

Psychological empowerment as an antecedent of workplace learning: A study in the context of SMEs in Pakistan

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Abstract

A very important aspect of HRD research is Workplace Learning (WPL). WPL is very important considering its role in the development of skills and abilities of employees. Since employees are a crucial asset for organizations to achieve competitive advantage. Therefore, organizations must ensure continuous learning of their employees. This research was aimed at the investigation of the antecedent role of Psychological Empowerment (PE) for WPL. Using a quantitative approach, primary data was collected from 241 employees of 153 SMEs in Pakistan. Data was analyzed through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) by using PLS-SEM. The results of the study indicated that PE did play the role of an antecedent of WPL. Furthermore, Informal learning appeared as the most important form of WPL, followed by incidental and formal learning in SMEs in Pakistan.

Keywords: Psychological empowerment; self-efficacy; workplace learning; self-determination; PLS-SEM.

The increased complexity of business environment, greater uncertainty and increased competition pushes businesses to search for different ways to achieve competitive advantage. A main source for achieving competitive advantage for any organization is its human capital (Mahoney & Kor, 2015). WPL has greater potential to develop the human capital and link it to the development of organization to achieve competitive advantage (Manuti et al., 2015). Learning is a natural process and one can see it to be a natural facet of routine actions in work context and work itself can be regarded as a thriving context where learning can take place (Collin, 2003). Hence, WPL plays a critical role in the development and enhancement of the knowledge, skills and capabilities of individuals which will result in human capital improvement and enhancement and will help in improving the success of the entire organization.

In the above context, continuous learning is crucial for employees to contribute to their own and organization's development (Kyndt & Baert, 2013). There are many factors that contribute to the facilitation of WPL (Crouse, Doyle, & Young, 2011). Antecedents or facilitators are factors that can motivate, maintain or enhance learning (Hicks et al., 2007). Crouse et al. (2011) grouped antecedents of WPL identified in past research into different categories. Personal attributes of individual constituted one of the categories of the antecedents of WPL and it included the attribute of 'self-efficacy' of the learners. The term self-efficacy is connected to the cognitive thinking of employees and it indicates the extent of a person's ability to complete tasks effectively (Men, 2011). Self-efficacy is the key element of social cognitive theory which is regarded to provide the theoretical base for the notion of PE (Bandura, 1977). Ultimately, being psychologically empowered will provoke the feeling of having self-efficacy among employees, which in result will encourage them to take part in WPL. However, there has been lack of research on psychological antecedents of WPL in developing countries as majority of the empirical evidence comes from developed countries (Jeong, McLean, & Park, 2018). Moreover, most of the research in this regard has been conducted in larger organization and there is dearth of research in the context of SMEs (Rowden & Conine, 2005; Moon & Na, 2009; Wang et al., 2010; Kunjiapu & Yasin, 2015). In particular there has been only few studies to investigate the role of employee's psychological characteristics in facilitating WPL (Moon & Na, 2009). Therefore, investigating the role of PE as antecedent of WPL will be of importance. This will be more beneficial in the context of SMEs in a developing country.

Considering the above context, this paper aims to explore the role of psychological characteristics in motivating employees to participate in WPL. The PE construct adopted for this purpose incorporates four psychological variables i.e. Meaning (ME), Competence (CMP), self-determination (S-DR) and impact (IIM), related to psychological cognition of employees about their

job. In combination, these four cognitions enhance the feeling of employees to have self-efficacy on job.

The empirical findings of this paper will further the debate related to the psychological variables related to the facilitation of WPL. In particular, it will contribute to the literature linked to WPL and its antecedents in a developing country (Pakistan) context. This is of main concern, keeping in view the fact that most of the research related to WPL and its antecedents is conducted in Developed countries and western context (Jeong, McLean, & Park, 2018). Hence, there is only little known about this area in developing countries and particularly South-Asian countries.

The next section is about the literature linked to the notion of WPL and PE followed by research methodology. The paper then discusses data analysis followed by discussion, research contributions and limitations of the current study.

Literature review

Workplace Learning (WPL)

WPL is a broad term, it comprises all categories of learning that takes place in the organization and it is crucial for the working lives of people, groups and organizations Marsick & Volpe, 1999). It is therefore critical to realize the importance of WPL for better performance of the organization.

There are different definitions of WPL presented by academics and researchers from diverse academic backgrounds and there is no single definition that is agreed by all (Chiang & Wang, 2008). In fact, researchers define WPL according to the context of their study and their research intentions (Moon & Na, 2009). Jacobs and Park (2009) stated that the term WPL could be used to mention the various ways that could be used by employees for learning in the workplace. Hence, WPL includes all types of training programs, development initiatives and experimental learning aimed to obtain the knowledge, skills and competencies which are compulsory to complete tasks and meet the demands of the organization (Jacobs & Park, 2009; Manuti et al., 2015). Marsick and Watkins (1990) also viewed WPL in similar way and proposed a model of WPL. According to their model, WPL incorporates three types of learning including formal, informal and incidental. Since that time, their model has been extensively adopted for the investigation of WPL (Rowden & Conine, 2005; Moon & Na, 2009; Wang et al., 2010; Kunjiapu & Yasin, 2015). This study also approaches WPL as characterized by formal, informal and incidental learning. Therefore, based on Marsick and Watkins (1990) model of WPL, WPL is defined in this paper as the engagement of employees in learning activities that could be characterized as formal, informal and incidental at workplace that improves their knowledge, abilities and competencies associated to their work.

In this context, formal learning is regarded to be structured with respect to learning settings, objectives of learning, support, and time (Kyndt & Baert, 2013). Usually, it is arranged through training courses offered by educational or training institutions either independent or established inside the organization (Kyndt & Baert, 2013). Therefore, formal learning occurs within a situation that is explicitly designed for learning. Moreover, it is a trainer/instructor led activity, having a time frame and has pre-determined outcomes (Eraut, 2004; Kyndt & Baert, 2013; Marsick & Watkins, 2001). In WPL literature, formal learning is often compared with informal learning (Malcolm, Hodkinson, & Colley, 2003; Marsick & Watkins, 1990). Informal learning incorporates a lower level of organizing and structuring with respect to the context of learning, objectives of learning, support for learning, and time of learning (Kyndt & Baert, 2013). Informal learning opportunities are not limited to organized learning environment and it can take place while performing various work-related activities. It is undertaken without an instructor, individually or collectively and learner is autonomous in his/her learning (Kyndt & Baert, 2013; Marsick & Watkins, 2001). Marsick and Watkins (1990) have also mentioned incidental learning and described it as distinct from of informal learning. They have explained incidental learning as un-intentional and highly unstructured form of learning which is a by-product of some other action. Most often, the learner is not aware of the learning that has taken place and it contributes to the 'tacit knowledge' (Marsick et al., 2008). The examples of incidental learning includes learning through networking, interactions and learning from mistakes etc. (Kunjiapu & Yasin, 2015; Marsick & Watkins, 2001).

Empirical research has shown the important role of WPL in the development of the skills and competencies of employees as well as in the enhancement of their job satisfaction and commitment to the organization (Rowden & Ahmad, 2000; Rowden & Conine, 2005). WPL serves as means for realizing personal and organizational goals. Hence, organizations should attempt to support and facilitate WPL to improve the competencies of its employees and overall organizational performance (Wang et al., 2010). The following section discusses PE and its role in facilitating WPL.

Psychological Empowerment (PE)

Social cognitive theory provides the theoretical roots for the notion of PE as a management concepts (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy is the chief component of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977; Fock, Chiang, Au, & Hui, 2011). The term self-efficacy is connected to decision making process of persons and it the confidence of someone about his/her abilities and attempt to complete essential duties (Bandura, 1982). Wang and Doong (2010) regarded the concept of self-efficacy to be the starting point of a person's performance and to develop and enhance one's performance in the workplace. Likewise, Men (2011) described self-efficacy to be the extent of one's capability to attain work related tasks. Self-efficacy is regarded to be the starting point of the notion of PE (Maynard, Gilson, & Mathieu, 2012). This suggest that being psychologically empowered, self-efficacy of employees will increase and ultimately, their performance will be improved. Therefore, the psychological feeling of being empowered is a very important aspect for improving the performance of employees.

In light of above discussion, empowerment could be defined to be the process of enhancing an individual's self-efficacy (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). In literature, the work of Conger and Kanungo (1988) is regarded to be the pioneering work associated to the psychological approach to employee empowerment. Building on their work, Thomas and Velthouse (1990) suggested four dimension of PE including meaning, competence, self-determination and impact. Spreitzer (1995) worked on the model proposed by Thomas and Velthouse and proposed PE as intrinsic task motivation composed of four cognitive facets. These four facets as described by Huang (2012) are: impact, self-determination, meaning, and competence. In light of this view, empowerment is not something that is done by management, rather it is a mindset of employees about their work (Quinn & Spreitzer, 1997). Nowadays, the model of PE presented by Spreitzer (1995) is extensively researched. According to Seibert et al. (2011), Spreitzer's model of PE was frequently used by researchers making an effort to assess the construct of PE. Therefore, Spreitzer (1995) model is adopted in this paper to investigates the role of PE in facilitating WPL. The next section talks about the association of PE and WPL and proposes research hypothesis.

Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis Development

This research aims to study the antecedent role of PE in relation to WPL. Figure 1 below illustrates the proposed framework for this research. The next sections discuss the dimensions of PE and their theoretical and empirical association with WPL.

Meaning and WPL

Meaning has been studied as the meaningfulness of work, which is considered as the extent to which individuals consider their job to be valuable and useful and it is influenced by the job characteristics (Hackman & Oldham, 1975). Thomas and Velthouse (1990) refined this understanding and considered meaningfulness to be the value of a job based on an individual's personal standards. This view looks at meaning as a person's intrinsic care for a task or job. In recent times, Lethbridge et al. (2011) have considered meaning as the standard of work based on the view of an individual about work. It is about the way an individual give importance to a job (Huang, 2012). Researchers have also used the word 'role identity' as similar to meaning, which means the perception of employees of having self-respect in a particular role (Zhang & Bartol, 2010; Men, 2011). Empirical research has found positive relation of meaning with different job outcomes including employee performance (Cho & Faerman, 2010), job satisfaction (Spreitzer, 2008), and many others. Likewise, Noe, Tews, and Marand (2013) found zest as a significant predictor of WPL. Therefore, this study investigates the role of meaning as predictor of WPL and purpose the following hypotheses.

H1a: Meaning positively influences formal learning

H1b: Meaning positively influences informal learning

H1c: Meaning positively influences incidental learning

Competence and WPL

The notion of competence originated from social learning theory. It is defined as psychological procedures which are means for creating and reinforcing one's anticipation of personal efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Bandura (1986) associated competence with two words i.e. self-efficacy and personal mastery. People at a low level of self-efficacy will try to escape performing in some conditions that necessitate the utilization of related skills and information. This will prevent the growth of one's competence. Building on this explanation, Thomas and Velthouse (1990) described competence as the extent to which one can perform a job competently when tired. Similarly, it is the confidence of a person in his/her capability of carrying out a job effectively Spreitzer (1995).

Recently, Cho and Faerman, (2010) explained competence to be the measure of understanding of employees about effectiveness of their job performance. Likewise, competence is considered to be the ability of an individual to execute a given job proficiently (Dierendonck & Dijkstra, 2012). Hence, competence is related to someone's belief that he/she is equipped with the skills and knowledge required to do a job in an effective way. Empirical evidence has found positive relation of competence to various job outcomes including creative performance (Zhang & Bartol, 2010), job involvement (Cho & Faerman, 2010) etc. In similar way, competence has been found to relate positively to WPL (Van Workroom, 2003). In line with above discussion, this study posits that having the cognition of competence will predict employees' involvement in WPL and hypothesize that;

H2a: Competence positively influences formal learning

H2b: Competence positively influences informal learning

H2c: Competence positively influences on incidental learning

Self-Determination and WPL

The cognition of self-determination has its origins in self-determination theory (Deci, 1975; Deci & Ryan, 2000). This theory states that employees who perceive that they have relatedness, competence, and have autonomy will be motivated to carry out their job (Vansteenkiste, Lens, & Deci, 2006). In literature, different words has been used to refer to self-determination such as choice (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990; Yukl & Becker, 2008), personal initiative (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Liu & Fu, 2011), autonomy (Elele & Fields, 2010; Humborstad & Perry, 2011),

Those researchers who have equated it with the word 'choice' have described self-determination as having a choice in initiating and controlling one's actions (Spreitzer, 1995; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Likewise, those who have employed the word autonomy to refer to self-determination have characterized it as an individual's feeling of confidence or autonomy about performing a job (Elele & Fields, 2010). In this context, Liu, Zhang, Wang, and Lee, (2011) have argued that self-determination/choice/autonomy is the core component of PE. Self-determination has been examined in connection to a variety of job outcomes. It has been discovered to positively correlate to job performance (Humborstad & Perry, 2011), organizational commitment (Choong, Wong, & Lau, 2011), job satisfaction (Ford & Dickson, 2012) and many others. In context of WPL, studies have found that self-determination/autonomy is positively related to WPL (Kyndt et al., 2011; Fagerlind et al., 2013). It is therefore proposed that the feeling of self-determination among employees will facilitate work related learning and the following hypothesis are established;

H3a: Self- determination positively influences formal learning

H3b: Self- determination positively influences informal learning

H3c: Self- determination positively influences incidental learning

Impact and WPL

Form empowerment viewpoint, impact is viewed as opposite concept to learned helplessness, which is a mental state that arises when events are not manageable or controllable (Seligman, 1975; Martinko & Gardner, 1982; Spreitzer, 1995; Hill, Kang, & Seo, 2014). Learned helplessness is the perceived lack of influence of an individual on workplace events and it is based on past experience (Spreitzer, 1996).

In contrast, impact is considered to be the extent of influence that a job has on work and lives of other people in organization or outside working life (Hackman, Lawler, & Porter, 1983). Likewise, Thomas and Velthouse (1990) explained impact as the degree of perceived influence an individual is making through his and her role in the organization. In other words, impact could be described as the extent to which the action or behaviour of a person has the potential to have an effect in the workplace (Gkorezis & Petridou, 2008). Recently, impact has been defined as the degree of impact on work related outcomes operationally, managerially and strategically (Ertürk, 2012). Thus, impact means an individual's belief of having an influence on work related outcomes. Research in this context has found positive association of impact to different outcomes. For example, creative performance (Sun et al., 2012), job satisfaction (Sarmiento, Spence Laschinger, & Iwasiw, 2004), and innovative performance (Spreitzer, 1995). Subsequently, this study proposes that the feeling of having impact will encourage employees to learn in the workplace. Therefore, the following hypotheses are devised;

H4a: Impact positively influences formal learning

H4b: impact positively influences informal learning

H4c: Impact positively influences incidental learning

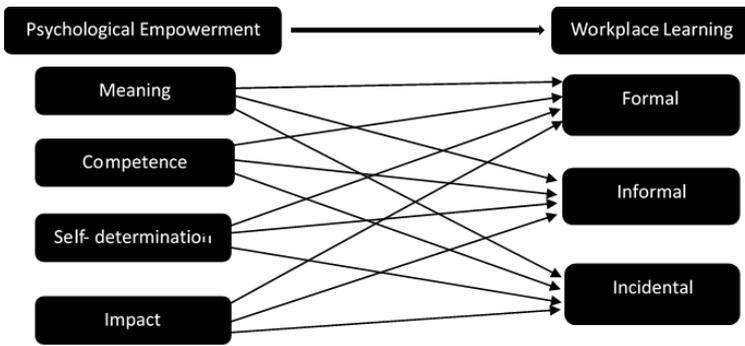


Figure 1. Theoretical framework

Research Methodology

Research settings and respondents

For data collection, a few considerations were made to identify the target population. For an organization to be included in the target population, it should be an SME, it should be an ISO certified SME working in service sector and the respondent should be knowledge worker. Following these conditions, the following steps were taken for data collection.

First, the study adopted the definition of SME as employing at least 10 and a maximum of 250 employees (SMEDA, 2018). Based on this definition, organizations having an employment figure of 10-250 employees were selected. The second condition was of ISO certification which helps SMEs to improve different aspects of their performance including the performance of employees (ISO, 2019). Therefore, organizations having an ISO certification were selected. Third, SMEs working in service sector were selected. Fourth, data was collected from employees whose work was suitable to be regarded as knowledge work and employees as knowledge workers. Knowledge worker is someone who uses their mind more than their hands (Drucker, 1969). Despres and Hiltrop (1995) described knowledge work as a systematic activity related to the handling of data, manipulation of information and development of knowledge. Based on their view, knowledge worker is someone whose work qualifies as knowledge work. In this research, employees who have a certain level of education and whose work could be regarded as knowledge work are regarded as knowledge workers. On this criteria, knowledge worker of ISO certified service sector SMEs formed the population for this research.

Based on the above criteria, a sample was drawn using convenient sampling method. Convenient sampling was considered suitable for this research, keeping in view the nature of the study and the criteria adopted to identify the target population. A total of 153 SMEs participated in the study and around 500 questionnaires were sent out, of which 248 were returned. Out of the returned questionnaires, 241 were found complete and useful generating a response rate of 48.2%. The participating SMEs were located in Islamabad, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab. As mentioned earlier, the participating SMEs were from service sector and different sub-sectors including; Accountancy, Advertising, Computer software, Consultancy, Education, Healthcare, Information technology, Insurance and Real estate.

The next section talks about the scales used for collection of data.

Scales

To collect primary data, a questionnaire was established having three parts. The first section of the questionnaire asked about the background information of SMEs and demographic information of respondents. The second part of the questionnaire includes items related to four dimensions of PE. For this purpose, items were borrowed from the scale of Spreitzer (1995). The scale of Spreitzer (1995) was heavily used in previous studies such as Aggarwal, Dhaliwal, & Nobis (2018); O'Brien (2011) etc. A total of 12 items were used 3 each for every dimension of PE. Expert opinion was taken to rephrase the items of scale in order to let the respondents understand them and provide accurate data. The third and last part contains questions regarding WPL where the scale developed by Rowden (2002) known as SBWLS (Small Business WPL Survey) was used. All the three dimensions of WPL were measured by 19 items where 6 items for the measurement of formal, 7 items for informal and 6 items to measure incidental learning. The questions were rephrased, and some new questions were

added based on WPL literature. All the items of the questionnaire survey were measured by 5-Point Likert scale where 1 for “strongly disagree” and 5 for “strongly agree”.

Data analysis Technique

The collected data was analyzed by using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). In this context, measurement and structural analysis were carried out. Smart-PLS (version 3.2.8) was used for this purpose. The rationale for using PLS-SEM as a tool for data analysis was due to the reason that the purpose of this research was to examine the relationship among several latent variables and it was not intended to confirm a specific theory (Hair et al., 2017). Furthermore, PLS-SEM also exhibits more statistical power than CB-SEM (Hair et al., 2017; Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011). The issues of Prevention of restrictive assumptions, inappropriate resolutions and indeterminacy of factors derived by the use of ML techniques is overcome with PLS techniques (Hair et al., 2017). To obtain loadings and path coefficients level of significance, 500 resample of bootstrapping method was run to generate the standard errors of estimation and t-values (Hair et al., 2017).

Data analysis and Results

Profile of SMEs and Respondents

A total of 241 questionnaires were found complete and useful for data analysis meeting the minimum required (200) for SEM (Kline, 2011). The background information of participating SMEs and respondents is shown in table 1. The table depicts that 50.2% of the respondents belonged to SMEs located in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, followed by 29.5% from Panjab and 20.3% from Islamabad. The respondents belonged to SME from service sector with 9 different sub-sectors. More than 52% of the SMEs had employment between 10-99 and 47.3% had employment between 100-250. Out of the total respondents, almost 76% were male and about 24% were female. This was consistent with the cultural orientation (male dominated society) of Pakistan (Khilji, 2003). With respect to age, 50.6% of the respondents had their age under 35 years, 40.7% were aged between 35 and 50 years and 8.7% were aged more than 50 years. In line with the criteria for sample selection, 49.4% of the respondents were university graduates, 42.7% had postgraduate degrees and 7.9% had college level diploma/certificate. Finally, 68.9% of the respondents worked as employees whereas 31.1% were managers.

Table 1. Background information of SMEs and profile of the respondents.

Characteristic	Sub-category	Frequency (N=241)	Percentage
Location of SME	Punjab	71	29.5
	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	121	50.2
	Islamabad	49	20.3
Industry Sector of SME	Accountancy	32	13.3
	Advertising	17	7.1
	Computer and software	26	10.8
	Consultancy	25	10.4
	Education	33	13.7
	Healthcare	36	14.9
	Information Technology	31	12.9
	Insurance	19	7.9
	Real Estate	21	8.7
No of Employees	> 9 and < 100	127	52.7
	More than 199 but not more than 250	114	47.3
Respondent’s Gender	Male	183	75.9
	Female	58	24.1
Respondent’s Age	Under 35 years	122	50.6
	35-50 years	98	40.7
	More than 50 Years	21	8.7
Respondent’s Educational Level	Intermediate OR equivalent	19	7.9
	Graduation	119	49.4
	Postgraduation	103	42.7
Respondent’s Hierarchal Position	Manager	75	31.1
	Employee	166	68.9

Assessment of the measurement model

A two-step method was adopted for the assessment of measurement model (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). In first step, convergent validity and reliability was calculated. There are three

necessary conditions to achieve convergent validity. The first condition is that factor loading should be greater than 0.5 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Second, the value of composite reliability should be greater than 0.7 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Lastly, AVE should be greater than 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Items related to WPL (FRML1, INFRM3, INFRM4, INCDT3 and INCDT4) and PE (ME3 and IM1) having lower loading were dropped from subsequent analysis. Table 2 shows that the model satisfied all the three criteria of convergent validity.

The next step was to evaluate discriminant validity of the model. Table 3 outlines the AVE share between latent constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The values indicate that the respondents were aware of the constructs used and they understood their uniqueness. Furthermore, variance inflation factor (VIF) was calculated and as table 5 shows, its value was within the range of 5, therefore there was no multicollinearity. Table 4 reveals that items had greater loading than their cross-loading (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2014). The result of all these indicators suggest that the model has attained discriminant validity.

Table 2. Results of measurement model

Construct	Item	Loading	(CR)	(AVE)
ME	Having belief about ability to do job.	0.86	0.91	0.83
	Work is important to me	0.96		
CMP	Having large influence on what occurs in one's department	0.76	0.85	0.66
	Activities included in job are meaningful to me.	0.76		
	Large extent of control on happenings in my section.	0.91		
S-DR	Discretion of decisions about doing my job	0.87	0.85	0.66
	Opportunity for freedom and independence of doing job	0.82		
	Got Proficiency in skills essential for my job.	0.74		
IM	Having considerable effect over what occurs in one's department	0.87	0.86	0.75
	Self-assurance about capabilities to do work activities	0.86		
FRML	My SME buys new equipment and have someone to train us about their usage	0.72	0.85	0.53
	Encouragement from my organization to discover learning and training opportunities for me	0.68		
	Training funds are available in my organization if I need	0.80		
	Organization provides support if I need further formal education	0.72		
	Top management supports formal training/education in my SME.	0.72		
INFRM	Worked with a competent person who helped me to learn the basics of my job	0.74	0.84	0.51
	Accessibility of information to do my job in an improved way	0.67		
	Our supervisor thinks that helping employees to learn about doing job in a better way is important	0.68		
	There is opportunity for cross training to learn skills from others	0.77		
	At different meetings, employees learn useful information	0.71		
INCDT	Learn job by performing it and keeping myself busy	0.63	0.83	0.56
	My supervisor helps me not to repeat same mistake	0.72		
	Occasionally, I learn something (some information, a skill etc.) that is not intended and is valuable	0.81		
	At times, there is opportunity to work closely with colleague	0.82		

Note: ME (Meaning), CMP (competence), S-DR (self-determination), IM (impact), FRML (formal), INFRM (informal), INCDT (incidental), CR (composite reliability), and AVE (Average Variance Extracted).

CR = $\sum(\text{Factor loadings})^2 / \{\sum(\text{Factor loadings})^2 + \sum(\text{Error variances})^2\}$.

AVE = $\sum(\text{Factor loadings})^2 / \{\sum(\text{factor loadings})^2 + \sum(\text{error variances})\}$

Table 3. Discriminant validity of constructs

	Meaning	Competence	Self-determination	Impact	Formal	Informal	Incidental
Meaning	.91						
competence	.23	.81					
Self-determination	.07	.10	.81				
Impact	.09	.33	.20	.87			
Formal	.08	.06	.19	.14	.73		
Informal	.03	.16	.17	.26	.31	.71	

Incidental	.03	.07	.11	.13	.33	.18	.75
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Note: Diagonal values are the square root of AVE and other entries signify the correlation values.

Table 4: Cross loadings

	ME	CMP	S-DR	IM	FRML	INFRM	INCDT
ME 1	0.86	-0.071	0.03	0.07	-0.06	-0.01	0.01
ME2	0.96	.112	0.08	0.09	-0.09	-0.03	0.04
CMP1	0.21	0.76	0.12	0.20	0.07	0.06	0.02
CMP2	0.19	0.76	0.07	0.27	-0.04	0.13	0.07
CMP3	0.19	0.91	0.08	0.30	0.09	0.17	0.07
SDR1	0.04	0.16	0.87	0.22	0.14	0.18	0.08
SDR2	0.02	-0.02	0.82	0.12	0.26	0.07	0.09
SDR3	0.13	0.13	0.74	0.17	0.02	0.18	0.12
IM2	0.14	0.31	0.23	0.87	0.17	0.21	0.11
IM3	0.02	0.25	0.12	0.86	0.07	0.24	0.12
FRML2	0.02	0.12	0.12	0.17	0.72	0.33	0.16
FRML3	0.03	0.03	0.16	0.10	0.68	0.19	0.27
FRML4	-0.17	0.00	0.17	0.06	0.80	0.21	0.30
FRML5	-0.05	0.07	0.15	0.11	0.72	0.20	0.26
FRML6	-0.09	0.01	0.07	0.09	0.72	0.20	0.21
INFRM1	-0.08	0.12	0.05	0.21	0.28	0.74	0.17
INFRM2	0.09	0.18	0.01	0.16	0.10	0.67	0.09
INFRM5	-0.02	0.08	0.06	0.18	0.24	0.68	0.15
INFRM6	0.00	0.09	0.27	0.19	0.24	0.77	0.11
INFRM7	-0.06	0.12	0.13	0.17	0.21	0.71	0.15
INCDT1	0.03	0.09	0.04	0.06	0.24	0.13	0.63
INCDT2	0.01	0.01	0.08	0.09	0.26	0.14	0.72
INCDT5	0.02	0.02	0.12	0.11	0.19	0.05	0.81
INCDT6	0.04	0.10	0.09	0.12	0.32	0.24	0.82

Assessment of the Structural model

Table 5, table 6 and figure 2 shows the results of hypothesis testing. The results reveal that out of the total 12 hypotheses developed, 9 were supported and 3 were not supported.

The first hypothesis was about the influence of meaning on three forms of WPL. It was found to positively influence formal learning ($\beta = 0.21, p < 0.05$) and informal learning ($\beta = 0.187, p < 0.05$), while it did not influence incidental learning in a significant way ($\beta = 0.051, p > 0.05$). Hence, resulting in the acceptance of H1a and H1b and rejection of H1c.

The second hypothesis was about the impact of competence on formal, informal and incidental learning. Competence was found to have a positive influence on informal ($\beta = 0.223, p < 0.05$) and incidental learning ($\beta = 0.198, p < 0.05$) but not formal learning ($\beta = 0.011, p > 0.05$). Therefore, H2a was rejected and H2b along with H2c was accepted.

Third hypothesis associated self-determination cognition to WPL. self-determination was found to positively influence all the three types of WPL i.e. formal ($\beta = 0.173, p < 0.05$), informal ($\beta = 0.37, p < 0.05$) and incidental ($\beta = 0.182, p < 0.05$). Consequently, hypotheses H3a, H3b and H3c were all accepted.

Lastly, the fourth hypothesis measured the influence of impact on WPL. The results indicated that impact did not significantly influence formal learning ($\beta = 0.043, p > 0.05$). Whereas, it had positive influence on informal ($\beta = 0.243, p < 0.05$) and incidental learning ($\beta = 0.162, p < 0.05$). Hence H4b and H4c were accepted and H4a was rejected.

Table 6 also displays the value of Q^2 and R^2 for endogenous constructs. Hair et al. (2017) recommended that both Q^2 and R^2 should be incorporated in predictive relevance of the model. The values of R^2 for the formal learning is 0.23, informal learning is 0.34 and for incidental learning it is 0.29. These values indicate that the state of being psychologically empowered explained 23% participation in formal, 34% in informal and 29% participation in incidental learning. Furthermore, the procedure of blindfolding was performed to obtain the values of Q^2 . The calculated Q^2 values for formal, informal and incidental learning were 0.199, 0.219, 0.209 respectively, which were greater than zero (Hair et al., 2017). Consequently, the model attains predictive relevance.

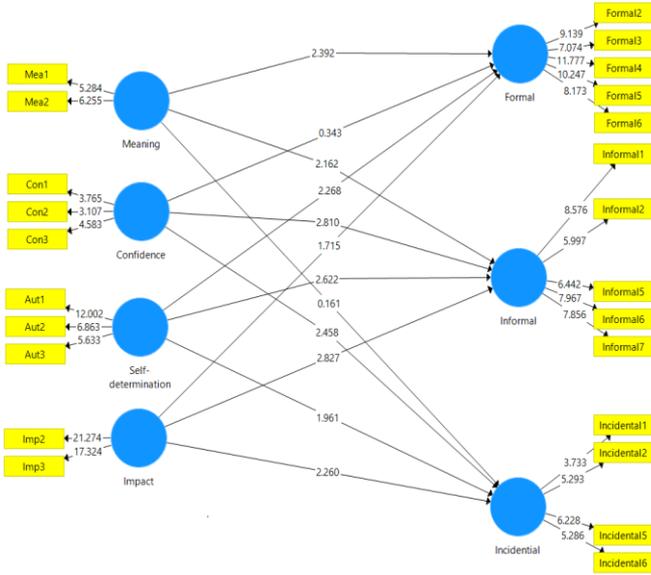


Figure 2. Research framework with *t*-values

Table 5. Path coefficients and hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Beta value	Standard error	t-value	Decision	VIF
H1a	ME → FRML	.211	.075	-2.39	Accepted	1.06
H1b	ME → INFRM	.187	.079	2.16	Accepted	1.06
H1c	ME → INCDT	.051	.120	0.16	Rejected	1.06
H2a	CMP → FRML	.011	.100	0.34	Rejected	1.18
H2b	CMP → INFRM	.223	.065	2.81	Accepted	1.18
H2c	CMP → INCDT	.198	.069	2.45	Accepted	1.18
H3a	S-DR → FRML	.173	.071	2.26	Accepted	1.05
H3b	S-DR → INFRM	.237	.064	2.62	Accepted	1.05
H3c	D-DR → INCDT	.182	.093	1.96	Accepted	1.05
H4a	IM → FRML	.101	.098	1.71	Rejected	1.16
H4b	IM → INFRM	.243	.067	2.82	Accepted	1.16
H4c	IM → INCDT	.162	.077	2.26	Accepted	1.16

Table 6. Results of prediction values

	SSO	SSE	$Q^2 \left(= 1 - \frac{SSE}{SSO} \right)$	R ²
ME	1431.00	1431.00		
CMP	1521.00	1521.00		
S-DR	1341.00	1341.00		
IM	1620.00	1620.00		
FRML	187600	1501.88	0.199	0.23
INFRM	1945.00	1518.66	0.219	0.34
INCDT	1573.00	1244.76	0.209	0.29

Notes. Blindfolding procedure only conducted for reflective constructs.

Discussion

This paper intended to assess the role of PE as an antecedent of WPL. The influence of four cognitions of PE on formal, informal and incidental learning was examined. The first finding was that the psychological state of meaning influenced the involvement of employees in formal and informal learning, but no significant influence of meaning on incidental learning was found. According to Appelbaum et al. (2015), as a psychological state, meaning or role identity provide meaning to individuals in their work organization. Hence, this finding indicates that the psychological state to meaning will induce employees to take part in WPL. This finding is also consistent with Noe et al. (2013), which indicated that meaning cognition ignites a sense of enthusiasm in employees and as a result, they are motivated to carry out their tasks in an improved way. For the improved performance of tasks, employees are expected to take part in WPL.

Second, competence had no significant influence on formal learning, whereas it was found to positively influence informal as well as incidental learning. This was consistent with the results of

earlier studies i.e. Noe and Wilk (1993) and Maurer et al. (2003). The results of both the inquiries found competence and the feeling of self-efficacy to have positive association with informal learning. However, this finding is contrary to that of Maurer et al. (2003), Renkema (2006), and Kyndt et al. (2011), concerning the influence of impact on formal learning. All these studies reported that self-efficacy and formal learning were positively related. An addition to the understanding of influence of competence on WPL is that it positively influences incidental learning, which previously is not investigated in association to competence in the context of SME's.

Third, self-determination or autonomy was found to have positive influence on all three types of learning. This result was consistent with earlier results of empirical research about the association of self-determination and WPL (Kyndt et al., 2011; Liu & Fu, 2011; Fagerlind et al., 2013). In all these studies job autonomy or self-determination showed a positive influence on WPL. In contrast, this finding is not consistent with that of Doornbos, Simons, and Denessen (2008), which showed an insignificant relationship of autonomy or self-determination with informal learning. In fact, in this study, self-determination cognition was found to influence informal learning more than the other two forms of learning. However, the relationship of self-determination and incidental has not been investigated in prior studies and in particularly in the context of SME's.

Fourth and last, this study finds that the cognitive state about the impact of the job also influences informal and incidental learning, however, this state had no significant influence on formal learning. This finding suggests that the believe of employees to have an impact in the organization through their job will motivate networking and more and interaction with supervisors and colleagues and subordinates. As discussed in the literature, networking and interactions are actions through which informal learning can take place. Therefore, it could be contended that impact will facilitate informal and incidental learning more often than formal learning.

Drawing from the above discussion, it could be contended that PE does influence WPL and acts as antecedent of WPL in SMEs. furthermore, its influence on informal learning is greater, followed by incidental learning and then formal learning. Formal learning was the least form of WPL being facilitated by PE.

Theoretical contributions

This paper aids to the existing literature related to HRD and WPL. The findings enhance our understanding of WPL strategies and its antecedents. It also builds upon the suggestions of Russ-Eft et al. (2014) related to the future directions in HRD research and in particular, WPL. The findings also supports the findings of Moon & Na (2009), and extends their work on the psychological variables as potential antecedents of WPL and also extends empirical research on WPL in Asian context. In addition, this study furthers the empirical findings related to psychological variables and WPL in among SME employees in a developing country.

Managerial implications

Since this research was carried out in SMEs settings, therefore, the findings of this research also have practical implications. First, it could be useful for SMEs managers as it provides guidelines about how employees learn in SMEs and what psychological factors can facilitate their learning. Managers should provide the necessary structures required to enhance the psychological state of being empowered in their work roles and resultantly, it will motivate them to participate in WPL. Second, facilitating WPL through psychological variables is important, keeping in view the limited opportunities for formal training in SMEs, specifically in the context of Pakistan (Almeida & Aterido, 2015). Lastly, since there are numerous problems associated to SMEs in Pakistan (Dar, Ahmed, & Raziq, 2017), facilitating WPL will improve the competencies of employees, enabling them to be efficient and contribute to the effectiveness of their organization and also to get competitive advantage in face of unprecedented complexity and greater competition.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Beside its contribution, this study also had some limitations. This study investigated the role of PE as antecedent of WPL in service sector SMEs. Future research should include SMEs in other sectors also and particularly, manufacturing sector and comparative studies related to different sector could also be of value. Next, the respondents of this study were knowledge workers, who possessed a certain level of qualification and were involved in knowledge work. It will be interesting and valuable to get an insight into the learning strategies of other employee who are not categorized as knowledge workers. Since organization possesses different categories of employees, WPL is equally important to all employees for their better performance and resultantly the performance of organization. Furthermore, this study employed quantitative data analysis, future studies could benefit from a combination of different research strategies to get a deeper understanding of the

work context and the psychological antecedents of WPL. Lastly, only psychological variables were investigated in this research. It will be more robust to investigate the combination of different categories of variables in the context of SMEs in in developing countries i.e. variables related to the work context, empowering leadership, job related factors etc. (Crouse et al., 2011).

Conclusion

This research was aimed at the investigation of the role of PE as antecedent of WPL. The study achieved its aim and found that PE does facilitate WPL with informal learning in the first place then incidental learning and finally, formal learning. Though, there were a few limitations associated to this study, yet, it made important contributions. It validated the measurement instruments of WPL and PE developed in developed countries in a developing country (Pakistan) context. The study also enhanced the understanding of WPL and its psychological antecedents in the context of SMEs. Lastly, the study also contributed to the literature of WPL and its antecedents, which is an important aspect of HRD.

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