learning behaviors employees engage in. As yet, researchers have tackled this issue by noticing all possible informal learning behaviors and activities. This resulted in a broad overview and scholars later categorized informal learning in either learning from oneself such as reading literature or learning from others such as exchanging feedback with others. This approach has limitations: using a broad categorization can lead to fallacies if the findings are used to make clear statement on the possible effects of informal learning on professional development.

The present dissertation builds on these efforts and responds to the limitations by focusing on informal learning from others. The goal is to gain a refined understanding of the informal learning from others behaviors employees engage in and how this contributes to their professional development. The concepts of employability and innovative work behavior were selected as indicators for professional development as these constructs are recognized in literature to be influenced by learning. More specifically, four empirical studies were set up to each make an individual contribution to the goal by addressing the influence of specific informal learning behaviors from others on employee's employability and innovative work behavior. The contribution of study 1 in Chapter 2 lies in the further operationalization of concrete informal learning behaviors based on prior research studies. This study compared the relation of informal learning and formal learning on employees' employability in the field of emergency medical services. The findings revealed that two behaviors, creating opportunities to gather information and proactive learning from others, positively related to employability. Next, the results showed that employability is foremost related to informal learning and not to formal learning. Study 2 in Chapter 3 expanded the results of the first study in two directions. First, by further operationalizing the concept of informal learning from others and looking at three specific behaviors that emerged from the first study: acting upon feedback, information seeking, and help seeking. These behaviors are also referred to in Chapter 4 and 5. Second, this empirical study took place in a different sector, namely higher education and studied the learning behavior of faculty staff. The results of the second study showed that acting upon feedback from colleagues significantly positively

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related to employability. In addition, informal learning from others had a stronger relation with employability than formal learning.

In relation to the expectation of lifelong employability, employees are also asked to fulfill tasks that lead to the development of new ideas and innovations. Study 3 (Chapter 4) examined the relation between informal learning from others and innovative work behavior across employees working in different sectors. The results revealed that two learning from others behaviors, that is, acting upon feedback from colleagues and information seeking were significantly related to employees' innovative work behavior. Study 4 (Chapter 5) took a different perspective on informal learning from others by identifying employees' preferences for acting upon feedback, information seeking, and help seeking and its relationship with their background characteristics. The results demonstrated that employees prefer certain behaviors over others depending on job mobility and work experience. Accordingly, employees will engage in ways that best serve their purpose and assist their career trajectory. In conclusion, this dissertation extends previous findings from literature leading to a more sophisticated understanding of the concept and effects of informal learning from others in the workplace on both employability and innovative work behavior.

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to all of you who  
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are my partners in crime  
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