

**PROFICIENCY ENHANCEMENT IN THE WORKPLACE
THROUGH INFORMAL LEARNING**

ASTRID RUITERS

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER BACCALAUREUS COMMERCII IN INDUSTRIAL PSYCHOLOGY



Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences

Department of Industrial Psychology

University of the Western Cape

SUPERVISOR: MR. KARL HESLOP

NOVEMBER 2013

DECLARATION

“I declare that this research study of Proficiency Enhancement in the Workplace through Informal Learning is my own work and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references”.

.....
Astrid Ruiters



Abstract

Organisations are under tremendous economic global pressure and continuously need to change, adapt and be more productive to meet the demands of an industry. Basim, Sesen and Korkmazyurek, (2007) claim that in this economic era, the shift is from, “survival of the fittest” to “learning to survive” in the workplace. There is an increasing amount of recognition and acknowledgement of the role of informal learning in adult learning and employee development (Cunningham & Hillier, 2013). It is in this light that the study outlines why informal learning at work has become a prominent subject matter. The focus is on examining the socio cultural and multidisciplinary perspective through which informal learning is understood and the potential and impact of informal learning in the workplace.

The study examines three emerging salient themes. Firstly, it highlights the current perception of informal learning in the workplace which has multiple definitions and descriptions. The second theme draws attention to the sociocultural structures and the impact on individual engagement in workplace learning. The last theme illustrates the potential of informal learning and how individuals and their learning environment at work cannot function independently.

Employees no longer have time for the inefficiencies of the past, old-style training they want to be co-participants in learning not simply receivers (Cross, 2007). By diagnosing the current status of informal workplace learning, the research examines the employee engagement, the perceived factors that affect learning engagement and explores the links between informal workplace learning and the performance of the organisation. Against the background of informal learning in the workplace, a learning organisation has been characterised, as an organisation that has development in place that supports learning and recognises the value of learning and extends itself towards the enhancement of employee’s proficiency and transfer of learning to others (Berg & Chyung, 2008).

The perceptions of informal learning in the workplace have been interwoven with the theory of informal learning through content analysis. Content analysis was used to analyse the experiences of the 13 respondents in their workplace. Semi structured interview questions

were formulated by the researcher which included probing questions to further gain in depth descriptions shared by participants.

The main interest and ultimate goal of this study is aimed at responding to the following research questions:

1. How do employees learn informally in the workplace?
2. Why does the sociocultural constructs have an impact on workplace learning?
3. What factors affect the potential and pathway of learning in the workplace?

The methodology which was used was consistent with the key concepts of informal learning in the workplace. The outcome of the results indicated that the employees viewed preferred practises of informal learning and sociocultural relationships as core factors in the effectiveness of informal learning. Other important sub themes which emerged during the interpretation relate to opportunities for learning and the achievement of personal goals were; taking ownership, enhancement of self directed learning; improving capabilities, increasing proficiency, sharing information, acknowledgement and recognition of learning, fostering a learning culture, building competence, implementing teamwork, increasing reciprocity, creating awareness of diversity, improving metacognitive abilities, co worker and management support.

The interpretation of this qualitative study indicates that all levels of an organisation, individuals, teams and the organisation could benefit through embracing opportunities of informal workplace learning. For all stakeholders and all researchers that are interested in workplace learning, it is an invitation and in the best interest of all stakeholders to expand on this area of research and be able to determine the relationship between informal learning and business productivity.

Key words

Informal workplace Learning

Employee engagement

Sociocultural constructs

Proficiency

Learning organisation

Acknowledgements

All glory, honour and praise to God for granting me faith and courage to travel this journey.

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to the following people and organisation, whose assistance, support and expertise facilitated the completion of this research.

To my husband Brent, I thank you for your love, patience, encouragement and being my biggest supporter during this period. To my son Rosco and daughter Jamie, you both are one of the reasons I chose this journey, this is all part of being a good role model for you.

Karl Heslop, you are a unique individual and every student's "Gift from God". You convinced me I was capable of achieving where I doubted my own abilities that trust allowed me to grow in courage and confidence. Your enthusiasm and professionalism was what kept me going throughout this invaluable experience.

A special thanks to my parents, Mom Ellie, siblings and friends for your continuous prayers; encouragement and support.

Lastly, I am eternally grateful that I had the support of the organisation, my team, management and the participants to conduct my research.

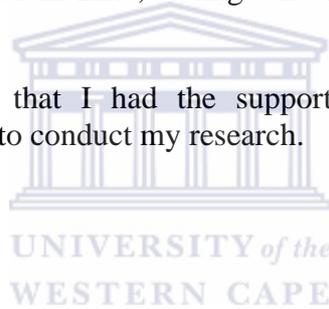


Table of Contents

DECLARATION

ABSTRACT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Chapter One: Introduction to Informal Learning	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Informal Learning as a concept.....	3
1.3 Formal Learning.....	4
1.4 Workplace Learning.....	6
1.5 Learning organisation	7
1.6 Focus of the Study	10
1.7 Statement of the problem.....	11
1.8 Significance of the Research.....	11
1.9 Research Limitations	12
1.10 Research Overview	12
Chapter Two: Literature Review	14
2.1 Introduction.....	14
2.2 Concept of Informal learning.....	15
2.3 Relationship between Formal and Informal learning.....	18
2.4 Approaches to Informal Learning.....	19
2.5 Proficiency	23
2.6 Transfer of Informal Learning in the Workplace.....	26
2.7 Factors affecting learning in the workplace.....	27
2.7.1 Learning in context	28
2.7.2 Interaction with one's line manager.....	30
2.7.3 Employee Development.....	32
2.8 Affordances and Constraints of the sociocultural setting on Informal learning.....	34
2.9 Benefits of Informal Learning in the Workplace	36
2.10 Organisational Factors Enhancing Informal Learning.....	39
2.10.1 Strategic positioning of Informal learning	39
2.10.2 Availability of skilled labour	39
2.10.3 Structure of the organisation.....	40
2.10.4 Democratic workplaces.....	40
2.10.5 Performance Management Framework.....	41
2.10.6 Employee's attitude and motivations.....	41
2.11 Recognition of Informal Learning	42
2.11.1 The process of recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes.....	44

2.11.2	Benefits of Recognition of informal Learning	46
2.11.3	Benefits of Skills Development	47
2.12	Practical Implications.....	48
2.13	Conclusion	49
Chapter Three: Research Methodology.....		50
3.1	Introduction.....	50
3.2	Qualitative Research Methodology.....	50
3.3	Phenomenological Approach	54
3.4	The Qualitative Content Analysis process	55
3.5	Method of Data Collection.....	57
3.5.1	Research setting	57
3.5.2	Sample.....	59
3.5.3	Interview	62
3.6	Data analysis and interpretation	65
3.7	Codifying and categorising the data.....	65
3.8	Researcher Position.....	67
3.9	Presentation and Interpretation of Results	68
3.10	Data Quality	70
3.11	Ethical consideration in Data Collection.....	72
3.12	Conclusion	73
Chapter 4: Presentation of Results.....		74
4.1	Introduction.....	74
4.2	Perception of Effective informal learning in the workplace	76
4.3	Socio cultural constructs of informal learning in the workplace	84
4.4	The Potential of Informal workplace learning	93
4.5	Conclusions.....	114
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations		117
5.1	Introduction.....	117
5.2	An overview of the effectiveness of Informal Learning	117
5.3	Summary of Results	118
5.4	Findings and Interpretation	118
5.5	Current Perceptions of Informal Learning	121
5.5.1	Activities describing Informal Learning	122
5.5.2	Learning structures and processes creating opportunities.....	123
5.5.3	Attributes of Informal learning	125
5.6	Sociocultural constructs of informal learning in the workplace	133
5.6.1	Sociocultural relationships.....	133
5.6.2	Workplace and personnel structures	137
5.7	Potential of Informal learning in the workplace	140

5.7.1	Employee Development.....	140
5.7.2	Co – worker and management support.....	143
5.7.3	Personnel practice	144
5.7.4	Challenges of informal learning.....	145
5.8	Summary	147
5.9	Conclusion	148
5.10	Application of best practise principles.....	149
5.11	Research boundaries	151
5.12	Summary and Conclusion	157
5.13	Suggestions for future research.....	159
	References.....	160
	Addendum	170



List of Tables

Table 1.1: Elements that promote learning in an organisation	19
Table 2.1: Key characteristics of different forms of learning	29
Table 2.2: What is being learned in the workplace?	31
Table 2.3: Summary of the different Authorities and Acts	53
Table 3.1: Summary of sample	71
Table 3.2: Phase Model of Content Analysis	77
Table 4.1: Summary of preferred practise of Informal learning	89
Table 4.2 Sharing experiences	97
Table 5.1: Summary of key results	119
Table 5.2: Workplace principles and recommendations	150



List of Figures

Figure 2.1: Informal learning cycle in the workplace	26
Figure 2.2: Proficiency Development Cycle	36
Figure 2.3: Factors affecting learning in the workplace	39
Figure 2.4: Leader Member eXchange Model	40
Figure 2.5: Time to Performance	48
Figure 3.1: An interactive Model of Research Design	62
Figure 3.2: Gender Distribution	71
Figure 3.3: Codifying and Categorising data	76
Figure 3.4: Research Methodology and analysis of results	79
Figure 4.1: World of Work	86
Figure 4.2: Results of World of Work	115



Chapter One: Introduction to Informal Learning

1.1 Introduction

The challenge in most organisations, especially in the service industry, is having a constant supply of skilled human capital and retaining talent to sustain a competitive edge. Due to global economic pressures, employees are constantly expected to perform, acquire the knowledge, modify their skills and add exceptional value to their workplace. In addition, organisational restructuring and acquisitions have become a common occurrence; consequently employees must remain employable and highly competent or face restructuring or redundancy. Employers expect their staff to be the most productive and efficient. However, to achieve this organisational goal, strategic business initiatives need to be in place to develop employees' skills to the required level of performance and retain talent.

In research studies conducted by Eraut (2011), informal workplace activities reported to provide 70 to 90 percent of the learning; but informal learning was treated as a by-product. Employees that are given the opportunity to learn are likely to be more capable of performing required tasks of the job; they may be confident and proficient in delivering expected standards. Transferral of knowledge and skills enhance the proficiency of employees as there is an application by the employee of the acquired skill. Enos, Thamm, Kehrhahn and Bell (2003) clearly define proficiency as the ability to apply knowledge skilfully; it has been cited as a leveraging point to gain competitive advantage.

Eraut (2011) postulates that given favourable conditions in the workplace, learning can be improved by creating opportunities for dynamic, productive engagement and participation in a broad scope of work processes. The calibre of employees is likely to increase and it could impact on performance and productivity. Employees could become faster and flexible, adapt and manage change. Hence, organisations need to adapt and adopt a new approach to the culture of informal learning.

Advances in technology, the demise and growth of the service industry and changes in workplace structures and practices are completely different to the past. Many researchers such as Lee, Fuller, Ashton, Butler, Felstead, Unwin and Walters (2004) postulated that as a

concept informal learning is moving through a period of political, economic and social transformation.

Top performing organisations have realised that in strategic business planning, it is the human capital that separates them from their competitors and investing in the development of the staff have increased levels of commitment, productivity and profit margins. "Companies are no longer recruiting for technical skills, but are placing more emphasis on competencies in other areas, such as metacognitive abilities, problem solving, creative thinking, interpersonal skills, ability to work in a team, communication skills and leadership effectiveness" (Le Clus, 2011, p. 362).

Subsequently, recruitment and selection, skills development, talent management and succession planning have received much attention. Competency profiles and career pathways have been designed and developed to ensure the right job "fit". The workplace has become a learning space. According to Billett (2004), a workplace has become a learning environment that need to be understood, there are complex negotiation and acquisition of knowledge and skills, roles and processes and the participation of the individual in situated work activities. Highly skilled employees are attracted to organisations who offer learning opportunities.

The contribution and the support of the employer towards the employee's learning strengthens the economic well being of the organisation as it is further enhanced by the government policies and legislation (Lee et al., 2004). A core feature promoted by the government is not only the recognition of knowledge and skills within a successful and dynamic economy but also to support companies that address issues of social justice, equity and social inclusion. This raises the employer's interest in informal learning in the workplace, in that significant financial benefit is accrued by investing in a workforce that is all engaged in learning and development.

In South Africa, the unique diverse workforce is protected by the Skills Development Act (SDA), Act no.97 of 1998 and Employment Equity Act no. 58 of 1998. Whilst the SDA enforce the need of developing and improving the skills of the South African workforce, the Employment Equity Act ensures that there is equitable representation in all occupational categories and levels in the workforce. Legislation dictates the competitive edge by the implementation of Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment. In South Africa, legislation

prescribes the development of skills and empowerment of staff to promote employment equity. In the same vein, with the challenges of legislation much attention has been focused on the value, recognition and fostering a culture that promotes informal learning in the workplace.

Both formal and informal learning will have to be integrated in the workplace to address shortage of skills. Formal training exclusively cannot address the pace of an increasing demand, shortage of competencies and development of skills. Organisations have now reached a point where they need to intentionally provide a working environment that endorse and support continuous informal learning (Le Clus, 2011).

1.2 Informal Learning as a concept

Dale and Bell (1999) defines informal learning as learning that occurs in the workplace, the acquired learning relates to an individual performance of their job and/ or influences their employability, it is not formally organised into a programme or curriculum by the employer but determined by the employee. Informal workplace learning is usually learner initiated and self directed and involves learning through action and doing. Employees can develop at their own rate and at their desired pace because they have the discretion in determining how and when to commit to cognitive resources, time and energy. They often use resources such as e-mails, reading and acquiring information on the internet and informal, spontaneous interactions (Cunningham & Hillier, 2013).

Berg and Chyung (2008) provide an analogy that explains and describes the difference between informal and formal learning. Informal learning is compared to riding a vehicle, the individual examines the destination “ goal “ and decides on the route map of the journey to the destination (cited in Cross, 2007), the pace of travelling and acquiring the available resources to reach the endpoint. On the other hand, formal learning is explained as travelling on a bus, the route is fixed; learning is the same for all as well as the pace of travelling to reach the end point.

Informal learning can primarily be unstructured, pragmatic and incidental. There are informal learning activities that are intentional and unintentional. The intentional informal learning activities include coaching, mentoring, self study programmes, networking, asking questions

and receiving feedback. The unintentional are more integrated into other tasks, it is an unconscious process and takes place while the individual is executing daily work tasks from trial and error (Berg & Chyung, 2008). The results of previous studies have concluded that formal and structured learning only contributes towards 20% of workplace learning. Conlon (2004) claims that more value is derived from learning with employees taking time to question, listen, read, observe, reflect and transfer skills.

Informal learning can be encouraged and supported in the workplace without being forced on employees. Informal Learning has depth; it can unconsciously be shaped by employees' emotions, which react differently depending on the influence of the working environment (Conlon, 2004). For example, if a line manager has a positive approach to learning and gives recognition to a task that has been well performed, it promotes and enables sharing of information and transferral of skills. The emotions could have influenced the employee's attitudes towards learning and leads to behavioural change (Short & Yorks, 2002) cited in Conlon (2004).

A critical question remains in the feedback and evaluation of learning, "Has there been a change in behaviour after the training has taken place?" Informal learning plays the role of a "changing agent" in mentoring and coaching relationships, the engagement of employees and coach or mentor encourages working relationships that fosters skills development and dialogue. In this relationship, there is a common goal and a shared set of values which strengthen the organisation's commitment to learning (Laiken, 2003 cited in Conlon, 2004).

1.3 Formal Learning

Formal Learning has been described by Marsick and Watkins (2001) as classroom based and highly structured with clear outcomes to be achieved. Learning is intentional and accredited after completion and occurs within an organised educational setting and structured context (formal education, in-company training). It may lead to formal recognition (diploma, certificate, degree) and qualification.

Organisations face a fluctuating market with constant and unpredictable internal and external forces affecting their financial well being, brought about by technological advancement and a knowledge economy. The best way to endure the challenge is by preparing to adapt.

By adapting, top performing organisations cultivate a culture of learning that generates creativity, innovation and transfer of knowledge and skills, which leads to correcting behaviour that could result in acquiring new knowledge and insight. The recognition and enhancement of this learning culture is critical in enhancing economic productivity (Marsick & Watkins, 2001).

There is an inclination to regard formal and informal learning as two separate entities. In formal learning, the focus is on acquisitional and individual learning within a classroom setting; learning is predominantly knowledge based, results oriented and success is based on vertical movement. With, informal learning, learning is predominantly through everyday work experiences within a non educational setting and achieving the required competency, acquiring knowledge for lateral movement. This often results in a higher regard for formal learning due to formal recognition, acknowledge and certification (Berg & Chyung, 2008).

Four key elements are taken into account in learning (Malcolm, Hodkinson & Colley, 2003) when one distinguishes between formal and informal learning; they are processes; location and setting, purposes and content. The process of learning is regarded as formal if the programmes are structured with specific outcomes and facilitated in a controlled environment; however, where learning is individual based and self directed it would be then regarded as informal.

Location and setting play an important role as formal learning takes place in a closed structured environment with clear learning objectives and standardised methods of assessment. On the other hand, informal learning is open, in an unstructured and takes place in an environment with predetermined objectives (Malcolm, et.al, 2003) that is aligned to individual needs. If the purposes of the learning is determined and initiated by the learner, it is recognised as informal, alternatively if the learning is designed and determined to meet the business needs is categorised as formal. Lastly, the knowledge based will be structured in formal learning, informal learning will lean more towards acquiring knowledge by everyday practice and transferring the skill or sharing of information (Malcolm, et.al, 2003).

The fundamentals of formal learning should be integrated in an informal setting and similarly the fundamentals of informalities should be present in formal settings depending on the

outcomes of the knowledge and skill required for the learning activity (Malcolm, et.al, 2003) and the situation.

A holistic and balanced approach of combining the two learnings is extremely beneficial for organisation, for example, with the Individual Development Plans of employees. Specific areas of development can be acquired by both formal training and informal workplace learning, whereby a formal programme could be attended by the employee to acquire the knowledge and information required to close the performance gap. Also, added value by informal learning could add, on the job training, coaching, mentorship and practical applications that can address critical developmental needs (Malcolm et al., 2003).

1.4 Workplace Learning

Evans, Hodkinson, Rainbird and Unwin (2006), claim that workplace learning incorporates all forms of learning that takes place at work to increase performance and productivity (cited in Sutherland, 1998). It has a much broader context that goes beyond task performance; the focus is on learning to empower the individuals in the workplace. Empowerment and skills development in the working environment initiates a contract of engagement, commitment and cooperation between managers and employees, and trade unions.

It is described and characterised as an advantage to develop employee's performance and productivity; it potentially provides and create opportunities for personal and professional development, has a positive influence on job satisfaction and self fulfilment. Potentially initiating movement towards an equal and socially all-encompassing society where there will be better job opportunities and more skilled labour, knowledgeable and competent workforce (Lee et al., 2004).

Evans et al., (2006) propose that to meet the challenges of a global economy, undoubtedly qualifications and skills of the workforce need to be raised so that high wage costs of production facilities in organisations can be justified. This applies not only to the formal qualifications of young people leaving the education system and starting their careers, but also to employees already in employment. Existing employees need to increase their skills and adapt to changes in work organisations and technology and at the same time, to improve their employability and marketability in the event of redundancy. There has been a paradigm

shift to lifelong learning for companies to continuously develop their skills and qualifications in order to be successful and maintain a competitive edge.

Evans et al., (2006) postulate managers require from employees more than the contract of employment indicating key performance areas. They search for a winning team of employees, who are dedicated, move beyond the Result Areas and Result Indicators of their Job Portfolio's, are results oriented and are flexible and adaptable to change (cited in Geary, 1995).

With trends in organisational culture, much attention and discussion has been on learning and skills rather than education and training. Learning and skills at the workplace are broader in context and more focused hence the referral in key policy documents to "Workplace Learning". Interestingly, as noted in workplace learning, employees need to take ownership and employers need to provide access to resources that could promote development of skills and provide understanding of the employee's role and responsibilities (Evans et al., 2006).

To proactively influence workplace learning, an organisation need to build a learning climate and culture that is collective. The organisational framework of learning should be designed by all stakeholders who lead and learn and can use their experience to influence the learning of others and generate an organisational climate and culture of expectations that deliver the desired results which can be measured and rewarded (Marsick & Watkins, 2003).

1.5 Learning organisation

A learning organisation can be described as continuously creating learning opportunities, promoting inquiry and dialogue, encouraging collaboration and team learning, creating systems to capture and share learning, empowering people towards a collective vision, connecting the organisation and its environment, providing strategic leadership for learning, showing key results for financial performance and provide knowledge information (Marsick & Watkins, 2003).

It is constantly aware of managing knowledge, information and business trends that add value to the business. Sunassee and Suwrey (2002), describes Knowledge Management (KM) as further refining, organising, developing, distributing and generating an organisation's critical knowledge. Managing the knowledge by interpreting, analysing and processing the

information strategically creates an opportunity for learning and motivates employees towards achieving the agreed organisational goals.

Stadler (1999) points out that KM harnesses the intellectual assets and abilities of employees', stimulates creativity and innovative ideas of employees. Subsequently, the right knowledge gets to the right place and is developed further (Sunassee & Sewry, 2002).

Learning is an ongoing process and employees share, manage and transfer knowledge in a creative and innovative mode. The workplace learning arena is part of the knowledge capital of the organisation. Knowledge Management is a critical success criterion to the financial and social well being of an organisation and filters into the elements of a learning organisation.

Previous studies have shown that there is a growing evidence of a relationship between financial performance and the elements of a learning organisation. Table 1.1 illustrates the elements accompanied by a brief description. These elements in the table 1.1 form the baseline for enhancing employee's performance.

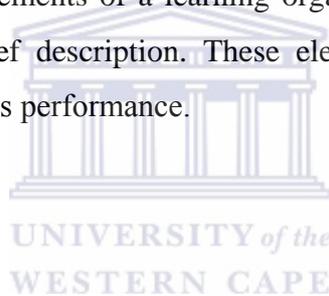


Table 1.1: Elements that promote learning in an organisation

Elements	Descriptions
Create continuous learning opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning is predominantly on the job learning, opportunities are provided for empowering individuals with ongoing skills development programmes.
Promote inquiry and dialogue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employees are given the opportunity to express their opinion and give input, listen to the views of others and reason logically. An open forum whereby employees can ask questions, give feedback and learn by trial and error.
Encourage collaboration and team learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teams are encouraged to work together and apply different methods to find the best solutions for the best results. Knowledge is collectively shared and information resources to strength the effort of the team. Each team member is responsible for the win-win situation therefore deserves the rewards.
Create systems to capture and share learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organisations are willing to share systems and implement new systems. Application of the new systems is integrated with work. Feedback is encouraged to monitor and evaluate best practice.
Empower people toward a collective vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employees are consulted and involved in creating, taking ownership and implementation of a combined vision. Shared responsibility, decision making and the partnership to achieve the collective vision encourages employees to be accountable.
Connect the organisation to its environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employees are assisted to see how their valued input contributes to the success of the organisation. The individuals analyse and assess their environment and use information to adapt work practices to current and future needs; this connects the organisation to the environment.
Provide strategic leadership for Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership understand the benefits of learning. They become role models appoint coaches and encourage mentorship programmes to use leadership to gain the required financial performance.
Key results for Financial Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Availability and accessibility of resources for the financial well being of the organisation
Knowledge performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keeping abreast with trends in products and services due to learning and knowledge proficiency and investing in intellectual capital.

Adapted from Marsick and Watkins (2006)

1.6 Focus of the Study

The service industry is fast paced, with technology constantly changing and organisations dependant on their human and intellectual capital to provide a competitive edge. It is crucial to empower the employees to close any performance gaps in the shortest period of time.

The return on investment of training programs and formal learning interventions has always been questionable by organisations as the challenge remains the application and transfer of knowledge and skills acquired from these learning programs to the workplace (Enos, Kehrhahn & Bell, 2003). Organisations are more willing to explore alternative learning options in the workplace.

The main interest and ultimate goal of this research lies in determining and exploring the effectiveness of informal learning and how this contributes to proficiency enhancement in the workplace.

To determine the effectiveness of informal the research objectives will determine:

- How do employees learn informally in the workplace?
- Why does the sociocultural constructs have an impact on informal workplace learning?
- What factors affect the potential and pathway of informal learning in the workplace?

Berg and Chyung (2008) argue that 80% of workplace learning occurs through informal learning, yet organisations invest only 20% into enhancing informal learning (cited in Cross, 2007). Young employees under the age of 24 depend on the experienced employees for job related knowledge and skills and the majority of those over the age 45 benefit from learning that relates to their experiences (Cunningham & Hillier, 2013).

1.7 Statement of the problem

Organisations know that they have to invest in development of their intellectual capital of their staff to gain that competitive edge. The significance of informal workplace learning has stimulated researchers to conduct numerous studies, to explore and investigate factors that affect employees' engagement in informal workplace learning activities in recent years (eg. Kwakman, 2003; Maurer et al., 2003; Naquin and Holton, 2002) cited in Van Rijn, Yang & Sanders (2013).

The significance of this study could highlight and support an increase in the investment of the organisation to support informal learning. The concern is if informal learning is effective and increases the proficiency of employees in the workplace, why it remains a challenge to promote skills development in the workplace and support employees to become more efficient.

To demonstrate the impact of informal learning, a sample of 13 participants were selected to conduct the research. The study collected qualitative data from the interviews that were conducted.



1.8 Significance of the Research

Organisations should provide their employees with a favourable working environment that equally promotes informal learning in the workplace with other priority business strategies. Moreover, they should recognise that informal learning could further enhance proficiency and include it as part of strategic planning in achieving business objectives. Learning occurs informally within the workplace and through teamwork, problem solving and social interaction with colleagues, managers and clients. Far too often, leaders and managers overlook a crucial element: acknowledging employees' knowledge and skills and experience by reinforcing their innate talents which can be nurtured through informal learning. Recognition of informal learning boosts effectiveness, efficiency, creativity and innovation. Marsick and Watkins (2003) postulate that to nurture this innate desire to learn, organisations should form a partnership by supporting, mentoring and encouraging its employees.

1.9 Research Limitations

According to Cunningham and Hillier (2013), they point out although researchers recognise the importance of informal learning, there is a lack of clarity of the types of informal learning activities and processes that are useful in the workplace and how to measure effectiveness.

Various research studies that have been conducted, provide vast amounts of evidence and emphasis on the effectiveness of Informal learning; however there is not much detail provided on the process and engagement of informal learning and what employees consider being important for learning in the workplace (Le Clus, 2008).

In addressing the limitations, this research approach could provide more insight on learning activities, processes and elements that may enhance proficiency of employees in the workplace. Future studies should consider a longitudinal research approach to overcome this limitation.

1.10 Research Overview

The research study was designed to gain knowledge, understanding and insight into the effectiveness of informal learning in the workplace and the impact on the proficiency of the employees. The overall aim of the study was to identify the nature of informal learning and how to draw the major stakeholders' attention to how informal can influence the proficiency of employees in achieving desired performance.

Chapter 2: The literature review is organised according to different aspects, understanding the process of informal learning; the transformation and the transferral of formal and informal learning in an organisation, organisational factors that enhance informal learning and the impact it has on the employee's proficiency. The Recognition of informal learning is also presented as an important factor in the research. The objective of this study is *to investigate the effectiveness of informal learning in the workplace*. The researcher seeks to establish answers to the following research questions, how do employees learn informally in the workplace? Why does the social structure in the workplace have an impact on informal learning? What is the potential of informal learning in the workplace and how it can enhance the proficiency of employees in the workplace?

Chapter 3 addresses a cross sectional research design and outlines the qualitative research methodology adopted to study informal learning in the workplace. The approach taken in the empirical study was informed by a phenomenological inquiry. The interpretation of the study is qualitative using content analysis to interpret the interviews. A qualitative study was designed to understand the meaning and situations of the participants, the actions they are involved with at the workplace and accounts they give of their daily lives and experiences. In a qualitative study, the interest lies not only in the physical events and the behaviour that is taking place, but also how the participants in the study make sense of these and how their understanding influences their behaviour (Maxwell, 2005).

Chapter 4 uses the data from the interviews to interpret and analyse the results of the study. Transcriptions have been prepared from an initial audio digital recorder. The results are expressed in narrative form from the data collection. After the transcriptions were prepared for this chapter, the researcher examined the raw data and analysed the emerging themes which was necessary to build the validity of the study.

The results of this study are represented in three sections; current perceptions of informal learning, sociocultural constructs that affect informal learning and factors that affect the potential of informal learning in the workplace. Each section reflects co-worker's experiences of their daily activities in the workplace. All the sections illustrate the structure and experience of the phenomenon as told by the employees.

Chapter 5 is comprised of four sections. The first section summarises the results organised around the three questions that guided the empirical study. The second is the discussion of the major findings. The third section provides the conclusion, limitations of the study and recommendations for further studies. This is based on the final diagnosis offered, from additional literature which supports the participants' views and experiences of the effectiveness of informal learning in the workplace. This is integrated to provide a potential response to the organisation on development strategies for future research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In the service industry, there has been an increasing demand for a workforce that is employable and competent in developing a relationship with their co workers and clients, continuously showing increasing productivity, managing a leadership function within their teams, sustaining and generating sustainable opportunities for all.

Currently, for a fast paced dynamic and constantly demanding market, it has been acknowledged that formal training cannot on its own prepare employees with the required knowledge and skills. Effective learning has to be adaptive, transferrable and meaningful to employees (Enos et al., 2003). One has to take into account, formal and informal learning can no longer be compared whereby, one is regarded as more important than the other, the integration in the workplace has become imperative. In certain professions, formal training is utilised primarily for the new knowledge and skill component, and forms an integral part of the informal learning in the workplace that follows thereafter. Similarly, employees that have acquired the knowledge first informally can more easily comprehend and understand when the information is presented in a formal manner.

In recognising this synergy of learning in the workplace, this study draws the attention to the effectiveness and impact of informal learning in the workplace. Thus the issues are examined in the research are, whether informal learning can adapt, be easily transferred and be meaningful and relevant to keep abreast with market trends and address performance gaps. Examining the effectiveness of informal learning could assist organisations to design, develop learning interventions and capitalise on their learning programs; reduce costs by focussing on specific training needs and ensure positive relationship building in the workplace. Employees who are given opportunities to develop and who are willing and encouraged to share and transfer skills are energised and confident to embrace change management and organisational development. This could ultimately, enhance the competitive edge increasing performance and succeed at increasing the profit margin.

The purpose of this literature review is to expand the conceptual framework for understanding the benefits and value of informal learning, exploring the sociocultural factors that influence informal learning in the workplace and highlighting the potential of elements of a learning organisation that enhances informal learning and subsequently proficiency. The research is relevant for this organisation that constantly examines perceived factors that influences proficiency and affects performance in the workplace.

The literature review is organised according to different aspects: the first aspect explains the concept of informal learning; the transformation and the transferral of formal and informal learning in an organisation. The second aspect explains the impact of workplace learning and particular attention is drawn to what is being learned and how it is being learned? The third aspect focuses on the interaction between the affordances and constraints of the sociocultural setting. It examines the interrelationships between the opportunities for learning that are afforded by the workplace and the extent to which employees capitalise on these opportunities. The fourth aspect discusses the factors that influence informal learning in the workplace. The fifth aspect highlights the organisational factors that enhance informal learning and the impact it has on employee's proficiency. Finally, the fifth aspect places emphasis on recognition of informal learning which is also presented as an important factor in the research.

2.2 Concept of Informal learning

Learning is lifelong, ongoing, acquiring new knowledge, building on skills, modifying and reinforcing existing knowledge, skills and behaviours; processing and synthesizing the information to perform the required task (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Learning>). Learning is regarded as part of a process of change and the changes produced are relatively permanent and empowering.

Van der Heijden, Boon, Van der Klink and Meijs (2009) examined informal learning and defined it in the context of corporate training and education as learning that occurs as a result of on the job training activity, workshop, and performance support material, coaching and mentoring. It is not an instructor led program. Informal learning in the workplace is learner initiated and involves action and doing. Individuals can progress in their learning at their pace, because they have the discretion into how and when to commit cognitive resources, time and energy (Cunningham & Hillier, 2013, p. 39).

Employees are unconscious of it taking place and moreover it is not always intentionally searched for. It includes incidental learning and on the job learning. Incidental learning is described as a by-product of an activity; learning takes place by self discovery and increasing awareness. It includes task accomplishment, interpersonal interaction, sensing the organisational culture, trial and error experimentation, or even formal learning. Marsick and Watkins (2003) add a further interesting dimension by pointing out that Informal and Incidental learning are driven by the need of people, motivation and opportunity for learning in the workplace. The eagerness and willingness to learn are essential employee characteristics that form part of the Personal Development Learning Toolkit.

Marsick and Watkins (2003) modified a model to describe the concept of Informal Learning.

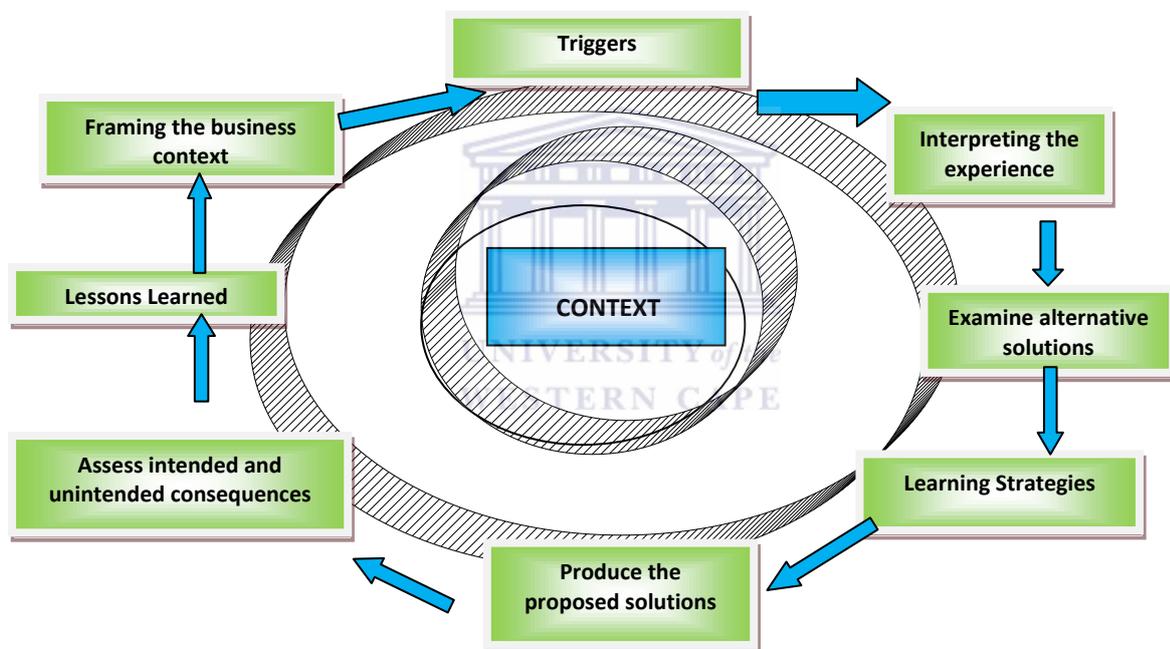


Fig. 2.1: Informal Learning Cycle in the workplace

While examining the cycle of informal learning, Marsick and Watkins (2003), explain the circle in the centre presents the belief that learning grows out of everyday encounters. A new work experience may offer exciting, different challenges, an opportunity to solve a problem or share innovative and creative ideas. The outer circle represents the context within which the experience occurs, the personal, social, business, and cultural context for learning that plays a key role in influencing the way in which people interpret their situations, create ideas, make choices, initiate and take ownership, the actions they take and the learning that is affected. The model depicts a progression of unconscious learning.

Learning begins with some kind of trigger that is either an internal or external stimulus that pulses on the thinking of the current ways. The model depicts that people process a new experience that they encounter. They assess what is problematic or challenging about it. People refine their diagnosis by interpreting and searching for past experience. Interpretation of the experience leads to choices about alternative actions. These choices are guided by recollections of past experiences, or similar or other potential models for action (Marsick & Watkins, 2003).

Success in implementation depends on drawing on capabilities that are adequate to the task. If the solution calls for new skills, the person needs to acquire or develop these new skills. Once an action is taken (a solution produced), a person can assess the outcomes and decide whether or not they match the goals or the intended results. The step of assessing the consequences enables a person to draw lessons and establish a learning curve. The lessons are used for planning future actions. The concluded thought provide framework that encapsulate new understandings, experiences when encountering a new situation, which brings one back full circle to the beginning of the cycle (Marsick & Watkins, 2003). Earlier, in the study, reference was made to informal learning as being unconscious. In this model, the unconscious is explained and the understanding of how informal learning takes place in the workplace.

This model should be addressed in Learning and Development strategy sessions especially with Human Resource (HR) Practitioners, to create and increase awareness for both employers and employees in understanding the cycle of informal learning in the workplace. The model could also assist in Performance Management, it identifies employees that are stimulated by their working environment; in conjunction, employers should provide a stimulating, conducive learning environment that could provide the triggers to constantly attract employees into the cycle. Consequently, there would be an emerging skilled pool of employees. An informal learning cycle provides the insight that is necessary to discuss the relationship between formal and informal learning.

2.3 Relationship between Formal and Informal learning

There are many different types and levels of training, education and development (from a professional degree to structured forms of on-the-job training). Currently, the modern tendency is to reject a rigid distinction between education and training that has been inherited from the past. So much has changed; training has been substituted with the term learning which is ongoing and lifelong. Learning has been transformed into different concepts which are formal, non-formal and informal. In this research, the only distinction is between formal learning and informal learning. Informal learning is not classroom based, the structure with planned learning outcomes is set out to achieve by the learner. (www.amdin.org/documents/d00104/SAMDI_TOT_Module_1.pdf).

Marsick and Watkins (2001) point out that formal learning is classroom based, is highly structured with clear outcomes to be achieved, learning is intentional and accredited after completion. The learning programme and pace of learning is determined by the facilitator. Informal learning is more flexible; less structured and includes incidental learning. It occurs mainly in the workplace and it is not only classroom based or highly structured. The significant distinguishing factor between formal and informal is that the control of learning primarily rests in the hands of the learner.

In the context of corporate training and education, the term Informal Learning is widely used to describe the many forms of learning that takes place independently from instructor-led programs: books, self-study programs, performance support materials and systems, coaching, communities of practice, and expert directories. Informal learning include on the job training, work study, observations, research, self directed learning, networking, coaching, mentoring and performance planning that includes opportunities to review learning needs. The different forms accommodate and engage with all individuals (Marsick & Watkins, 2001).

Understanding informal and formal learning relationships is valuable because it assists organisations to assign learning interventions according to formal or informal learning. If the position is more senior, formal learning will be recommended as theoretical knowledge and reflection is required to achieve the learning outcomes. In the same vein, the lower level occupations are more skills and practical application driven; hence the need would be for an increase in on the job training. An effective training plan that is designed and developed to

use both formal and informal learning in the workplace reduce unnecessary training costs and ensures a more skilled and productive workforce (Marsick & Watkins, 2001).

Wallis, Panagiotakakopolus and Stuart (2007) reported that the European Commission’s communication on lifelong learning (European Commission, 2001), stressed the importance of learning is not on the differentiating factors between formal, non formal and informal learning but rather on the locus of learning, the learning outcomes and the extent to which it intends to develop new knowledge and competencies. The key characteristics of the various forms of learning are summarised in Table 2.1. It provides an explanation and comparison of the different forms of learning (Wallis et al., 2005).

Table 2.1: Key characteristics of different forms of learning

Form of Learning	Locus of learning	Learning structured or unstructured	Learning is intentional or unintentional	Learning accredited or unaccredited
Formal	Educational institution centre or on the job training	Structured	Intentional	Either accredited or Unaccredited
Non Formal	Everyday situations	Structured	Intentional	Unaccredited
	Everyday situations	Unstructured	Intentional	Unaccredited
Informal				

Source: European’s Commission, 2001

2.4 Approaches to Informal Learning

According to Eraut (2004), the main challenges with conducting research in informal learning is drawing awareness and shifting the focus to when learning is actually taking place, what has been learned and how the learning took place. The process is absolutely unconscious and thus not interpreted as learning. The new knowledge, experience or skill acquired is regarded as natural or innate talent. However, most of the employees acquire the knowledge by listening, observing, imitating, discussions and trial and error (experimenting).

The informal learning outcome is not based on the body of knowledge but more on the capabilities of the employee. Learning takes place in context; it is relevant and promotes application. Employees are unaware that they are articulating what they know to those in similar roles; the challenge is explaining the scope of the work and the level of proficiency to

others. Day (1998) cited in Enos et al., (2003) maintains that learning takes place informally by on the job training, supervising, coaching, mentoring, meetings, social interaction between co workers, external and internal customer interaction, observation and exploration, previous experience and networking. Employees that acquire their skills informally are more confident to share ideas and readily apply in the workplace.

In this study, the research examines the informal learning by allowing employees to work through relevant and real work issues and challenges. York et. al., (1998) claim that employees who are part of such a program demonstrated a difference in behaviour after the training (cited in Enos et al., 2003).

Eraut (2004) developed a typology (Table 2.2) and classified on what is being learned in the workplace although it is presented, it is viewed more as a heuristic framework for use in research and consultancy. Furthermore, the classification is described which is valuable in the workplace setting.



Table 2.2: What is being learned in the workplace?

Classification	Description
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✿ Task Performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speed and Fluency Complexity of tasks and problems Range of skills required Communication with a wide range of people Collaborative work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✿ Awareness and Understanding of concepts and processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Other people; colleagues, customers, managers etc. Contexts and situations One's own organisation Problems and risks Priorities and strategic issues Value Issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✿ Personal Development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self Evaluation Self Management Handling Emotions Building and Sustaining relationships Disposition to attend to other perspectives Disposition to consult and work with others Disposition to learn and improve one's practice Assessing relevant knowledge and expertise Ability to learn from experience
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✿ Teamwork 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborative work Facilitating social relations Joint planning and problem solving Ability to engage in and promote mutual learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✿ Role Performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritisation Range of responsibility Supporting other people's learning Leadership Accountability Supervisory Role Delegation Handling ethical issues Coping with unexpected problems Crisis Management Keeping up-to-date
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✿ Academic Knowledge and Skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of evidence and arguments Accessing formal knowledge Research-based practice Theoretical thinking Knowing what you might need to know Using knowledge resources (human, paper based, electronic) Learning how to use relevant theory(a range of practical situations)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✿ Decision Making and Problem solving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When to seek expert help Dealing with complexity Group Decision Making Problem analysis Generating, formulating and evaluating options Managing the process within an appropriate timescale Decision making under pressurised conditions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✿ Judgement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality of performance, output and outcomes Priorities Value Issues Levels of Risks

Source: Eraut et al. (2004a)

Eraut (2011) explains that the complexity of certain job profiles makes it difficult to describe what participants learned. It should rather be envisaged as progressing along several learning pathways and each learning pathway is one of eight main categories as shown in Table 2.2.

Eraut (2004) identified four types of work activity to describe how learning takes place at the workplace:

- **Group Exercises:** The group has to work together to achieve a common goal. To achieve this goal, each member needs to understand the intention and be equally committed to achieving the goal. The information and knowledge sharing in the group fosters the informal learning. For example, with projects, each member despite their portfolio learns from the other team member.
- **Collaboration:** Each person in the group is keen on observing, listening and sharing ideas with their team members. Each member is committed and dedicated in promoting the best interest of the team, as a result each one will want to perform effectively by learning from each other, acquiring new knowledge and skills.
- **Task driven performance:** Challenging tasks on the job provide opportunity for brainstorming, creativity and innovation. It increases motivation, confidence and commitment towards success.
- **Client Focused:** Customer service orientation provides insight into handling different types of clients. Consulting with client in resolving issues and following best practise methods.

The degree and extent of diversity in the group can influence how employees learn at work. One needs to be aware and sensitive to that adults learn differently. Hence the informal learning in the workplace should be adapted accordingly.

Informal learning is more significant as more learning takes place informally on the job rather than with formal learning (Eraut, 2004). It should not be regarded as inferior and only there to provide the groundwork for formal learning.

2.5 Proficiency

Proficiency is largely developed through informal learning activities that are characterised by action and reflection (Enos et al., 2003). In the corporate world, the proficiency is measured by determining capabilities to perform the function and more often exceeding the function. Proficiency is also a determining factor for succession planning and talent management. Employees that are highly proficient are recognised as the high performers in the industry. In recruitment and selection, proficiency in the respective competencies has become a key focus for a successful appointment. Employees who are competent in a position, they have been employed in have a greater chance of increasing their proficiency in the position.

According to Sheckley and Keeton (1999) cited in (Enos et al., 2003) individuals develop proficiency by working in challenging and supportive environments, self-monitoring, engaging in deliberate practice, and solving ill-defined problems. Proficiency is also the result of informal learning and that proficiency and transfer of learning have a reciprocal relationship. For example, when faced with difficult work-related problems, managers apply specific strategies that they had learned from previous experiences.

As an outcome of these applications, managers' understanding of the effectiveness and confidence of using knowledge have become more robust which leads to proficiency. As a result of each application of knowledge, managers continue to learn informally and the proficiency cycle is kept in motion (Enos et al., 2003).

Gallup researchers (<http://gmj.gallup.com>) showed that people who know and use their strengths at the companies they work for tend to be better performers. In a study of 65 672 employees, Gallup found that employees who received strengths feedback had turnover rates that were 14.9% lower than for employees who received no feedback (controlling for job type and tenure). Moreover a study of 530 work units with productivity data found that teams with managers who received strengths feedback showed 12.5% greater productivity post intervention than teams with managers who received no feedback.

According to Enos et al., (2003) they claimed that proficiency is developed and constantly strengthened by continuous informal learning, and implementation of Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's), engagement and interaction with colleagues and finally observing,

reflecting and providing feedback within the team. Studies conducted postulate that employees that gain knowledge through informal learning are autonomous and can be held accountable. The metacognitive skills are continuously developed which leads to high order thinking, a key element in achieving the goals of the organisation.

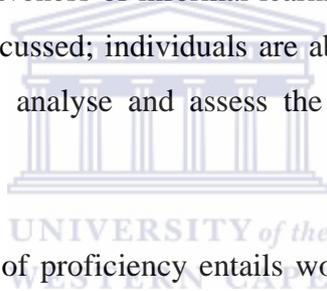
The two pivotal features of proficiency are planned domain knowledge and the metacognitive skills of the employees. In the workplace employees depend on the activation of their metacognitive abilities, self awareness is critical, a shift from the known to the unknown. Employees set learning goals, they understand their own learning styles and have the ability to evaluate their own learning. Unveiling these abilities encourages engagement of employees to participate and interact in informal learning tasks. Efficient employees that have required knowledge are aware of their knowledge and effectively analyse, plan and apply their informal learning experiences. Consequently, this sets off the cycle of Proficiency Development (Enos et al., 2003).

They illustrated what facilitates the application of skills learned informally, by using proficiency cycle (Fig 2.2) to explain the following proposals; the first, informal learning is a continuous cycle that ignites challenging experiences, actions and reflection. Employees need different tools to be able to understand what is required. Job experiences, action learning, observed learning, participation and interaction, assist employees with understanding their experiences. The different tools that stimulate deeper and higher level of thinking lead to an ongoing series of experiences that promote empowerment (Enos et al., 2003).

In the second proposal, they posit the view that informal learning takes place through a process of socialisation, employees in the work environment interact and learn from each other. Evidence suggests that the integration of interaction with co-workers and participating in activities leads to effective, meaningful learning and enhances proficiency. The support is readily available as employees guide each other to achieve required levels. Experienced employees with a high level of performance share their skills and the co workers observe and emulate these behaviours. Subsequently, employees have a better understanding of the expected level of performance and best practise techniques which is transferred from one manager to another. As much as proficiency can be enhanced through informal learning, one has to be mindful, it is can also be restricted by the lack of interaction amongst co workers and support from management. In addition, limited interaction obstructs the communication

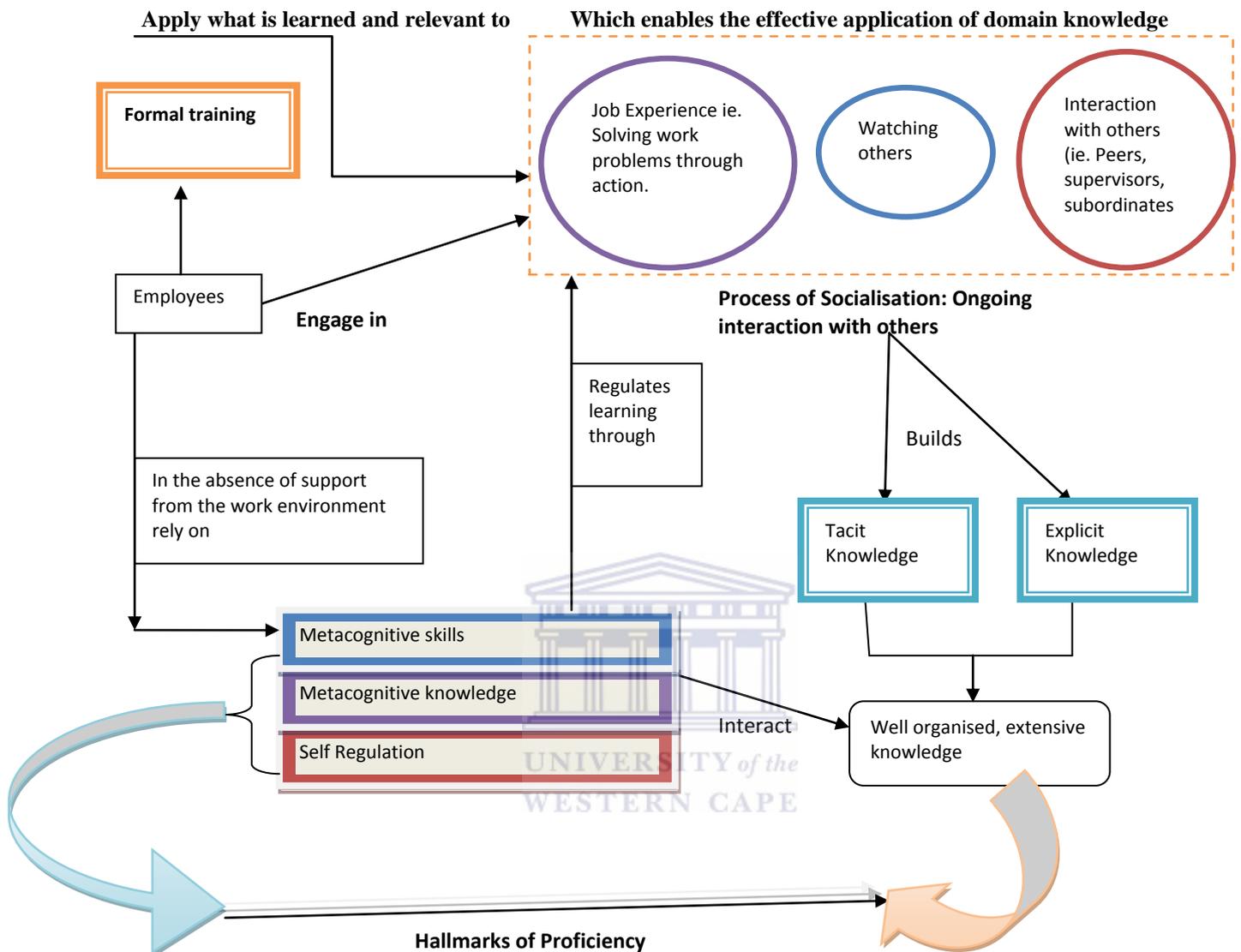
and expansion of knowledge and technical expertise required in a specific area (Enos et al., 2003).

In the third proposal, informal learning is a self regulation process. In the process, employees regulate the application and recurring, interactive tasks by setting up an action plan. The action plan highlights the approach that is monitored and assessed to accomplish a task. In the action plan, measurements are used to evaluate outcomes. The success of an action plan is determined by an employee's metacognitive knowledge. The synergy between metacognitive knowledge and self regulation lead to effective learning. The action plan will demonstrate the individual's metacognitive knowledge, the ability to understand what information is required to perform a task. Self regulation assists with closing the gap between the individual's current abilities and desired outcomes (Ertmer & Newby, 1996) cited in Enos and Kehrhann (2005). In the process of self regulation, an important element, feedback is provided, a critical element in the success and effectiveness of informal learning. During the feedback, strength and areas of development are discussed; individuals are able to revisit their action plan and work through the specific tasks, analyse and assess the information required for desired results (Enos et al., 2003).



The fourth proposition, the core of proficiency entails working in a challenging conducive environment that encourages learning. In addition, individuals monitor the progress of their learning and engage in problem solving. For example, employees apply what they have learned by transferring the knowledge and learn to trouble shoot, by using past experiences and support of co workers. Subsequently, the constant application strengthens the abilities to perform a task and leads to an increase in proficiency (Enos et al., 2003).

Figure 2.2: Proficiency Development Cycle



2.6 Transfer of Informal Learning in the Workplace

There is a greater potential to transfer the skills learned informally than the skills learned in a formal context. According to Enos et al., (2003) transfer of learning is defined as the degree to which trainees apply knowledge, skills, and attitudes, they gain in training and transfer it to their jobs. When a knowledge structure is dynamic and well organised with strong and clear links between the problem types and learning outcome it enhances the transfer of learning.

In the research conducted by Burns (2008), the focus of employers is more on the transfer of formal learning than informal learning. It may be agreed upon that informal learning is more easily transferred than formal learning, however the reason employers are more concerned

with transfer of formal learning is because the cost of formal learning is much higher than informal learning. Business organisations want assurance that trainees will be able to use what was learned on their jobs. Transferring knowledge from one individual to the other leads to knowledge sharing, it contributes to the organisations performance.

Employees are willing and able to share what they have learned and transfer it to the workplace if the environment is conducive. The encouragement and recognition of line managers further increases the transfer of learning (Burns, 2008). For example, if an employee attends the use of chemical training and the manager takes time to discuss with the employee the type of training and how it can be used in the workplace; the employee would feel valued and motivated to transfer and share the information with their colleagues and be interested in seeing the results of the training session. The team benefits from the transfer of learning. Indirectly the transferring and sharing of skills enhances the productivity of all employees.

One has to take cognisance of the influence of line managers; employees can easily feel threatened by the abuse of power. It has an effect on the degree of trust amongst those engaged in knowledge transfer, and thus restricts the learning outcomes (Wallis et al., 2007). The negative approach of line managers can be diffused by using the transfer of learning to promote team work whereby employees engage in discussions, exchange ideas and capitalise on each other's expertise which is an added advantage, they can close the gap in diversity and performance. As learning is transferred through the organisation, employees are invited to brainstorm and share ideas and informal learning becomes more dynamic and interactive. The transfer of learning is affected by the factors that influence learning in the workplace.

2.7 Factors affecting learning in the workplace

The ultimate need for employees in the workplace is the provision of adequate resources and a work environment that is conducive to learning. Given supportive conditions, learning in the workplace can be enhanced by creating opportunities for positive and productive engagement in a wide range of work processes. Moreover, co-workers working alongside and interacting with each other, enables learning by asking questions and receiving feedback about shared activities and discussing events as and when it occur. It also provides exposure to the learner to see how a colleague interprets a situation, observes and monitors them and then take decisions. In most cases these activities are largely tacit and difficult to describe

with clear detail. Working in a team with people who have different kinds of expertise and skills helps the learner to understand the nature of that skill and make better use of it (Eraut, 2011).

Eraut (2004) illustrates (Figure 2.3), the factors that affect learning in the workplace by focusing on:

- Learning in context
- Interaction with the line managers
- Employee development

2.7.1 Learning in context

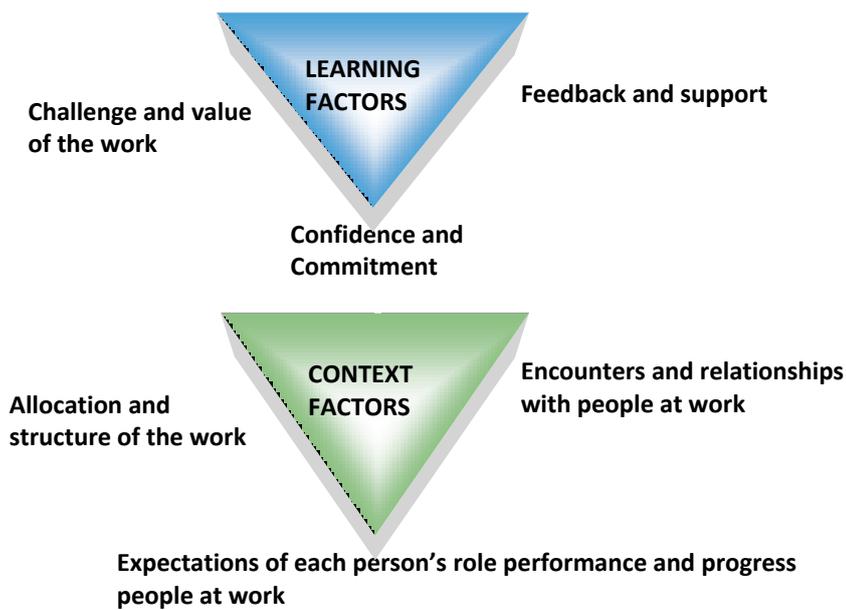
The first factor that affects learning in the workplace is confidence. Employees that are well supported in the workplace may constantly be engaged in task accomplishment. Each accomplishment has its own set of learning experiences that adds more value to the work. Overcoming the challenges increases the level of confidence.

Eraut (2011) points out that support and feedback were crucially essential for confidence, learning retention and commitment, especially during their first three months of employment when they were best provided by the direct manager as it is current and relevant. In the long - term, more feedback on performance, progress and meeting organisational expectations also became essential. One has to consider for enhancing confidence, one has to strike the balance by assigning the right level of challenge to an employee.

The feedback and support received with completion of tasks enhances confidence and commitment. Employees are more motivated and committed to building internal and external customer relations. A triangular relationship exists between the challenge, support and confidence (Eraut, 2004).

A ripple effect exists if there is a lack of support or challenge, the employees' confidence declines and there is no motivation or commitment to develop or succeed. Thus feedback has become a key element and contributing factor in support especially from the organisation and clients. More time should be allocated for honest, structured feedback, since it is critical and could be used in the personal development plan that records an employee's strengths and areas of development.

Figure 2.3: Factors affecting learning in the workplace



Source: Eraut, 2004

The second triangle Eraut (2004) mirrors the first triangle but focuses on contextual factors. In each triangle, the left apex relates to the work itself, the right apex to the relationships at work and the lowest apex to the individual employee. The allocation and structuring of work is central to the participant's progress, firstly, the difficulty of the work and the extent to which it was individual or collaborative and secondly, the opportunities for meeting, observing and working alongside people who had more or different expertise and for relationships that might provide feedback, support or advice. People are more proficient at tasks where they already have considerable experience, but may also need to be involved in a wider range of tasks in order to extend their capability and be challenged. Workplace conditions could increase the amount, quality and outcomes of informal learning.

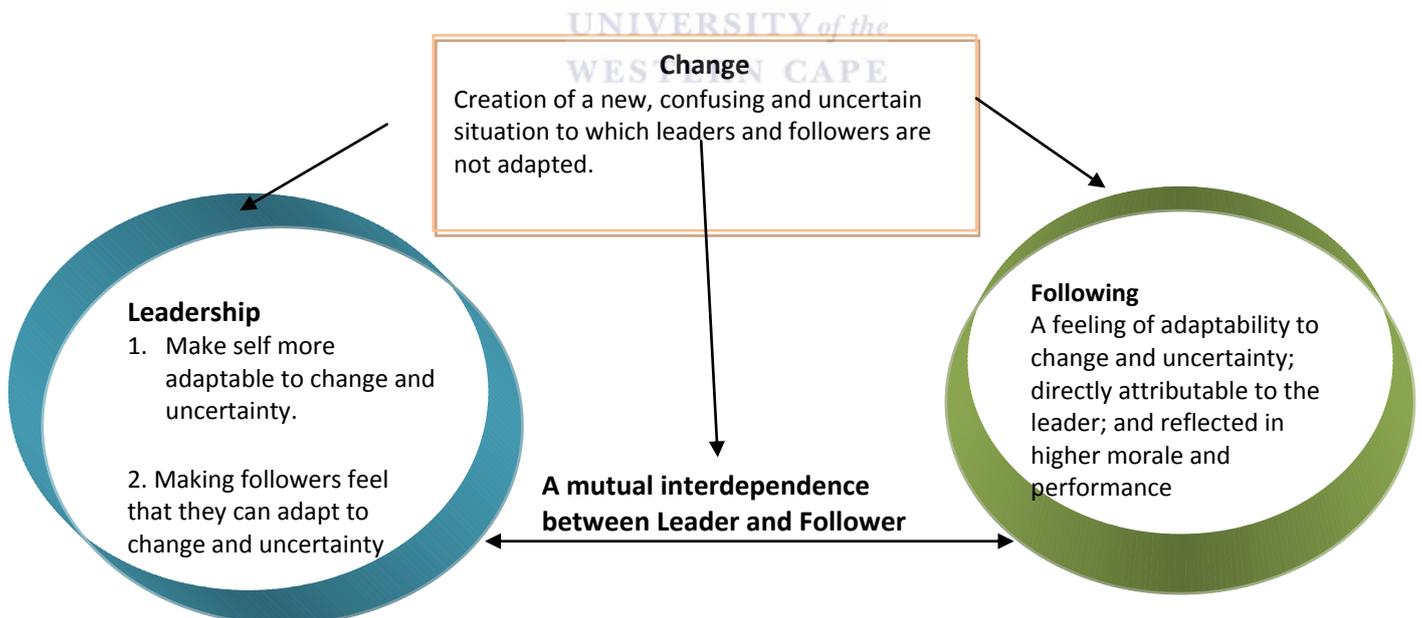
Van der Heijden et al., (2009) describe the social context by using the following sections of the different factors that encourage informal learning in the workplace by interaction with one's line manager (Leader Member Exchange) and co worker support (internal and external networks).

2.7.2 Interaction with one's line manager

According to Joo and Ready (2012, p. 279) in order “to attract and retain talented employees, organizations need to play a supportive, rather than directive, role in enabling their employees’ career success. Supervisory career support is a key factor affecting employees’ career development. Employees’ careers are likely to be enriched by supportive relationships with their supervisors”.

In the employee’s social context, managers occupy an important position, which is elaborated in Leader- Member eXchange (LMX) model (Figure 2.4), representing a major theoretical and empirical approach to organisational leadership. The core behind LMX is that within work units, different types of relationships develop between leaders and their subordinates or members. Managers and supervisors are thought to develop close relationships, and have high quality exchanges with only a few subordinates. Employees who receive more attention and support from their leader have higher staff morale than employees whose support is limited to what is required by the employment contract (Van der Heijden et al., 2009).

Figure 2.4: Leader- Member eXchange Model



Source: Ken W. Parry, (1999) "Enhancing adaptability: leadership strategies to accommodate change in local government settings".

LMX model has also been investigated as a predictor of innovative informal learning. Howell and Hall- Miranda (1999) cited in Van der Heijden et al. (2009) in their longitudinal study, they found high quality LMX to be positively related to follower performance. Similarly, Van der Klink, Gielen and Nauta (2001) and Hughes (2004) cited in Van der Heijden et al., (2009) demonstrated the predictive validity of a high quality supervisor- subordinate relationship in the light of employee's behaviour in the workplace, with respect to, for instance, awareness, understanding and commitment to work processes, policies and future innovations. Subordinates who receive sufficient information and support from their leaders and who engage in tasks that require challenge and responsibility are expected to have positive work attitudes and engage in more positive work behaviour compared to subordinates who receive less.

Newton et al., (2006a) cited in Wallis et al., (2007) pointed out that line managers have an immense influence on the culture of learning at an organisation. If they feel threatened that their position is at stake, they are likely to give very little support and encouragement to the staff. However, if a manager is also a leader and believes in empowering staff, they will reap the benefits of an innovative staff that transfers and implements new ideas and or applies best practice. In the light of what has been mentioned, much attention is on the manager's degree of empowering employees and this research has been conducted to determine the impact on manager's support of learning in the workplace.

Managers play a key role in the success of the implementation of Coaching and Mentorship, (Erlinger, 2005) cited in Wallis et al., (2007). Feedback is the most important component that provides employees with information on their strengths, capabilities and areas of development. Once an employee receives feedback from managers, they become more open to challenge, sharing and transferring knowledge in the workplace.

2.7.3 Employee Development

Furthermore, there are several reasons why managers develop employees. The benefits were discussed in a Training Development meeting with senior managers. Most HR Practitioners expect managers to understand and know the benefits of training. Very little time is spent in consultation to explain why managers need to develop their staff and not perceive it as affecting productivity time.

An article (www.amdin.org/documents/d00104/SAMDI_TOT_Module_1.pdf) provides a detailed explanation of why managers develop people by motivating with the following reasons:

1. Improve employee performance
2. Update employees' skills
3. Avoid managerial, professional and critical or scarce technical skill obsolescence
4. Orient new employees
5. Prepare for promotion and managerial succession
6. Satisfy personal growth needs
7. Solve organisational problems
8. Promote employability and sustainable livelihoods
9. Enhance employability of designated groups

- 1. Improve employee performance.** Employees who perform unsatisfactorily because of a deficiency in skills are prime candidates for skills training. Although training cannot solve all problems of ineffective performance, a sound training and development programme is often instrumental in minimising these problems.
- 2. Update employees' skills.** Managers in all areas must always be aware of technological advances that could make their organisations function most effectively. Technological change means that jobs change. Employees' skills need to be updated through education and training so that technological advances are successfully integrated into the organisation.
- 3. Avoid managerial, professional and critical or scarce technical skill obsolescence.** Rapidly changing technical, legal and social environments have affected the way

managers, professionals and technical experts do their jobs, and employees who fail to adapt to these changes may become ineffective.

4. **Orient new employees.** Sometimes a new or newly promoted employee does not have the skills and abilities required to be competent on the job. New employees may undergo training that may last for varying periods.
5. **Prepare for promotion and managerial succession.** One important way to attract, retain and motivate staff is through a systematic programme of career development. Education and training enable an employee to acquire the skills needed for a promotion, and eases the transition from the employee's present job to one involving greater responsibilities. Organisations that fail to provide such training often lose their most promising employees.
6. **Satisfy personal growth needs.** Education, training and continuous professional development can play a dual role by providing activities and opportunities that result in both greater organisational effectiveness and increased personal growth for all employees.
7. **Solve organisational problems.** Organisational problems such as absenteeism, ineffective and inefficient performance, low employee productivity, high employee turnover, labour-management disputes, inefficient bureaucracies and poor service delivery can be addressed in many ways. Employee education and training is one important way to solve many of these problems.
8. **Promote employability and sustainable livelihoods:** Many African countries have high rates of unemployment, which also results in social problems such as poverty and a high crime rate. Governments may provide financial support to companies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs) to stimulate skills development initiatives. All skills development initiatives include strategies for the placement of individuals in employment, self-employment or social development programmes, or engagement in further educational studies.
9. **Enhance employability of targeted groups:** Some national skills development strategies specifically target designated groups, such as new entrants, women, the disabled or minority groups, for participation in apprenticeships, learnerships, internships, bursaries and new venture creation initiatives.

According to Wallis et al. (2007), it was pointed out by Fuller and Unwin (2004), that informal on the job learning is in the hands of learners. The employees decide on the pace of learning and development of skills. In most organisations, learning pathways have been designed and developed to guide employees with the different skills they need for existing or future promotions. Employees need to acquire skills and knowledge to be competent in a position. It is the responsibility of an employee and not the manager to acquire the skills. It is in this regard, that an Individual Development Plan (IDP) is compiled.

Fuller and Unwin (2004), however, cited in Wallis et al., (2007) cautioned against leaning more towards informal learning. Learning at the workplace must be holistic and therefore there must be a slight balance. Adults learn differently, hence there are likely to be different learning styles. A formal learning approach is required with employees who are in more senior and specialist roles and their positions require an extensive amount of theoretical, structured knowledge in a classroom setting.

In this study, formal learning and informal learning are not being compared to assess if the one is better than the other. They each have their merits of increasing performance. It is the learning outcomes that are the most important factor. The value of informal learning tends to be promoted more by its benefits.

2.8 Affordances and Constraints of the sociocultural setting on Informal learning

According to Billet (2001), employees are not always treated fairly and given equal opportunities to develop their capabilities. The affordances and constraints are influenced by the perception of the individual's competence, the employee's race and gender, employee's scope of work and employee's level of engagement. Furthermore, the norms and values of the work setting and interrelationships of the team with each other, with the managers and workplace also have a significant impact on informal learning.

Affiliations and acknowledgements of employee's efforts in the workplace play a critical role in determining participation in the workplace. The degree of networking and interaction between staff and acquiring information for both familiar and new skills especially from the more experienced co-workers shapes the quality of the learning outcomes. Given that knowledge and acquiring new skills can be socially based by observations, demonstrations

and interactions with co-workers, understanding these participatory factors are central in understanding how opportunities can be created to learn. To a large extent these social factors depend largely on employee engagement and guidance given to each other. Learning and acquiring new knowledge about policies and procedures of the workplace and adopting norms and values can be a challenge. Individuals are active agents in these challenges and they can determine how and what they wish to learn from these social encounters (Billet, 2001).

Billet (2001) reported on the findings of an investigation study conducted at three organisations illustrating the co participation at work and how it affects informal learning. In the one organisation, employees were familiar and understood the work –based learning programs and interventions. It clearly defined workforce responsibilities and set hierarchical structures, there were minimum challenges in the way of conventional internal training. It was established that where there is more support for learning, the quality of learning and the outcomes associated with informal learning were higher than where the support was not available.

At the second organisation, the environment was highly conducive for learning and accepted and appreciated by managers. Mentorship programmes were in place and an effective level of guided learning was promoted, despite the merits of this workplace environment, it was rejected by the co workers and there were a reluctance to participate in informal learning. Based on this report, it is evident, as indicated in this situation that a workplace alone cannot guarantee and ensure quality learning outcomes when there is no buy in and value gained from the individuals. They decide not to engage in the process of learning as it is regarded only as in the best interest of the employer. In the third organisation, however, despite the limited support, low degree of readiness of employee’s for guided learning and low levels of reported quality learning and outcomes, one mentor worked against these challenges and shifted norms and culture of the practice by providing and initiating high levels of support. Cultivating the culture of learning by opening up possibilities for employees could lead to a change in adopting a new approach to learning (Billet, 2001).

These reported findings illustrate the potential of an individual to act as a central agent in shaping what constitutes an invitation to participate. In addition, the degree of workplace readiness influences how activities and support are afforded as part of daily work activities.

Understanding participation between workers and the readiness of the workplace environment is of utmost importance for the success of learning. The findings of the three organisations illustrate three key aspects: firstly, the diversity of relationships between co workers and sociocultural practices that contour the individual's participation and interaction with learning. Secondly, the findings highlight the individual's participation and their active role in influencing informal learning. The “what's in it for me” and finding meaning and significance in what they are doing determines the level of engagement in informal learning.

Thirdly, it is important that workplaces are collaborative and highly approachable in sharing new ideas and being innovative. The findings report that where support of the workplace is available, workplaces can facilitate the learning required for acquiring the knowledge and skill. It seems that for informal learning to proceed and function effectively, the manner in which workers are afforded opportunities to participate and supported in this venture will shape the prospect of a quality learning outcomes and set the scene for the way forward (Billet, 2001).

2.9 Benefits of Informal Learning in the Workplace

Managers want to know why they should invest time, provide resources and give recognition to learning in the workplace. Van Rijn et al., (2013) claim informal learning can benefit employees and organisations. Firstly, informal learning is initiated by the employees and takes place at the workplace, which makes it less expensive, less time consuming and more current and relevant to the individual learning needs than adopting only formal learning. Secondly, the knowledge, skills and abilities which result from informal learning activities facilitate employability and assists employees with the continual change that takes place in their work environment. Thirdly, informal workplace learning also contributes to the human resource of organisations. The combined knowledge, skills and abilities which result from informal workplace learning and collaborative partnership in the workplace provide a powerful source of sustainable organisational competitiveness.

The benefits are explained with reference to the following: benefits of increased innovation, improved productivity, cost effective knowledge transfer and collaboration.

Increased innovation: Informal learning provides a platform where employees can find and interact with experts and share knowledge on key issues or topics. It is not just socially driven; content can be created and delivered to serve any purpose, whether it is new employee induction, a new product launch or the creation of a project team. In such instances, the information can be managed by the end users themselves, making it more relevant and applicable to their jobs.

Improved productivity: Informal learning helps increase workforce efficiency and productivity because users are in greater control of the information. With the ability to quickly pose questions, share documents, discuss best practices and connect with experts, users find themselves getting what they need when they need it at a much more rapid pace, enabling them to perform their jobs better.

Increased, more cost-effective knowledge transfer: In today's "do more with less" environment, employees are asked to take on expanded or different roles, thus requiring additional learning and development. Informal learning can facilitate job transitioning and project collaboration in a much more rapid and purposeful manner.

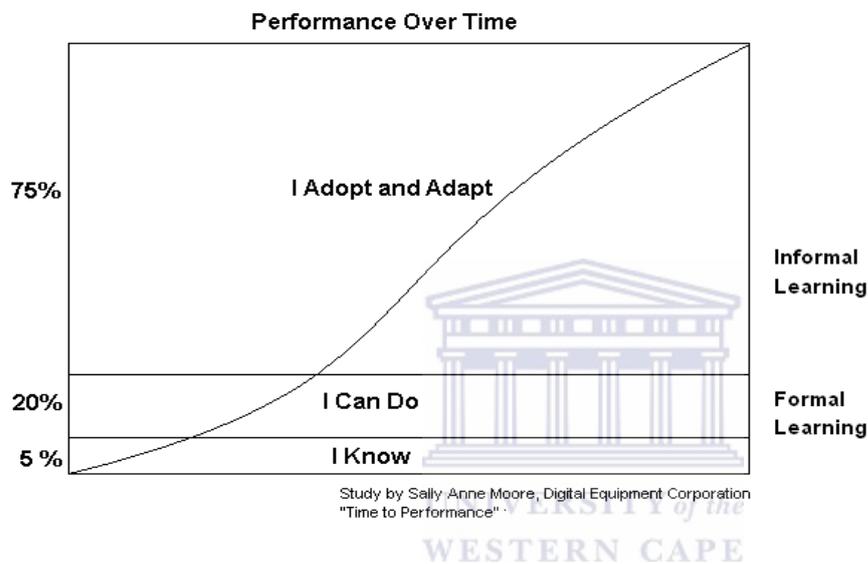
As corporate learning departments seek ways to more efficiently and effectively cross-train employees, informal learning has become an increasingly valuable alternative to formal training. Over and above the business benefits, today's employees appreciate the personal and professional development informal learning can lend to their lives and careers, through tools such as instant messaging, e-learning support groups, expert communities, mentor and coaching networks, personal learning portals and moderated chats.

Collaborating Breeds Competence: Social media and networking technologies have emerged as key enablers of informal learning. Whether it is Face book, blogs, portals or some other Web 2.0 application, informal learning boils down to collaboration among peers within knowledge networks that are often independent of any formal organizational hierarchy.

The benefits of informally learning can be graphically illustrated by a study of performance over time. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Informal_learning). This graph was published as part

of the “the Learning Revolution” white Paper by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2009. It shows that 5 % of learning draws from what one know. The 20% focus on what one can do and it is through formal learning. The 75% is informal learning which has been adopted and needs to be adapted to the workplace. The performance over time will increase as learning increases. A significance figure of 75% indicates the value of informal learning.

Fig. 2.5: Time to Performance



The different topics in this section have highlighted the fundamentals in informal learning in the workplace by using previous studies that examined the factors that influence informal learning in the workplace, support from line managers and the benefits of informal learning.

2.10 Organisational Factors Enhancing Informal Learning

Learning and development of competencies are strongly linked to organisational climate and to the informal learning processes. There are key elements that in the organisation that enhance the value and benefits of developing key competencies in the workplace and create opportunities for learning.

The key elements that addressed relate to:

- The strategic position of Informal Learning in the business strategy
- Availability of skilled labour.
- The structure of the organisation.
- Concept of a democratic workplace.
- Performance management frameworks
- Employee's attitudes and motivation.

2.10.1 Strategic positioning of Informal learning

Managers tend focus on the elements that contribute directly to the bottom line that reflects a visible, calculated rand value. Thereafter, the direction shifts to the nature of the work organisation, job design and performance management systems. The competitive global economy constantly demands change. Employers need to be fast and flexible to adapt to change. Organisations need to position learning and development as part of their core strategies in order to remain abreast of global trends (Wallis et al., 2007).

2.10.2 Availability of skilled labour

Organisations all have access to the resources however; their access to skilled labour is limited. Ashton and Sung's (2006) cited in Wallis et al. (2007), used the study of organisations in the manufacturing and retail sectors to draw attention towards skills development. Learning interventions and Training resources have no value if the focus is merely on production. The South African labour market is characterised by an oversupply of unskilled workers and a shortage of skilled ones. The economy is moving away from labour intensive to capital intensive. Accordingly, companies must have a strategy in place that prioritises learning and skills development in order to sustain their competitive edge.

<http://www.southafrica.info/business/economy/policies/labour.htm>

2.10.3 Structure of the organisation

According to Tamkin et al. (2004) cited in Wallis et al., (2007), organisational structure affects skills development and learning in the workplace. The culture of market leading companies promotes empowerment, team work, innovation, taking ownership and leadership programmes that stimulate a demand for informal learning. Employees need to take ownership of their learning for career growth and personal development; however, the structures and availability of learning resources should be in place.

While most studies focus upon informal learning of specific groups of employees holding similar positions in the organisation, Ashton (2004) cited in Van der Heijden et al. (2009) applied an approach in which all categories of employees within a single organisation was involved. This allowed for more in - depth information on how organisational structures shape informal learning. Access to an availability of relevant information, opportunities to learn and to apply learned skills, availability of support and feedback of managers and co workers, respectively, seemed to be important conditions that influenced both possibilities and content of informal learning experiences.

Skule's (2004) research as cited in Van der Heijden et al., (2009) added new insights to the impact of organisational factors on primarily informal learning. His work was concerned with the identification of factors most conducive to learning at work in different sectors and revealed that organisational size and sector were important predictors for the proportion of learning intensive jobs.

2.10.4 Democratic workplaces

Clarke (2005) cited in Wallis et al., (2007), points out that practising democracy in workplaces fosters a culture that promotes and encourages learning. The communication and interaction of employees creates a platform that further enhances staff involvement in decision making. The relationship between culture and performance has been further examined in detail by Purcell et al., (2003) cited in Wallis et al., (2007). The findings of the study suggests that, in most companies that are transparent and encourage employees at various levels to be part of decision making, employees are loyal to the employer and want to give their best. The pace of advancement in learning and performance increases as all employees want to be top achievers.

Furthermore in an organisation, it is important to highlight the significant role Trade Unions play in making a positive contribution to workplace learning by putting pressure on organisations to promote skills development. One of the aim's of the union is to ensure that each employee has been a given a fair and equal opportunity to be trained and developed by an organisation.

2.10.5 Performance Management Framework

Performance Management is the process of creating a work environment that people can be managed to perform to the best of their ability. The outcomes of informal learning can be measured through a performance framework. The employee's performance will be reviewed on either a quarterly or annual basis to provide feedback to the employee on the areas of strength, skills they need to develop in order to maximise their potential and achieve goals in the agreed upon time frame. In the performance Management process the goals of measurement must be clear. In the sponsoring company, a Balance Score Card (BSC) is used which has the key performance indicators. Performance Appraisal takes place at the end of the financial year and provides the motivation for the rewards (Wallis et al., 2007).

Companies that implement a Performance Management Framework (PMF) encourage employees to perform the goals that need to be achieved are agreed upon by both employee and manager. These goals can only be achieved through learning and development whether it is informal or formal.

2.10.6 Employee's attitude and motivations

Most companies implement a career pathway that is designed and developed in conjunction with a succession plan to manage and retain talent. The effectiveness of a succession plan is based on the willingness of employees, the attitude displayed and the motivation to succeed (Wallis et al., 2007). These employees must take ownership of their learning whether it is informal or formal and achieve the learning outcomes.

Ellstrom (2001) cited in Wallis et al., (2007) claims that there are different learning outcomes for each employee irrespective if they have the same job or potential to learn (cited in Wallis et al., 2007). It is based on what it significant to the employee in the learning process and the ability to process information. The employee's motivation to learn also can be used as a measure to reflect staff morale.

A key indicator of staff morale is an employee's willingness to get involved in temporary assignments or projects at work, where they take on new challenges of using their initiative and an opportunity of taking ownership, either on a short or long term. At the end of a short term, individuals can engage in special projects or stretch assignments or a work structure known as matrix organisation. In a matrix structure, individuals can either be based in one department but also participate in cross organisational projects or they report to more than one manager. They contribute by utilising existing expertise and skills untapped in their own department and thus develop new competencies. Long term learning course of action can evolve from voluntary job rotations, cross training and team responsibilities. In organisations that explore and provide such informal learning opportunities, employees tend to be more satisfied and motivated with their career developments and their opportunity to contribute to the organisation (Cunningham & Hillier, 2013).

White (2012) points out that retaining a quality employee is critical; informal learning is more than just learning. It is about line managers seeking the Return on Investment by appreciating and encouraging a team. Communicating appreciation within a work environment encourages the team and improves the quality of a working relationship. Organisations create a positive work climate that enhances informal learning by managers giving time and energy to show and express meaningful appreciation. It should be interpreted as employers showing an interest in the well being and being part of an employee's career growth.

2.11 Recognition of Informal Learning

The aim of any learning program is to achieve outcomes and to give recognition to learners for successfully completing a programme whether it is formal or informal learning. Recognition is described as a way of drawing widespread attention to their knowledge, skills and competences and choosing the most appropriate method; a certified qualification or learning portfolio as evidence (Werquin, 2010).

It must be stressed that "skills development" can be embarked upon with very good and noble intentions but it can very quickly become just another catch phrase if it does not become part of the organisation's culture and every employee understands and pursues skills development as part of the value that they bring to their organisation. Skills development is an extremely powerful tool in any organisation but then it requires unequivocal, agreed commitment and

support at the highest levels of organisational structures and non-negotiable adherence to its success requirements throughout all levels of the organisation (Werquin, 2010).

According to Werquin (2010), the South African government, because of its history and challenges that it faces as a member of the global village relentlessly focuses on eradication of the ills of poverty, unemployment and improving the standard of living of all its citizens. The government has realised that these quests will remain exactly that if no concerted effort is made to address the dire shortage of appropriately qualified and skilled people in the country. To achieve this, the South African government embarked on a deliberate strategic initiative to create an enabling environment in the country through legislation for purposes of addressing skills development across all sectors of the South African economy.

The legislation led to the establishment of institutions such as the South African Qualifications Authority, The National Skills Authority, the National Skills Fund, Sector Education and Training Authorities and a Skills Development Levy System, all guided by a National Skills Strategy (Werquin, 2010). These are encapsulated in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3: Summary of different South African Authorities and Acts

South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)	The body responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of the National Qualifications Framework, established in terms of the SAQA Act no. 58 of 1995.
National Qualifications Framework	To create an integrated national framework for learning achievements Accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities; Contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large. This framework allows education and training to take place within a formal structure that can be monitored and controlled by Government.
National Skills Fund	Employers must pay 1% of their workers' pay to the skills development levy. The money goes to Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) and the Skills Development Fund to pay for training.
Sector of Education and Training Authorities	Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) must work out and implement sector skills plans, promote learnerships and hand out funds in their sector.
National Skills Authority The National Skills Authority (NSA) was established in terms of section 4 of the Skills Development Act, 1998	To advise the Minister on a national skills development policy, a national skills development strategy, guidelines on the implementation of the National Skills Development Strategy, the allocation of subsidies from the National Skills Fund, and any regulations to be made.
Skills Development Act no. 97 of 1998	The Skills Development Act aims to develop the skills of the South African workforce and to improve the quality of life of workers and their prospects of work. To improve productivity in the workplace and the competitiveness of employers and to promote self-employment.

In the light of South Africa's political and socioeconomic background the following topics are discussed as follows:

- The process of recognising non formal and informal learning outcomes
- The benefits of the recognition of informal learning
- The benefits of skills development.

2.11.1 The process of recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes

Werquin (2010) elucidates that the process for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes may contain several stages. Assuming that standards have been devised for granting social recognition to a qualification, the process of validating or certifying non-formal and informal learning outcomes may be divided into four stages.

First, there is the *identification* of the non-formal and informal learning outcomes. The identification is undertaken with a view to assessing those outcomes. This may involve self-assessment or third-party assessment. Guidance can be an important element in the process of identification.

Second, there is the candidate's *production of evidence* of the outcomes on the basis of reference documents. This paves the way for the validation stage. It is at this stage that the redefined standards must be introduced. Otherwise, participants may not have the necessary frame of reference to document their outcomes correctly, or to analyse them so that the process of validation/certification can genuinely be one of building up knowledge, skills and competences through an understanding of those outcomes.

Third, there is the *validation* of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. This is an essential stage aimed at verifying that the documents produced or any other form of assessment simulation, real situation, written tests that have value in relation to a given standard. It is usually at this stage that the concept of level comes into play since, for a given body of knowledge, skills and competences being validated, the context may lead evaluators to propose higher or lower levels.

Lastly, there is the very formal and highly formalised stage of *certification*, in which the candidate receives an official document attesting to the veracity, validity and authenticity of these outcomes. If standards have been prepared in accordance with the social context, this document will enable its holder to reap the expected benefits in the labour market, or to return to formal learning when a specific qualification or level is an entry requirement.

It is as a result of non-formal and informal learning, knowledge, skills and competences have been acquired. These are recognised with reference to standards which, if they are established and accepted by society, will give currency to the qualification awarded through the certification process (Werquin, 2010).

More generally, it is desirable to ensure that all learning outcomes become visible, irrespective of the setting in which they were acquired, whether formal, non-formal or informal. More recently, a report was compiled by the Organisation for Economic Co – operation and Development (OECD), (2007), in which they ranked the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes high on the list of 20 mechanisms identified as potentially capable of motivating learning. The OECD is a unique forum where the governments of 30 democracies work together to address the economic, social and environmental challenges of globalisation.

At the same time, major international organisations are showing a close interest in the recognition of learning outcomes (Cedefop and European Commission, 2008; Ecotec, 2007; Singh, 2008; 2009). All these studies point in the same direction: formal learning alone cannot account for all of the learning encompassed by the concept of lifelong learning. There is thus no shortage of studies that argue for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. However, these studies have been piecemeal and there is a need to examine the quality of existing data, the validity of the studies, especially in terms of cost, the usefulness of comparative studies, and the accuracy of certain claims and assertions, which seek to justify the introduction of systems for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes (Werquin, 2010).

One way organizations can accomplish this is by creating, or co-opting, collaborative learning environments, where formal and informal learning are seamlessly tied together. It does not take huge amounts of time, resources or money to get started. In fact, organizations

might increase their success by integrating informal learning into their system one step at a time. While there will be challenges along the way — for example, getting agreement from IT, learning, HR and other stakeholders on how to capture and recognize these informal contributions — blending cost-effective, efficient and relevant informal learning into the organization's overall learning and development platform can yield significant long term results.

2.11.2 Benefits of Recognition of informal Learning

According to Werquin (2010), in South Africa, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes clearly became part of the national compensation policy after the first free elections in 1994. From this standpoint, the expected benefits were linked together to achieve a comprehensive readjustment in economic, educational and social terms.

What are the expected benefits of recognition of learning?

- **Workforce Development:** Organizations seeking to build their competitive advantage through workforce development must evolve their learning management strategies and systems to incorporate informal learning. Not only do today's employees interact, learn and work in different ways, but most organizations also have an increasingly mobile and geographically dispersed workforce.
- **Employee's proficiency:** Employee capacity, performance and ability are directly determined by the relevant skills, knowledge and abilities that such an employee possess, and the currency and relevance thereof.
- **Understanding the challenges it faces as an organisation:** There is a clear vision, mission, plan and objectives in the short, medium and long term that directs their efforts in meeting the challenges and exploiting their benefits. Employee's competencies are continuously evaluated, updated, aligned and developed. It creates an enabling environment that treats skills development as an ongoing priority.

2.11.3 Benefits of Skills Development

Werquin (2010) pointed out that forward-thinking companies realize that while corporate training continues to play an integral role in advancing today's workforce, informal learning has emerged as an equally important, if not more critical, element. In today's hyper intense workplace, companies are blending informal learning into their development methodologies, recognizing the value of better informed and better skilled employees who are supported at their point of need, and thus creating more competitive advantage throughout the business.

The benefits of skills developments are as follows:

For the employer:

1. For companies to receive a mandatory grant they have to ensure that skills development takes place in the organisation.
2. Business priorities are supported by relevant and current skills
3. Skills development strategies are directly aligned with business strategies.
4. A Learning organisation is developed.
5. Skills development becomes a recognised organisational development tool.
6. Resources for skills development are effectively assigned and deployed.
7. Return on Investment in skills development becomes measurable
8. Quality assurance and customer satisfaction becomes entrenched in the organisation's culture.
9. Interpersonal relationships are improved
10. Cost/benefit relationships for skills development becomes meaningful
11. Business performance attributable to skills development becomes tangible.

For the employee:

1. Employees experience themselves as true assets that add value to business operations.
2. Employee morale, motivation and commitment are significantly improved.
3. Business objectives and employee objectives are aligned.
4. Quality assurance and customer service improves significantly.
5. "Them" and "us" becomes "We."
6. Incentives linked to performance becomes understood, accepted and supported.
7. The stigma clinging to performance appraisals are removed.
8. Employee development becomes purposeful

9. Employees accept accountability for performance.
10. Employee attitudes changes from “conformity” to “concern”

For the Country

- A sense of national direction in people development
- An enhanced image to the outside world with respect to human potential development.
- A growing pool of skilled and qualified workers.
- Improvement in ability to become a world competitor in the global economy
- Self achievement and self worth as an independent country

2.12 Practical Implications

Today’s companies rely mostly on formal training to develop proficiency of managers (Mc Murrer, van Buren & Woodwell, 2000) cited in Enos et al., (2003). Unfortunately, the use of formal training programs to develop the proficiency of managers has not paid dividends, as most skills that are learned during formal training are rarely applied on the job.

The first implication is to shift the focus away from formal training of managers and develop more realistic expectations concerning the application of what is learned through formal training. Recognise and leverage the abundance of informal learning opportunities that managers experience and focus on developing managerial proficiency and expertise.

Opportunities for informal learning such as interactions with others in the workplace, observing others and challenging job assignments must be harnessed and leveraged. In addition, to develop explicit and implicit knowledge over a period of time is more apt to result in the development of proficiency. In order to facilitate managerial proficiency in the workplace, managers need to be in an environment where informal learning is encouraged and strategies and activities that promote informal learning experiences are made available (Enos et al., 2003).

The second implication is to develop the metacognitive skills of employees. Employees that have superior metacognitive skills are more likely to engage in and seek out informal learning opportunities. Past research supports two approaches to developing self regulation. The first approach is to give learners control over the content, sequence and pace of the learning. This could lead to a more motivated and involved learner. A second approach to promoting an

employee's self regulation is generating a mastery orientation. Mastery orientation differs from a performance orientation in that the focus of learning is on developing proficiency of a skill (Enos et al., 2003).

The study of Enos et al., (2003) suggested that learners learn mostly from informal learning and the transfer process. In the light of these findings, companies should harness and leverage informal learning and cultivate the Metacognitive abilities of managers, as opposed to increasing spending on formal training programs. By applying these approaches, companies may save money, develop more proficient managers and gain a competitive advantage.

Van Rijn et al., (2013) they maintain that both the motivational concern of “what do you want” and the self identity concern of “who you are” are important for employee informal workplace learning. Human Resource professionals should stimulate employee's career motivation and development, while for employees; they should take ownership and engage in creating learning opportunities.

2.13 Conclusion

According to Enos et al., (2003), they pointed out the fast pace at which corporations operate today, and the need for companies to remain competitive, have unloaded a heavy burden on organisations, managers, and management education and development practitioners.

The recognition of non-formal and informal learning is an important means for making the ‘lifelong learning for all’ agenda a reality for all and, subsequently, for reshaping learning to better matches the needs of 21st century knowledge economies and open societies. Werquin (2010) in his report to the OECD postulates that all learning has value and most of it deserves to be made visible and be recognised. It is a clear possible option, and a plausible alternative to formal education and training, to have non-formal and informal learning assessed. Many countries are putting recognition of non-formal and informal learning at the top of their policy agenda and the time have come for a thorough evaluation of what it entails.

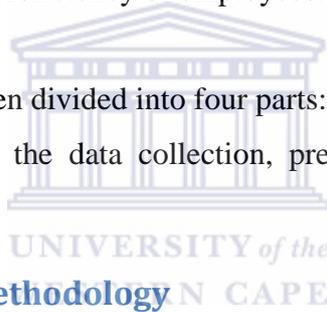
Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Many creative and innovative training programmes are designed and developed to bridge the performance gap; the learning is often formal and structured. With this approach, management decides and expect staff must be trained and shortly, thereafter employees need to be competent. The emphasis is more on gaining knowledge and less on developing the skills. There is very seldom consultation with employees to understand their perceptions and to give them the opportunity of describing the factors as in the current working environment that promotes or hinders performance. It is precisely in this light that the qualitative method has been chosen to conduct the research.

The aim of this research is to recognize the effectiveness of informal learning in the workplace and the impact on the proficiency of employees.

The outline of this chapter has been divided into four parts: qualitative research methodology, the phenomenological approach, the data collection, presentation and explanation of the findings.



3.2 Qualitative Research Methodology

The previous chapters reviewed the literature relating to factors that influence the effectiveness of informal learning, how it enhances proficiency in an organisation and the recognition thereof. The aim of the research would be to identify these factors and use it to enhance proficiency, which could ultimately lead to a more conducive and supporting workplace environment.

This chapter delineates the research methodology used to investigate the effectiveness of informal learning and the impact on proficiency in the organisation. To enhance the proficiency of employees, a better understanding of the effectiveness of Informal Learning is imperative.

One of the critical decisions to be made in designing the research study is the paradigm within which it is undertaken. A clear paradigm, Maxwell (2005) that assists with design decisions and to justify these decisions. Against the background of investigating the

phenomena that enhances effective informal learning in the workplace, a qualitative paradigm is more suitable than a quantitative paradigm. In a qualitative study the variables are not controlled, there is a degree of freedom and natural development of sharing and describing experiences that the researcher need to captures (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smith, 2010).

It is not always possible to capture data that is detailed and varied with preset instruments as they may influence and restrict the depth of understanding of the research study. Therefore, if a researcher is focussing on capturing the richness of data, a qualitative inquiry is preferred and it will draw out the thoughts, actions and perceptions for the research process (Henning et al., 2010).

Babbie and Mouton (2008, p. 490) advocate that “there is no one neat and tidy approach to qualitative data analysis, nor even one approach to specific type of qualitative data analysis”. The researcher is seeking to learn more about effectiveness of informal learning in the workplace and how it enhances proficiency in the organisation. Understanding these phenomena leads the research to a theoretical framework within which to apply suitable techniques for the study.

The qualitative research engages in a collaborative action with participants, the aim of which is to determine not what is happening in informal learning in the workplace, but how it is happening and more critical to understand, why it is happening this way. The information will be used to gain insight and apply to future studies. The researcher uses the evidence of the data and literature reviews to demonstrate the value of effective learning in the workplace (Henning et al., 2010). Content analysis is the preferred method of analysing the data which may assist in understanding these experiences.

In qualitative research, the focus of the attention is on how participant’s perceptions of what is happening and how this perspective explains their actions, rather than giving an account of what took place. Le Clus (2008) suggests that a qualitative research has a different interpretation for each person, depending on the experiences of participants.

The research examines the effectiveness of Informal learning and seeks to explain using a Qualitative Methodology, how and why things happen. A qualitative research is more suitable to illustrate how this occurs (Maxwell, 2005). Research questions are formulated and

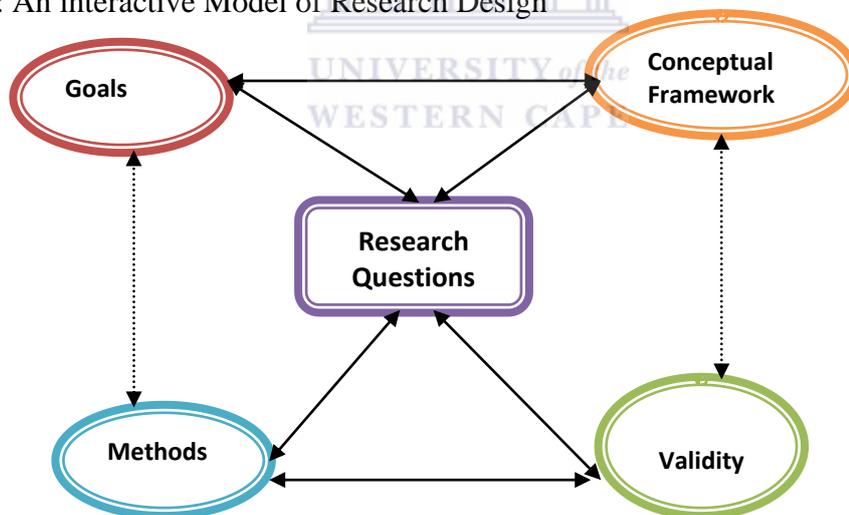
deal with providing meaning of work related events and job tasks to employees involved in them, sharing and describing experiences and highlighting the influence of the physical and social context on work related events and job tasks.

The current study explores the following research questions:

- How do employees learn informally in the workplace?
- Why does the sociocultural constructs have an impact on informal workplace learning?
- What factors affect the potential and pathway of informal learning in the workplace?

The study is designed to illustrate the Qualitative Research elements and describe and explain how these elements interact with each other namely, Interactive Model of Research The model clearly outlines the structure and planning of this qualitative research and takes into account the relationship between the different components (Maxwell, 2005).

Figure 3.1: An interactive Model of Research Design



Source: Qualitative Research Design: An interactive Approach by Maxwell (2005)

The model of the qualitative research design depicts the elements of the Qualitative Research that are imperative for the logical reasoning of the study. The design provides a more understandable explanation of the elements of Qualitative Research and the mechanism thereof.

1. Goals: Describe the effectiveness of Informal Learning in the workplace and focus on how organisations can promote informal learning to enhance the proficiency of employees.
2. Conceptual Framework: Previous literature has been reviewed on informal and how it affects an organisation. Personal experiences and perceptions are taken into account to give depth to the study. Based on the literature and experiences of participants, it expands an understanding of how effective informal learning can increase the proficiency of employees in an organisation.
3. Research questions: The primary objectives of the questions are to establish, how job skills are learned from informal learning? Why does the relationship between co workers have an impact on informal learning? What factors affect the potential and pathway of learning in the workplace?
4. Methods: A phenomenological approach is taken to conduct the study and interviews used to gain insight into understanding and description of participant's experiences. Interviews are used to collect the data.
5. Validity: The results and conclusions that have been identified illuminate threats and how they are addressed. The potential challenges are identified; the results are based on the experiences of the participants that have been translated.

The Upper Triangle of this model (Figure 3.1) keeps the elements as a close unit. According to Maxwell (2005), the broken lines illustrate that there are other elements that can affect the relationship between the different elements and can be identified in the phenomena that takes place. However, the challenge in the findings of research may lack depth. A phenomenological approach is adopted to unveil, explore and gain better understanding of the effectiveness of informal learning in the workplace.

3.3 Phenomenological Approach

By understanding the effectiveness of informal learning, an organisation can assess the impact of learning and focus on the factors that promote learning and development. Participants were encouraged in the interview to share their experiences and perceptions of informal learning in the workplace, the in depth analysis points out the factors that hinder and promote informal learning. Phenomenological research includes informal learning describing daily experiences as lived by the participants (Polkinghorne, 1995) as cited in Le Clus (2008) and the creation of a structure of these daily experiences and beliefs.

Employees are invited to share their understanding, provide a descriptive experience, explain their participation and interaction with their co workers and give a detailed account of how the workplace supports informal learning. A phenomenological approach seeks to answer these questions that describe the experiences of employees as lived. The study aims to describe practises of informal learning in the workplace, explains the effectiveness of informal learning, the social context and the organisational factors that promote informal learning.

The main objective of this approach is to clarify and identify the phenomena based on the experiences as perceived by the employees involved. This involves accumulating data and describing it through qualitative methods such as interviews, discussions and participant observation and expressing data based on the perceptions of the participant. The approach provides a framework for knowledge gained based on employees' insight and interpretation and further describes what drives employees' to engage in effective informal learning and how the organisation can promote informal learning (Le Clus, 2008).

The methods of collecting data, interviews allows for a source of information that describes experiences in the workplace and identifies factors based on perceptions of participants that create depth, can support or challenge policy and procedures of an organisation. To gain the depth, there should be good quality rapport and sense of empathy between the participants and interviewer. The detailed responses derived from the individual situations cannot be used for generalisations. There is a great need for transparency in the phenomenological approach to ensure validity and interpretations of the study should be clear.

When analysing the content of the data, the researcher seeks to find a common thread to respond to how informal learning occurs and why it is important for learning to be effective. The understanding what is stretched further into how and why, it offers the strength to argue, justify and gain support in an organisation to promote effective informal learning (Le Clus, 2008).

3.4 The Qualitative Content Analysis process

The aim of content analysis is to describe the phenomenon in a theoretical form. It is a form of examining the essays, chapters, interviews, stories, oral and visual communiqué of the participants and analysing the responses. It is defined as a logical and objective method of describing the experiences of participants. The responses are coded and condensed into categories that have a similar meaning or pattern (Elo & Kyngas, 2008).

Sekaran and Bougie (2010) explains that content analysis quantifies the qualitative information obtained through methodical analysis of information derived from real life experiences. This may be used in presenting the data for statistical analysis. In qualitative data, the information which is transcribed is codified, the response categories then transformed into concepts or emerging themes, and subjected to appropriate data analysis.

There are two types of content analysis, that is, Inductive and Deductive. With Inductive content analysis, there has been no previous research and it progresses from a specific to the general. Deductive analysis is valuable when the main objective is to test a previous premise under different circumstances or comparing categories at various stages (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). It progresses from the general to the specific. This study used a Deductive Content Analysis to analyse the responses of the interview questions (Burns & Grove, 2005).

Deduction assists with interpreting the meaning of the data and the results thereof. If it was explained that effective informal learning enhances the proficiency of employees in the workplace, and then it can be deduced that to enhance proficiency in the workplace, effective learning must be promoted in the workplace. Based on these deductions, one can draw on and explain the factors that enhance informal learning and the impact of the organisational factors that promote informal learning. The results of these deductions, allow the researcher to make recommendations on how to enhance the effectiveness of learning in the workplace (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010).

Content analysis involves expressing the qualitative data obtained through a systematic approach of analysing the relevant information. The transcribed information is incorporated and categorised. From this categorisation of responses, themes emerge which are subjected to appropriate data analysis (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). Based on examining the responses and repetitions of words or phrases which are highlighted, the researcher can make theoretical deductions of the author of a transcript (Babbie & Mouton, 2008).

Content Analysis provides an understanding of the data by testing theoretical concerns. Analysing the content commences with a problem statement and the research questions to examine. In the study, the focus of the questions is based what needs to be solved from the content. The objective of the content analysis is to convert raw data into data that can be cared for in a methodical approach in order to expand the knowledge (Babbie & Mouton, 2008).

In qualitative data, Sekaran and Bougie (2010) purports that the data is gathered in a story telling form either by interviews or observations or both. In interviews, the responses from the participants is organised to determine the different categories and the degree to which similar responses are expressed by the participants.

Elo and Kyngas (2008) describe content analysis as a research method for replicable and valid deductions from data in their current situation with the main objective of gaining knowledge, depth and presenting the facts and activities. The ultimate goal is to achieve a solid and broad range of descriptions of experiences and the results of the analysis are recorded in the form of categories which leads to concepts or emerging themes.

Qualitative content analysis is the most often used method of analysing because it focuses on analysing the content of the text. A limitation maybe that the findings are based on real life experience of the research participants in a simplified manner without much cross examining of the data.

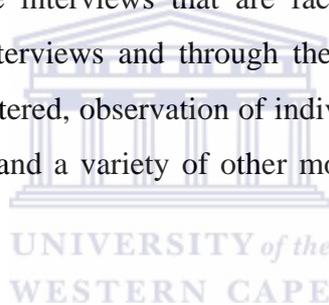
Traditionally, qualitative data is analysed manually. Currently, the availability of computer packages (that are specifically designed for qualitative data and analysis) has significantly reduced the need for manual content analysis. Software analysis programs, (CAQDAS) seek to address the meaning in each line of the initial transcriptions (Henning et al., 2010).

Mayring (2000) points out two computer programmes that have proven its worth in interpreting qualitative content analysis, namely, Atlas/ti and WinMax. In this researcher, a manual approach was adopted there was no use of any software to help the researcher to interpret the data (Henning et al., 2010).

3.5 Method of Data Collection

A cross sectional research design was used to examine the effectiveness of informal learning in the workplace using individuals as the unit of analysis. It may be suggested that the researcher would want to adopt a longitudinal study by examining the employee's experiences at one point and then after the challenges of informal learning has been addressed with management, to examine the effects of the change again.

Data can be collected in a variety of ways, in different settings and from different sources. Data collection methods include interviews that are face to face interviews. Telephonic interviews, computer assisted interviews and through the electronic media: questionnaires that are either personally administered, observation of individuals and events with or without videotaping or audio recording: and a variety of other motivational techniques (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010).



This section is divided into four components: the first component provides information on the research setting, the second component depicts the sample selected for the study, and the third component explains the interview process that was used to collect data. The fourth component describes the validity, reliability and objectivity of the researcher and brings to the forefront the rapport with the participants in the organisation that has been developed over a period of time.

3.5.1 Research setting

This study was conducted in an organisation that was established in 1969 and over the years evolved to become the largest and most specialised cleaning company in South Africa. In 1993, the company was acquired by one of the biggest groups and is part of offering international services and listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. The core business of this organisation is service orientated.

The organisation has a range of specialised services in the different sectors of the economy. There is uncompromising commitment to excellence in service delivery, the foundation of its business strategy, which has seen it become the market leader in its industry. It has a reputation for innovation and continuously seek to deliver high quality service solutions. The key focus is on building lasting business relationships and to attract and retain high quality staff. Managers that are assigned will always be from that client's particular business or industry background. They are expected to understand both the requirements and also the potential pitfalls. The organisation has 11 business categories and management's approach is to view each one of the units as a separate profit centre. Each manager reports monthly, but they have the autonomy to make strategic and financial decisions based on their expertise.

The empowerment initiatives are geared towards skills and development accredited qualifications, On the Job training, management development and succession planning programmes. The Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment is scored at level two by the Empowerment Logic Rating Agency. The organisation highlights the fact that they cannot achieve sustainable economic growth without addressing social and economic imbalances that exist in the country. The role of redressing these imbalances cannot be left to the government and as a major contributor to economic growth and development; the business has a key role to play. According to one of the directors, one of the critical areas of transformation is able to contribute and make a meaningful difference, through job creation and skills development. It is in this light that they commit themselves to continued training, development and creating learning opportunities for staff because they understand the broader impact they have on society.

The industry is all about "Creating sustainable opportunities for all". The core of sustainability lies within a competent, skilled and proficient work force. Proficiency is largely determined by the level of competency, if high it consequently leads to the effectiveness of employees in an organisation.

In this study, the focus is on generating an in depth description that assists with understanding the employees daily experiences, their perception of effectiveness of informal learning and interaction in the organisation. There are six occupational levels in the organisation. Informal learning takes place at each occupational level, however for this study, the participants were chosen from three levels that is non management level, junior management level and middle

management level. These groups were chosen as the operational success of this business is heavily reliant on the efficiency of these levels.

The non management employees consist of the general workers or assistants and team leaders; they are responsible for the direct service delivery of the standard operating principles. In this study, five permanent employees were chosen and invited for an interview.

The junior management in this organisation include supervisors and the core result areas and indicators are Client Satisfaction, Control of Budget, Management of General Assistants and Safety operating procedures. In this study, four full time employees were invited for the interviews.

The middle management in this organisation include contract and operational managers. They would be responsible for managing the junior management occupational level. There were four permanent employees invited to be part of the study.

The research aims to draw from the experiences and perceptions from employee's daily experiences in the workplace, in addition to gain understanding of the relationship between the co workers and the impact on informal learning in the workplace. Gaining and understanding and sharing descriptive in depth analysis will illuminate the factors that enhance the proficiency and promote effective workplace learning.

3.5.2 Sample

Sekaran and Bougie (2010) claim that in order to understand how data can be collected, one first has to give a description of the population, element and then proceed to the sampling. The population refers to the group of employees that was used to conduct the study. Each participant was an element of the study and a register of all these elements forms a population framework. The population of this study are full time employees of the organisation who has knowledge, skill and experience to perform the job functions in the workplace.

Sekaran and Bougie (2010) explain, a sample is a subset of the population that was examined for the purpose of this study. Data was collected from employees in a geographical division of the organisation. Le Clus (2008) purports that in a qualitative research, two to ten

participants are an adequate amount to reach saturation and further to the required amount. In this study, the sample size is 13 employees.

Through purposive sampling, the direct managers identified the participants to be part of the study in the respective occupational levels. It is sometimes necessary to obtain information from specific groups, in this case, in the organisation to gain maximum variation of experiences and perceptions of the effectiveness of informal learning the different occupational levels. Participants were selected because they are exposed to the daily practices of informal learning in the workplace. Consequently; they would provide a meaningful description and share experience of informal learning that can be considered either as enhancing or hindering proficiency in the workplace. The research highlights more the description of the experiences than the organisation itself and the participants are able to describe their experiences of informal learning as they are lived in the workplace (Henning et al., 2010).

Before proceeding with selecting the participants, the Human Resource director of the organisation was approached and authorisation was requested to use the organisation as a research setting for the study. Upon permission granted from the HR director, the researcher consulted with the direct managers of the participants and requested a list of participant's to represent the respective occupational levels. These participants were selected to share their experiences in workplace as they would all be able to describe their everyday informal learning activities.

Table 3.1: The following summary provides the detail of the sample used in the study.

Occupational Level	Age at the time of the interview	Role	Length of Service (in years)	Level of education
Middle Management	50 - 55	Contract Manager	16	Gr. 11
		Operations Manager	10	National Diploma
	35 - 40	Contracts Manager	3	National Diploma
		Training Consultant	13	Gr.10
Junior Management	40 - 44	Supervisor	3	Gr. 10
		Supervisor	7	Gr. 12
	35 - 39	Supervisor	7	Gr. 12
	20 - 29	Supervisor	3	Gr.10
Skilled; Non Management	40 - 44	Team leader	4	Gr.12
		Team Leader	3	Gr.10
	35 - 39	Team Leader	1	Gr.10
	20 - 29	Team Leader	4	Gr.12
		Team Leader	3	Gr.11

Source: Le Clus (2008)

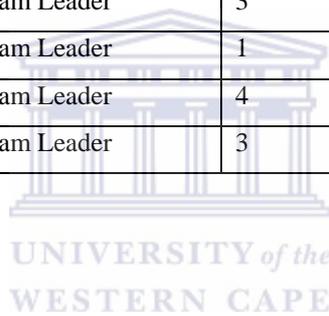
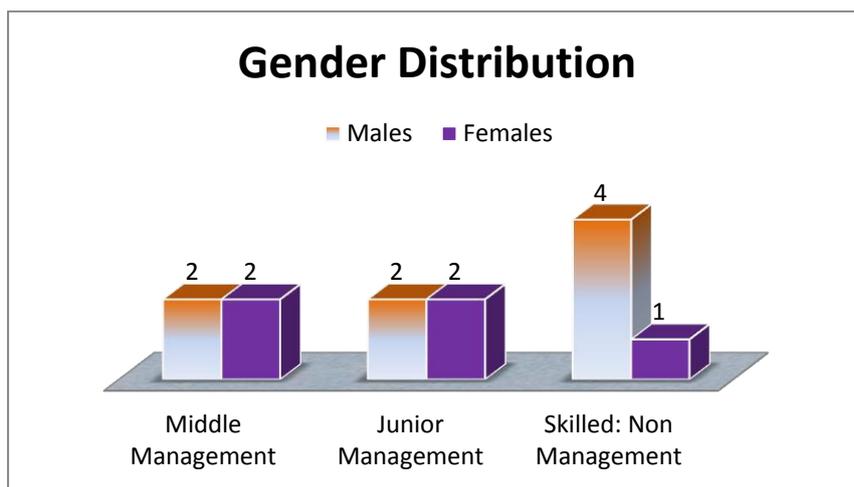


Figure 3.2: Gender Distribution



Confidentiality was expressed and shared with the participants. They were willing and eager to share and describe their experiences of effective informal learning in the workplace for the researcher to proceed with the research. The ethical considerations were taken into account and each participant was informed before the researched continued with a face to face interview.

3.5.3 Interview

Maxwell (2005) postulates that there are two focal points in data collection methods and triangulation of these methods. The selection for the method of data collection depends on the research questions and what will work effectively in the setting to give the researcher the information required. In this research, face to face interview is used as a method of data collection in the work place setting.

Face to Face Interviews

The participants were interviewed face to face and structured interview questions were formulated to collect data for the study. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2010), interviews can either be structured or unstructured. With structured interviews, respondents would answer a list of pre- determined questions formulated by a researcher and it is known from onset of the interview what information is required. A list of predetermined questions was posed to the participants from different occupational levels.

The interview was conducted in the workplace setting in a relaxed and conducive environment. The participants were told that their responses would be recorded and the information was regarded confidential. In the study, the questions focused on three key areas, their perceptions of informal learning and the effectiveness thereof, their interaction with their co workers and the recommendations of factors that would enhance proficiency in the workplace through informal learning. The phenomenological approach is to gain insight and understanding of participant's feelings as it is lived in their workplace, share their experiences and goals. They were free in their responses and willing to answer the open ended questions.

Prior to the interview, participants were informed about the research project, confidentiality and contact details of the researcher. Each interview lasted between 20 to 30 minutes. With

each interview detailed notes were taken. Interview questions were formulated from the key issues identified in the literature review. In order to explore specific research questions, the interview questions were based on examining and describing the effectiveness learning in the workplace (Le Clus, 2008).

In the first set of questions, the participants were encouraged to express their opinions and share their experiences and practises of informal learning. The main objective was to create a comfortable and relaxed atmosphere that enables building a rapport. The second set, was more focused on interrelationships with their co workers and support they give each other. The final set, focused on factors that promote or hinder informal learning in the workplace. The interview questions that were designed can be found in Appendix one.

The interviews were audio recordings with informed consent (Schilling, 2006). The researcher need to ensure that the information gained from respondents is not biased. The transcription of the recordings is noted and written evidence is used to eliminate the possibility of the researcher being biased. Informed consent must be granted at all times, the researcher must be clear whilst informing participants that data is collected for research purposes, this reduces anxiety and suspicion of the consequences that may follow. Unfortunately, anonymity is also not completely observed as the participants may be identified by their voices (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010).

Face to Face interviews help the researcher to build a sincere, credible and a non – judgemental rapport. Participants highlight concerns and actively engage in the interview by giving information and sharing their perceptions and opinions. This allows openness in the relationship between the researcher and participants which provides valuable, in-depth data that helps with achieving the objective of the study. The researcher can rephrase and clarify questions and check for understanding by paraphrasing responses. The non verbal cues is normally the indicators of difficulty in responding to a question, it is evident to the researcher that a participant has a problem with articulation, it then allows the researcher to adapt or further probe if participants struggle to answer questions (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). The researcher is responsible for transparency and need to discuss and clarify each step with the participant upfront (Schilling, 2006).

It is important to mention shortcomings of face to face interviews. The language barriers can be difficult if the responses cannot be expressed or certain phrases not clearly understood. The physical environmental factors can constrain the range of a research study. The researcher must have good interviewing skills especially with the ability to put the participants at ease, to gain in – depth experiences, perceptions and interpret the responses. It is a costly exercise to train interviewers so that they can be aware of being bias and subjective when taking notes or asking leading questions. Some participants regardless of reassurance still feel uneasy about the anonymity of their responses (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). It is highly recommended that pilot sessions of conducting an interview takes place, to prepare the researcher and understand the research questions. The researcher must make provision for how particular interview questions in fact work in practice and can be used to collect quality rich data. A developed and thorough data collection method requires creativity and insight and should not be an automatic programmed translation of research questions into methods (Maxwell, 2005).

The main objective of questioning is to provide a purpose for the content analysis. The questions that would be analysed were as follows: “Explain what is meant by Informal Learning (IL)? What is the difference between Informal Learning and Formal Learning? What are the benefits or advantages of Formal and Informal Learning? With some of the participants, the response was incomplete and further probing was required to gain more information. This is where interest and creativity is essential, as a researcher sometimes also has to paraphrase in order for the respondent to hear their train of thought and elaborate further. The researcher needs to create pause areas in responses, this gives a participant time to reflect and add more meaning to describing the experience (Henning et al., 2010).

It helps the interview process, if a researcher continues probing by asking a participant for more examples, asking them to share their feelings, what would they have done differently, what they could’ve done to make experiences better, how do your co – workers feel about a situation and how did you deal with the situation. These probing questions provide a more truthful, meaningful response and real experience that steers a participant away from what they think the researcher wants to hear. The researcher is empathetic by placing themselves in the situation of the participant. It is in this vain that a researcher must remain objective and unbiased.

Ultimately, real value in the questions of a qualitative study is collecting data of how participants make sense of what has happened, and how this perspective informs their actions, rather than determining precisely what took place (Maxwell, 2005). The participants shared information should be sufficient for systematic and methodical purpose (Babbie & Mouton, 2008).

Schilling (2006) claims that there is no perfect fit of a qualitative research. Maxwell (2005) adds on and postulates that qualitative studies should be dynamic, reflexive approach operating through every phase of the research, in collecting and analysing data, developing and modify an emerging theory, examining and adapting research questions and identifying and addressing validity threats.

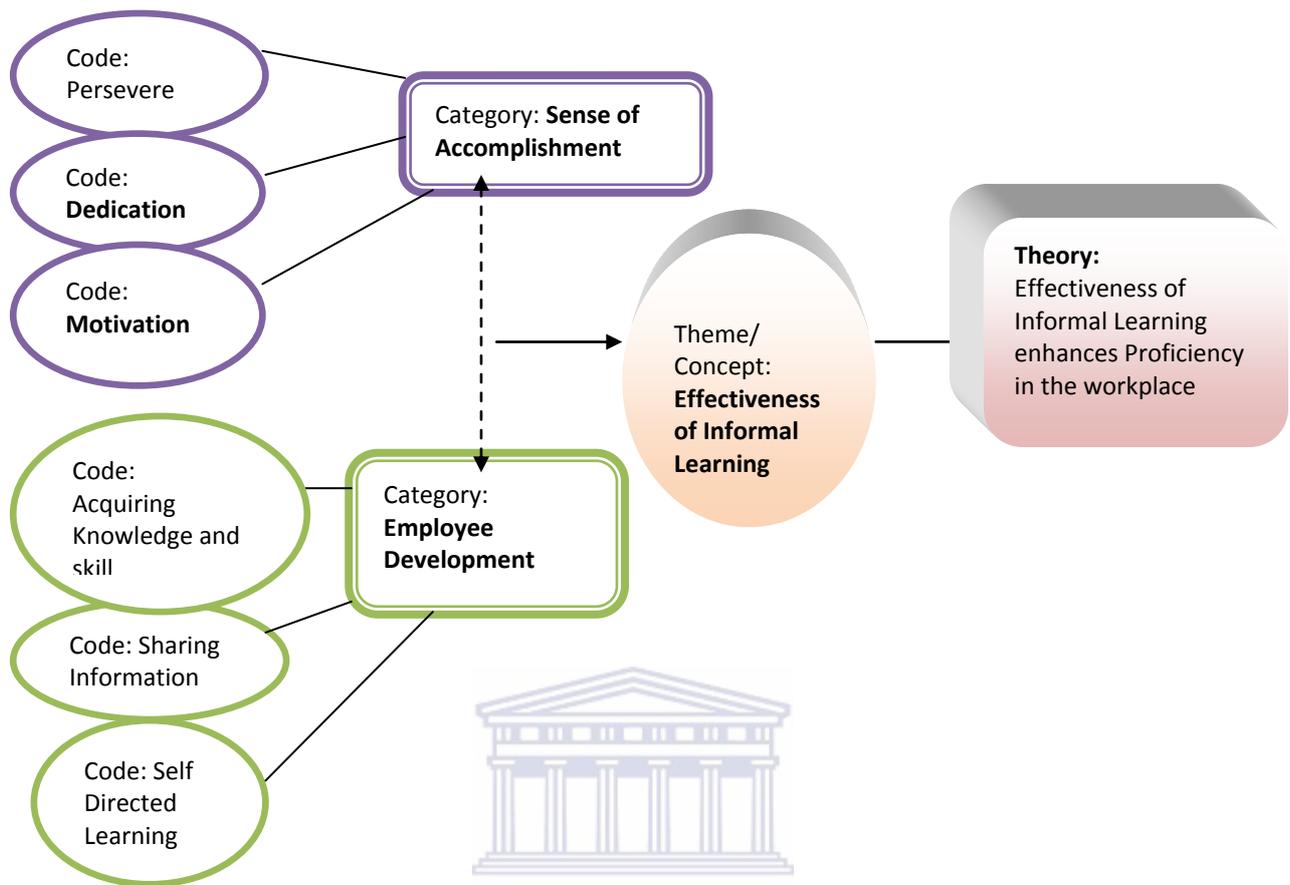
3.6 Data analysis and interpretation

The data gathered in this research study consist of transcripts and were examined and documented carefully and qualitatively analysed. The content is now prepared for analysis, in this process of analysis there are different research mechanisms that facilitate with understanding, strengthening and synthesising data. A number of options are examined to unveil and describe experiences of participants that occur in the study. The conclusion based on interpretation of the results should be objective (Babbie & Mouton, 2008).

3.7 Codifying and categorising the data

A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word that symbolises a salient, essence capturing characteristic describing the content and significance. Coding is a transitional process between data collection and more extensive data analysis. It is here that transcribed data are carefully examined line by line and divided into meaningful units called segments. The process is continued until all the raw data have been segmented and completed with the initial coding. It is above all an interpretative act. Codifying is a process that permits data to be grouped; the systematic order is used to consolidate meaning and explanation into categories (Saldana, 2009).

Figure 3.3: Codifying and Categorising data



Source: A streamlined codes to theory model for Qualitative Inquiry (Saldana, 2009)

Rossmann and Rallis (2003) point out the difference between a category and a theme. A researcher should think of a category as explicit, whereas a theme is a phrase or sentence describing more delicate and implicit processes. A set of themes will emerge from the analysis.

The more preciseness is gained, the more reassurance is gained with capturing the essence of data (Babbie & Mouton, 2008). Once the coded data has been grouped into categories, a pattern emerges. According to Saldana (2009), the pattern characteristics consist of similarities (happening the same way), variation (happening in a predictable manner), frequency (how often or seldom they occur) or correspond (happening in relation to each other).

The qualitative content analysis spiral is a method of transcribing data in 5 different stages and each process is described as a spiral movement that moves in analytic spheres (Schilling, 2006).

Stage 1 – from audio recordings via transcripts to raw data

Stage 2 – from raw data to preliminary code

Stage 3 – preliminary code to Inductive Category

Stage 4 – Inductive category to emerging themes or concepts

Stage 5 – Emerging Themes to Concluded Analysis and interpretation

Henning et al., (2010) illustrate a summary of the 5 stages in a three phase model of content analysis.

Table 3.2: Phase Model of Content Analysis

Phase 1: Orientation to the data	Phase 2: On the way – working the data	Phase 3: Final composition (Verbal)
Reading the data to form an overview and to comprehend the text (within the data)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coding segments for meaning • Categorising the related codes into groups • Seeking relationships between categories to form thematic patterns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing the final themes of the sets of data • Presenting the patterns of the related themes

Source: Henning et al., (2010)

Green (2004) suggests that there are three basic approaches in analysing content:

1. Enumeration which is a process of quantifying the data by counting the frequency of the words.
2. Examining the reoccurrence of words
3. Coding of text segments using a coding scheme

3.8 Researcher Position

As an employee of the organisation, and employed in the Training and Development department, the researcher has a rapport with all the participants. According to Marshall and Rossman (1995) cited in Le Clus (2008), the development of a relationship based on the rapport can contribute to the success of the research and provide rich data.

The benefit of an insider research is the knowledge that a researcher has about organisational culture norms of the work group. Rapport can be used to gain entry to a research setting and balances the power between researcher and a research participant. Rapport is built on an ability to convey empathy, being unbiased and understanding without judgement. It refers to positive concepts such as empathy, friendship, collaboration, trust and loyalty. In the present study, rapport played an important part in gaining access to potential participants and forming relationships based on trust openness (Le Clus, 2008).

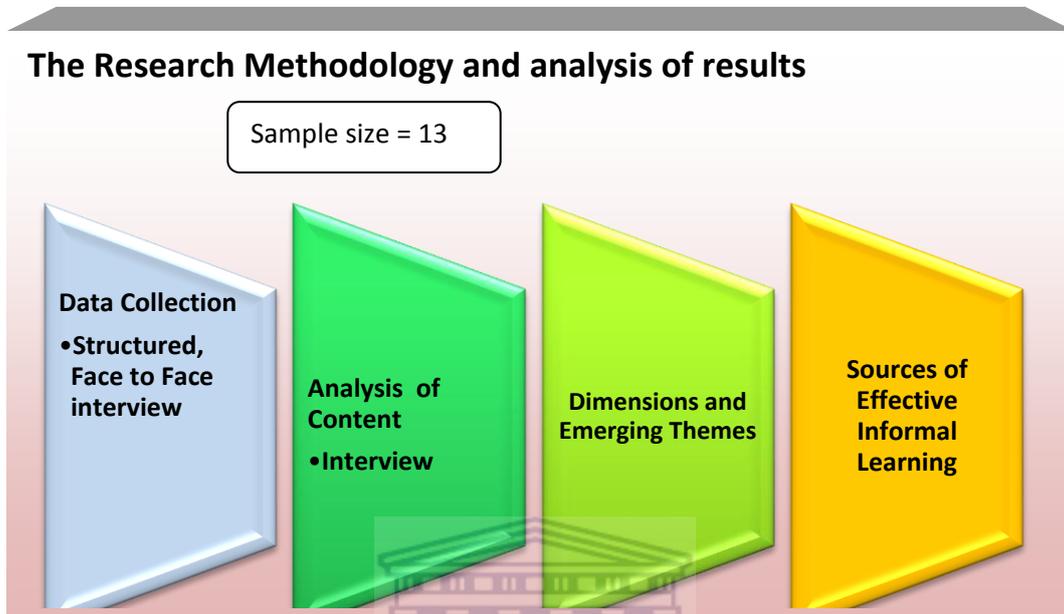
The rapport between the participants and researcher determines the extent of the rich in-depth descriptions and shared daily experiences of participants (Harrison, Mac Gibbon & Morton, 2001). Gaglio, Nelson and King (2006) pointed out that reciprocity is a method used to develop the level of rapport that leads to a good quality research relationship. Both the researcher and research participant may have different perceptions of belief and authority within this relationship that may affect the research process. Corbin and Morse (2003) described the interviews as a method that can be used to effectively overcome such issues because it is more based on daily conversations at the workplace and less challenging than any other data collection methods. Therefore both parties are relatively at ease and have equal in control over what is said.

3.9 Presentation and Interpretation of Results

The aim of qualitative research and the phenomenological researcher is to produce a description of lived experience. In a phenomenological study, data includes information gathered from research participant's and a researcher's personal reflections on the topic. Phenomenology encourages a "thick description" of events and experiences, and how participants' interpret experiences and surroundings. In this study, a phenomenological approach was used to provide a descriptive account of participant's everyday experience of informal learning and participation in workplace activities. In addition, the methodology for this study derived from a conceptual framework outlined in Chapter Two, which is grounded in a socio-cultural perspective. From this perspective, it is assumed that informal learning leads to better participation in workplace activities, however, the relationship between new co workers and established co workers may afford or constrain an informal learning process.

The summary of a Research methodology and analysis of results is depicted in the figure below:

Figure 3.4: The Research Methodology and analysis of results



The research questions were designed to find out how informal learning occurs in the workplace. This includes how and what co workers learn informally and more significantly, to find out whether a workplace, as a complex social system, affords or constrains informal learning. The phenomenological approach seeks to elucidate the experiences of co workers as told by those individuals and to provide an account of what actually happens when everyday activities lead to informal learning. The socio- cultural perspective helps to determine whether these everyday activities that lead to informal learning are afforded or constrained by co-workers.

The phenomenological approach encourages an in depth analysis of how these everyday experiences and participation in the workplace affect informal learning. The presentation of results was mediated by co-workers reflections on their informal learning experiences and participation. In this study, the intention is to present data in a way that will immerse a reader in the phenomenon and provide enough concrete details that allow a reader to identify with the experiences of each participant.

3.10 Data Quality

One of the most significant characteristics of a qualitative research is a comprehensive picture it gives a researcher. In a Qualitative research, the purpose of a method of content analysis channels a researcher into focusing on an in – depth, meaningful and broader understanding of a phenomena. It allows for flexibility in a research and a researcher modifies the research framework to adapt to the interviews. This increases the validity of the findings and there is more control and autonomy in a research process (Babbie & Mouton, 2008).

The benefit of content analysis is cost effective and saving on time. The researcher is not restricted to use multiple research resources or prescribed tools to complete the study. The crucial element is access to data, the data to be codified and categorised. The researcher has an opportunity to always code and recode and recode again if necessary (Babbie & Mouton, 2008).

Content analysis is a practical tool to use as a research technique for examining large quantities of text. It provides objective guiding principles in the coding of the transcripts and allows for conclusions to be drawn from the data. It helps in the coding the text according to systematic and objective rules and in drawing inferences from the data. It is a safe and secure method if the researcher discovered or realised that a portion of the critical information was omitted, or incorrectly coded, the researcher can return to the text and add-on the missing data. By being able to return and have access to the data, it adds more value to the organisational research (Babbie & Mouton, 2008).

Content Analysis provides the theoretical base and a carefully thought out methodology, which provides a study with the defence and rigour it deserves when presenting data and reporting on the findings (Schilling, 2006).

Qualitative research, like all forms of research, must address issues of reliability and validity. The nature of qualitative research suggests that these are difficult to determine as the uniqueness of each participants' experience cannot be generalised. For this reason, Babbie and Mouton (2008), depicts four key principles of objectivity for the qualitative researcher for evaluating the quality of qualitative research as the following: credibility, transferability,

dependability and confirmability. Credibility refers to expressing the confidence one can have in the facts of the realistic findings that can be established by various methods. By two methods of choice were triangulation and member checking. The researcher used member checking as participants were given an opportunity to listen to the audio recordings and confirm that the data collected reflects their informal learning experiences. Furthermore, it was emphasised that the impact and value of good research is not only generated by rigorous data but also by going beyond the data to generate ideas.

To guarantee, credibility, the researcher must adhere to guidelines of a good quality interview. The credibility of a researcher's position as a researcher may have influenced the quality of the study. The researcher is a Training and Development Manager in the organisation. The researcher was particularly attentive to the possibilities of interviewees describing experiences and sharing their perceptions as to what they thought the researcher wanted to hear. The non verbal cues were used as indicators as to when this occurred. If there was an indication, the researcher would probe further for truthful and meaningful responses.

Transferability allows researchers, to apply the findings of the study to their investigations and refers to the likelihood that of what was found in one context by a piece of qualitative research could be applicable to another context. To facilitate transferability, this research presented findings with in depth descriptions of informal learning experience and perceptions by responding to interview questions. Transferability provides other researchers with enough information to review the appropriateness and relevance of applying the result to other settings. The main objective of transferability is to provide researchers with enough information to structure a substantial description and assess the applicability of results to other settings. In this study, the responses of the interviews provided the researcher with a personal account of the shared, current experiences and perceptions as it is lived in the workplace setting (Le Clus, 2008).

Dependability was demonstrated in this chapter and explained as providing documentation of data, methods and decisions of the research process. The key question is raised, as to whether the researcher can depend on the research process. This approach makes it necessary for the researcher to take cognisance of the ever changing context within which the research

occurred, including changes that occurred in the workplace setting, and documenting how and why these changes may have affected the research process (Le Clus, 2008).

Confirmability uses assessment as a means of demonstrating quality. To promote confirmability, all procedures were documented examined and re-examined; this was pursued throughout the study. A data assessment was performed that examined the data collection and analysis and allowed the researcher to examine the potential for bias, subjectivity and misinterpretation. In the research, analytical triangulation and participant feedback was used to ask interviewees to review findings based on a participant responses to the interview questions. The research process also encourages communication validation where confirmability can be insured when additional probing questioning can be followed, once the researcher has re –entered the setting and collected additional data. Another way of ensuring confirmability was to share these interpretations with interviewees of their experiences and using member checking processes in the study. In any research it is necessary to acknowledge techniques that enhance the quality of an analysis; confirmability can replace the need for objectivity in qualitative research. (Le Clus, 2008).

3.11 Ethical consideration in Data Collection

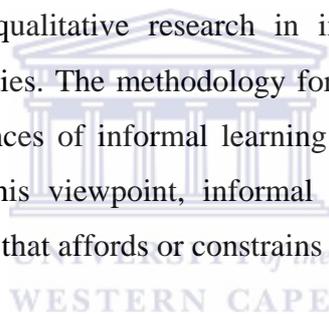
The researcher informed the participants that all data collected was for research process and not for the organisation. Ethics should at all times be considered while the researcher is engaged in conducting the research. The researcher should treat the information provided by the respondent as strictly confidential and protecting the privacy of the participants is of utmost importance. The participants were not required to provide their names and informed consent was provided before the researcher commenced with an interview.

The main objective of the researcher is be sensitive to negative consequences that could occur such as low self esteem, anxious or discomfort in opening and sharing experiences. The researcher uses the code of moral guidelines to conduct the research in a morally acceptable manner. Participants were informed about the study; the sole purpose was for research, what the main objective of the study is, where the data will be collected, how the data will be collected and why the data is important? The participant was informed that the responses to questions will be recorded, if they should experience discomfort at any point, they are free to end the interview.

The data collected shall not be misused or misrepresented by the researcher; it should be used in accordance with the study. In the research, acknowledgement will be given to those that have made a contribution. Research Plagiarism, misrepresentation and bias of all information used is strictly forbidden. Information will be highlighted according to the existence.

3.12 Conclusion

This chapter described the qualitative approach adopted in this study and outlined the research approach, data collection methods were discussed, presentation and interpretation of results were provided and emphasis was placed on data quality as a critical component of the research methodology. As emphasised in this chapter, a phenomenological approach in qualitative research seeks to understand and describe the phenomena through how and why they are perceived by the participant. Phenomenological research seeks to understand and give meaning to subjective experience and move beyond theories. The conceptual framework for this study illustrates how qualitative research in informal learning leads to better participation in workplace activities. The methodology for this study was influenced by the perceptions of learning, experiences of informal learning in the workplace and interaction between co - workers. From this viewpoint, informal learning in a workplace can be conceptualised as a social system that affords or constrains informal learning opportunities.



Chapter 4: Presentation of Results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses the perception and experiences of the participant's thoughts and actions. A conceptual understanding of informal learning forms the basis for exploring effectiveness of informal learning. By analysing, the description of participant's daily experiences, the researcher can identify the elements that enhance and restrain the effectiveness of informal learning. These elements are related to a number of interactions of work, social and cultural practises. The results of the study are aimed at enhancing proficiency of employees through the effectiveness of informal learning.

In representing the results, significant emerging themes and sub-themes are illustrated based on perceptions, shared experiences of socio cultural aspects and descriptions of the workplace environment. The chapter further provides an overview of the most important themes and insights which emerged from interviews.

The effectiveness of informal learning can be influenced by perceptions of employees and socio cultural structures. In this chapter, perceptions of participants and sociocultural structures are used to present how informal learning takes place. The key themes that emerged from the data are presented through interviews. Each interview is analysed based on descriptions of daily experiences and participation. A number of probing questions to each of the interview questions helped the researcher to evoke responses that could develop into significant emerging themes.

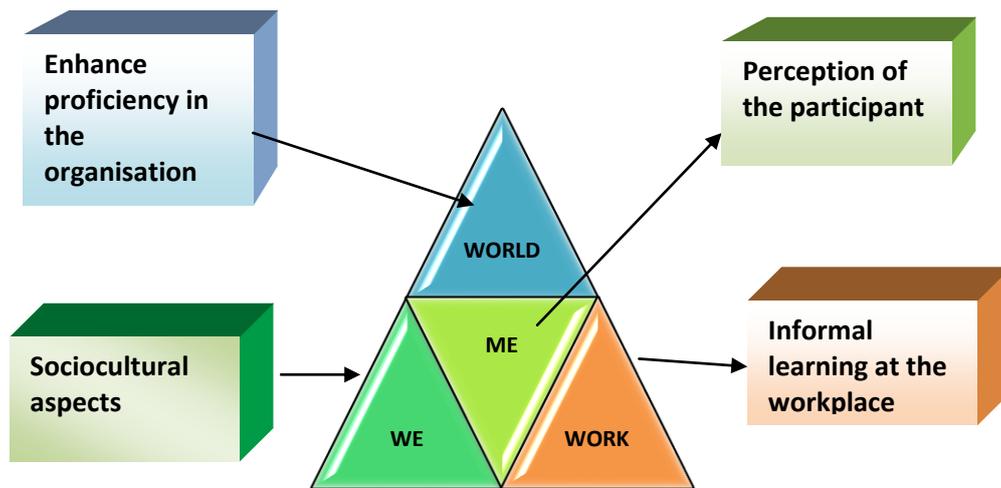
When the researcher asked "How effective do you think Informal learning is in the workplace?" and the response "very effective" the researcher rephrased the question to clarify and probed further by asking the respondent to give the individual's account of what they think makes informal learning effective in the organisation. Emphasis was placed on Informal learning in this organisation through the entire interview and applied to all questions from there on.

By taking a phenomenological approach, the themes illustrate a structure and describe experiences of the phenomenon as conveyed by the participants. In the interviews, certain emotions were expressed and this allowed the researcher to gain a more in-depth understanding of what employees experience and how they live and interpret everyday workplace activities. Several main themes emerged during the analysis which include amongst others, employee development, workplace structures, taking ownership, induction, acknowledgement and recognition. Subthemes that have emerged have been placed into context based on the responses from participants.

The interview questions were structured and divided into three sections. The first section included questions that focus on perceptions of participants and their understanding of effective learning. The second section includes questions that explore sociocultural constructs and the last section, examines factors that influence informal workplace learning. The main objective of this approach is to allow participants to create a pattern of thinking that would evoke responses that will provide a rich source of information that would describe their daily experiences.

The results of the interview can be illustrated by using a “World of Work” model; this model depicts how each dimension fits into each other and plays a pivotal part in the effectiveness of informal learning. The “ME” depicts the perception of the individual, the “WE”, sociocultural aspects that influences Informal learning, “WORK”, factors that influence learning and “WORLD” enhancing proficiency in the organisation.

Figure 4.1: World of Work



4.2 Perception of Effective informal learning in the workplace

It is important to assess the level of understanding to gain insightful information from the participants. They were asked to share what they understood and perceived as the concept of informal learning.

4.2.1 Dimensions and themes emerging from describing the concept of informal learning are interactive learning techniques and learning structures

Participant's best described informal learning by referring to informal learning activities when practising informal learning in the following way. Participant 1 says: "Informal learning is for instance a DIY project look on the internet or DIY pamphlet. You do it more in a practical way." Informal learning takes place by observation and demonstration, participant 2: "Take note of what you doing... you know how to go about doing it the next time... and this is the way to go". Participant 3: "It's like you said teaching yourself to learn out of what you are doing and then next time... way to go and how to start. We learn how to use the chemical, how to mix it ... and do some training... can show the other we take like a team leader Informal learning is basically a show and tell". Participant 6: "Something that is not taught your perception of something that is done and you use it to your own benefit".

Informal learning has been described as learning by sharing information, participant 9: "The information that I have we can share ... something like a debate, debate sharing your views, so that we can communicate ideas". Participant 11: "When you learn something...you must

learn information. You have to research the information and get the answers yourself...on site and get all your information on a specific site”.

The participants described the concept of learning by distinguishing informal and formal learning structures. The formal learning is predominantly theory and informal learning, regarded as practical. The formal learning settings were classroom based and more formal seating with assessments in place to determine the level of competency.

Furthermore, in formal learning, employee development is seen in a different light, it is more centred on task analysis. In contrast, in informal learning, the participants describe employee development as being interactive, practical and natural, the manager is more involved.

Participant 2: “Formal learning is what you learn but people are teaching or whatever that person is teaching you”. Participant 6: “Formal learning with writing you having a class and you study and sit down, learn that and you will test me on that”. Participant 7: “Classroom training. Formal is like sitting around a table in a classroom. Formal learning with writing you having a task and you study and sit down, learn that and you will test me on that”. Participant 9:” ...on my mind, that I learned, God gave to me to teach the others”.

Participant 10: “Formal learning will be academic, sitting in a classroom listening to a lecture, doing presentations, giving paperwork, you involved”. Participant 11: “Joe was my supervisor and then he taught me how to work with the staff, how to tackle the staff, how to tackle the staff and the clients”.

Taking the detail description of understanding of what is meant by informal learning and key differences between the two, participants could give an account of the benefits of informal learning and how it enhances proficiency in the workplace.

4.2.2 Preferred practise of Informal learning: by solving problems through actions and adapting informal learning techniques

This question illustrated different types of practises of informal learning which leads to effective learning. In these interviews, co workers reported how practises of informal learning could enhance working conditions. Ultimately, it is about using the most effective and

efficient method to practise informal learning in the workplace, participant 10 points out: “have the job done quicker and the people trained, the people with informal...while something is happening”. This is supported by participant 7: “Like on my own, they must work as a team work. Let me say, I’ve got 4 ladies, like this, I ask them nicely you must work faster because the client coming in the guest. The two girls will start there and meet other 2 on the other side. That means 15mins. Quickly you go on lunch, you come back and continue”.

Participants expressed their most preferred method of practise for informal learning as solving problems through actions. Participants indicated that using this practise allowed them to deal with a situation by active participation where they would gain firsthand knowledge and skill in performing a task at work. Solving problems through actions created opportunities for exploration, trying and testing different methods of learning by trial and error. Participant 2 says: “Well mostly when I’m given a task, I’m just asking to do it and I use my own discretion, I just think before I start with my job and see what will be the best way. I go about and if I see things are not done right, I choose a different tactic to do it...yeh”. This learning technique provides the opportunity for taking initiative and sharing best practice with both new employees and existing employees.

Solving problems through actions assisted with understanding how to resolve issues, knowing what questions to ask to complete the task. Furthermore, observation and demonstration are connecting techniques that initiates spontaneity, as one of the participants mentioned it creates a more “natural” approach to performing a task. The end result is positive and rewarding as groups are more interactive and goal oriented. Participant’s expressed their willingness to learn new knowledge and acquire skills that would enhance their jobs by observing more experienced co-workers and then demonstrating. It was interesting and insightful to note that attending training programs was also listed as important as demonstrations and observations.

The following table presents a summary of how participants rated and indicated the preferred practise of informal learning in the workplace.

Table 4.1: Rating of preferred practise of Informal learning

Themes emerging	Frequency	Evidence to support the emerging theme
Solving problems through action	5	I go about and if I see things are not done right, I choose a different tactic to do it
Demonstration and Observation of others	2	“Observation, interaction, and show and tell you have to watch very closely the person that is teaching you.” “Show staff member and tell him how would he, understand or show me you can do it.” It’s like what we call “steal with the eye”.
Learning through Trial and Error	3	I use my own discretion, I think before I start with my job and see what will be the best way.
Search the web, research	0	
Read professional magazines	0	
Talk with other people, or via email	1	“The information that I have we can share it, begin something like a debate, debate sharing your views, so that we can communicate ideas.”
Attend a training programme	2	“In a training centre, for me it is a plus and you can do a presentation.” Formal learning will be academic, sitting in a classroom listening to a lecture, doing presentations, giving paperwork, you involved.
Other methods, Describe	listening and sharing options	

These practises demonstrated the reciprocity occurring where interdependence exists between employees in how informal learning occurs and the opportunities they are presented with in their daily actions.

Talking with other people based on evidence also featured as a learning practise by talking employees are communicating and sharing information. Research and reading magazines did not feature as a tool used for practising learning.

Participants focused on adapting learning techniques to the area of work and task required as pointed out by Participant 1: “Adjust and look at ways and means of being more effective informally, by trial and error”. By observation and demonstration, Participant 3: “There is so much of; I didn’t know about floors, I learned about floors, strip floors and that to communicate with the client and always getting the job done. Learning is good to me, it’s too much, I get it step by step to go up”. Participant 11: “I am eager to learn new things, I prefer learning practically”. Participant 12: “I can say from the start, if I don’t know this thing that you doing, I like to watch first how you going to make it, to check it. It doesn’t matter, maybe

go back to school, I like to see things in order to do, especially when it comes to admin stuff. I like to sit and see what you do on your screen, don't give me a book and tell me, hell no. I look and need to see for myself". Based on the responses and the examples listed, action learning was the predominant method of practising informal learning and acquiring new skills. Action learning relies on the ability of the employees to set challenges and support each other. It enables other employees to question, support and challenge each other. The subsequent result is an increase in employee's skills in building and maintaining relationships and in dealing with the complexities, enabling them to operate with confidence and agility.

4.2.3 Informal learning is beneficial to the workplace and enhances proficiency, themes emerging are: Taking ownership, employee engagement, Information sharing, self directed, capability, giving recognition, transfer of knowledge and skill

The effectiveness of Informal learning is grounded in employees that take ownership of their learning. This question wanted participants to share and express their views on how informal learning can be beneficial, participant 1 point out: "you do it yourself". It's an experience...On the job training is better". Participant 2 says: "What you benefit ..., you experience what you were doing now stays in your head... I've done it myself so next time I know how to go about it and people teach you something then you put that into an exercise then afterwards you can say well now I know how to do it and how to go about doing it". In response to probing employee engagement, participants shared very clear descriptions and daily experiences. Participant 9: "Show and tell my view of my situation... I show him to... And he also shows me. He learns from me and I learn from him. I show the people, it is good when you talk". Participant 10: "I've done it myself so next time I know how to go about it I understood the pressure first, so I understood the job first before the academic. I was trained in service". Participant 12: "knowing the area; start knowing the client and that makes it a plus for someone working on site".

Understanding the impact of the effectiveness of informal learning, employees are willing to share information, ideas and take ownership of creating a more conducive learning environment at work. Participant 6: "the workers are doing the job, like can I make an example. To sweep water away, the workers tell me, you giving me hard broom, it's difficult to push; it works on our arms softer broom is easier to push water away and out of the

crevices. Changing to a softer broom made the job quicker for the staff”. This include, participant 4: “I just think if someone learns something on the street or wherever... I’m teaching myself or learn from others”.

Through taking ownership, employee engagement and sharing information, personal development could take place. Informal learning creates the opportunities to perform the task and boosts personal development, employees can achieve their goals and it boosts their confidence. The sense of accomplishment raises the level of their self esteem and self directed learning increases. Participant’s responses are reflected in the following quote, participant 1 says: “Informally I can do anything. I just read up the actual settings of the job”. Participant 2: On most things I teach myself, I like challenges. I’m asking for information on how to do the work but I like to test it on my own, so that I can have a grip of it and how to do it... yah”.

This is supported by participant 10: “It actually has influenced that I can see a staff member that would know thereafter, I don’t have to go back and show them again, they would know what to do next”. They enjoy performing the task and the practise of gaining the knowledge and skill, it gives them the confidence to ask if they don’t understand, they enjoy what they doing, and there is no fear of embarrassment, it creates a culture of learning. Employees are eager and determined”. Participant 4: “I call him lots of times. I eventually get it in my mind”. Participant 8: “Helping with the standards and making a difference.” Participant 9: “It helped, now at the end of the day, I’m still using it. It makes me perfect and sometimes if I am alone, I also train it and how to do and know it”. Participant 11: “I am one of the good supervisors here, yeh the mentorship”.

When employees are comfortable with using an approach that is empowering, and they can see results, it enhances their capabilities, subsequently, levels of support is stronger amongst each other and from management. Everyone is interacting and participating by working towards a common goal, increasing productivity. Participant 13: “confirms and says: Share communication and share your skill, because some people come and don’t know what the cleaning is all about; you have to share your skills”. Participant 6: “I see how the supervisors do it, You adopt different types of learning as you train the staff, different training to different staff members because you know their personalities, they can understand a bit of what you saying then you can go the theory way or a staff member that doesn’t know that much so I’m

going to say, show him, not to say that people are stupid but you get different types of people”.

Being supportive and giving recognition becomes part of a value system at work. Participant 5 confirms and says: “I observe whatever he does his happy with the job and I’m happy, I’ll give him a tap on the shoulder kind of reward, you do it by merit system”. Participant 10: “merits you qualify for it will push people to go further, a qualification or just a promotion”. By giving recognition, employees are motivated, participant 3 says: “I enjoy myself; I motivate myself to get things done. Regardless of management the employees are motivated to help each other, participant 8: they just put the person there, they don’t observe the person, not everybody can clean, I also train it and how to do and know it”.

With transfer of knowledge and skill participants illuminated the benefit by of informal learning, an example “What you benefit out of that is, I will answer like this, you experience what you were doing now stays in your head. I’ve done it myself so next time I know how to go about it and people teach you something then you put that into an exercise then afterwards you can say well now I know how to do it and how to go about doing it.”

4.2.4 Reflection and feedback of negative impressions of both formal and informal learning. The themes that emerged were financial and time constraints, metacognitive abilities and qualification and recognition.

In the interview, the participants were asked to share their negative impressions of both informal and formal learning. The question was posed, more to gain insight as to negative viewpoints of learning. The main objective was to allow participants freedom of sharing their thoughts and feelings and not only to talk about strengths but also to acknowledge the areas of development. It is within these areas of development that opportunities can be created for an organisation to action interventions to address and resolve issues.

The metacognitive abilities are a key factor in learning if an employee is challenged by their cognitive abilities; their level of comprehension could take longer than the team, which could be frustrating for all parties. Participants could take longer to understand what is expected from them due to language barriers, cultural diversity and learning styles. With informal learning the best method of performing a task might not be the first choice hence the

employee need to practice more and explore other options. The transfer of formal learning could be a tedious process and not that easily transferable as it could be difficult to communicate. Participant 10: “Informal learning, you don’t always have the time to point out the mistakes to other people understand what is going on. Some people it takes longer and not just a show and tell, it a show – tell –show- tell, to keep on coaching”.

Informal learning required time to practise the new skills and that was not always available. Employees are conditioned by “Time is money”; learning had to take place in the shortest duration and yet had to feature maximum results. The time constraints lead to compromising quality. It is therefore imperative that the orientation of the new employee or introduction of new knowledge and technology is thoroughly planned.

Furthermore, the financial constraints, participants expressed their negative impressions of both informal and formal learning, participant 1: “Informal is material wastage and if a mistake and start all over again”. Participant 4: “Don’t like to sit in a classroom go for the easier one which is informal learning.” . Formal training is it can become boring, tedious and stressful”. Participant 12 says: “Informal learning..., where people don’t take it seriously and they can injure themselves; I would say they neglect certain standards. Formal: people tend to talk together in training, classroom, they start losing interest where someone do something wrong some become bored in the session”.

Qualification and Recognition also emerged as a theme was mentioned as a negative attribute of informal learning. More value is attached to formal learning and it appears that receiving certificates validates the knowledge and skill required to perform the task, employees feel more empowered. There are employees that enjoy a controlled structure; they feel that they receive more recognition when they are chosen to be part of a training session. Participant 3: “People teach you something then you put that into an exercise. I’m part of the part of the company; the Supervisor is giving me training, writing, when you having a class and you study ... more knowledge”. Participant 11: “you don’t get a certificate or what you call recognition after...informal learning for everything you know”.

4.3 Socio cultural constructs of informal learning in the workplace

In the previous section, much emphasis was placed on perceptions of participants in sharing their understanding and expressing their view points on informal learning and formal learning in the workplace. In this section, the focus will be on interaction amongst employees.

4.3.1 Sharing descriptions of the people and examining their relationships, themes emerging are socio-cultural relationships, level of empathy, diversity and professionalism

Informal learning can be highly effective if interaction takes place between co-workers. Thus positive sociocultural relationships are a sound base for the Group Dynamics. It fosters a positive working environment. In most cases, participants feel they can reciprocate the knowledge and skill that they have acquired and pass to others who are now part of their team.

The social processes occurring between employees and the existing work group were illustrated and showed how learning opportunities can be created through participation. Participants value a supportive and cooperative work environment, Participant 1: “Assist each other; many hands make light work, you not totally on an island. Your knowledge... it’s not like you know everything”. Participant 2: “Uhhh, there is one thing that I can say about the people I work with, there is one or two that is trying to be difficult, but most of them listen to what I have to say. They know I can do the job, most of them prefer to work with me. There are always good results at the end so I would say I get along quite fine”.

When co-workers take responsibility to facilitate learning in their team especially with new employees, it creates a productive and interactive workplace environment. This is pointed out by the participants. Participant 9:” I can describe myself as good and they good to see me and they helping each other, doing the same, we show others what they must do”. Participant 11: “Working as a team, everything we do, we do as a team”.

Furthermore, it reinforces values and norms of the workplace, Participant 5: “For me, they are like a family because most of the time I’m here. Being reliable and honest”., Participant

4: “Reliable doing their jobs, they very honest, sometimes they are childish but I can mention everyone by name and try to say which character they’ve got”.

Encouragement and support from the manager, participant 2 says: “ I like to the choose the hardworking type to work with, well these few guys that help to get the job done, they have seen out of past experience, we get the results”. Participant 6: “immediately when I took on more responsibility, I relied on Richard to show me things and guide me and correct me, what haven’t I done, You didn’t try this and eventually I promoted to my own site, he still then mentored me on how to get the staff to respect you because they know you coming to a site at supervisor level. If it wasn’t for him I would not have been there”. Participant 4: “I always try and am very professional with them not stiff”.

Point of origin for learning is the level of empathy; it reinforces intergroup relationships and creates awareness to diversity. Participant 5 says: “For Me, they are like a family because most of the time I’m here”. Participant 10: “Working as a team, everything we do, we do as a team. In a work sense, words that come to mind are hardworking, committed. Commits to what they doing, maybe sometimes, compassionate and caring”. Participant 3: “Some of them, how can you say, they can work for you but it’s not only about working, you must always want to have a chat with them that day, so if you know your staff member has a problem, you can make a joke, you speak to her and she is doing your work”. It provides the platform for employees to become familiar with the job and the dynamics of the team.

Sociocultural awareness must be part of informal learning, participant 6 says: “Vast cultures, take consideration to all of those especially the older ones they don’t want to learn, younger ones also want to learn but they want to add their own. I would generally describe them as my family”. In some instances, participant 8:” My relationship with them is not so good, because I don’t want to be here. It provides me with a job, because they don’t respect themselves that is why I don’t want to be with them”. The effectiveness of informal learning is dependent on the positive interaction and participation of employees.

Being respectful and courteous is considered very important, it fosters close relationships between co-workers and there is a mutual understanding what are accepted behaviour and manner in which it is suppose to be conducted. Participant 8 confirms and says: “Sometimes they full of different moods, they do it and always willing to if I ask them to do something.

They just in the job because they have to be here. I tell them if you want people to respect you as a cleaner who is going to clean this place for them, you don't care and don't feel how you do it. They going to think that's how you clean your house. Sometimes they go and come back as the same person".

Participant 9: "They not the same, some of the ladies when you work with the ladies, talk nicely, please this things are supposed to be done like this. You are doing wrong things. Some of them from home; they've got that habit, if I'm here in this office. It must be nice and clean then you can see the person, you only show them, and then you thank them very much, you understand".

Maintaining a level of professionalism is pointed out by participants as an important feature in promoting informal learning, participant 10: "I think we should have a balanced relationship that we know when it's time to work and when play. So, I think that I can describe it as balanced, that goes for when I'm managing and when I am being managed, it's a perfect balance; you have to keep the balance". Participant 7: "I must make a good relationship, because I need help with a good job. I don't need a bad result".

4.3.2 Settling in at an organisation can be uncomplicated or overwhelming for a new employee. Themes emerging are workplace structures and Personnel structures.

The social processes occurring between employees and existing work group were illustrated and showed how learning opportunities can be created through participation. Orientation of new employees should not be facilitated for mandatory reasons but rather to facilitate it as a process of promoting a workplace environment conducive to learning from each other.

Based on the participant's response, from the thirteen participants, 9 had no difficulties settling in and 4 had difficulties settling in. From the question posed, did you experience difficulties fitting in? Nine out the thirteen participants provided strong evidence that they did not experience difficulty fitting in.

The role of the co workers and working environment is important as has an influence on making new employees feel comfortable in a group. During a process of settling in

employees learn new work procedures and technical skills, including the social knowledge that lead to successful integration into the team.

A summary of the participant’s response in sharing their experiences with fitting in when they started in their workplace is displayed as follows:

Table 4.2: Sharing experiences

Response	Frequency	Evidence
No difficulties	9	<p>“No, I didn’t. I was working with Prestige before”.</p> <p>“No, I fit in easily”</p> <p>“No, not really. I was just quiet and the talking to everybody but not unnecessary stuff. I like to be on my own.”</p> <p>“No difficulties, I had hotel experience.”</p> <p>“As a team leader, I do have the days that they told Nomolady be strong. There’s nothing wrong to be a supervisor be strong. We know, we work with you be strong.”</p> <p>“No, not really, I was already working – the support came from us.”</p> <p>“I didn’t feel difficulty, I told myself, I want to learn, what this person is doing, if he goes on pension, I must show the other.”</p> <p>“No difficulties”</p> <p>“No difficulties”</p>
Difficulties	4	<p>“I had difficulties fitting in not like the new guys”</p> <p>“At first, yes. I had trouble distancing myself from the cleaner manners; you know you had to do things in a certain way. You giving orders instead of taking orders, you had to change your mind set on how to think.”</p> <p>“Yes – The experience I knew nothing about the industry. So to me a mop was a mop, there was no formal introduction to the whole thing given. I was basically employed to manage. So I had to use what I knew and start managing it. I started the cleaning process afterwards. “</p> <p>“Only when I over to operations, I was given the position and never given training, it was swim or die. I died half way but I eventually reached the surface, it was a bit difficult for me it was hell but I’m glad I’ve been there for what I know today.”</p>

The responses to “No difficulties” are validated by having past experience, their determination in taking ownership and willing to fit and the support from a team, this reduced difficulties of fitting in.. The difficulties expressed by participants are related to stress and anxiety. In an induction process of new employees there should be a co worker adjustment process whereby the new employee is appointed a coach to assist with difficulties in learning knowledge, acquiring skills and understanding sociocultural process.

When starting at in a new team, participants reported being faced with a challenge of learning the Workplace practises and acquiring social skills that were necessary for a successful acceptance by existing team members. They reported importance of communicating how a

job must be done and norms and values of a team. This is confirmed by participant 10: “Introductions to the people and premises you working on. Introduction to the pros and cons as in health and safety of the premises, the do’s and don’ts is of great importance. I believe in drawing it out and give them a week or two...Uhhh and the start introducing the job slowly not just throwing everything at them, they run away and don’t want to be there”.

Participant 1: “I had a slight knowledge of the work as a contracts manager, supervisor, I had the support of management. But when I was in operations, it was just trial and error”.

Participant 7: “When I start working here, I got the training. I started as a cleaner, the store lady and then the team leader”.

Participant 5: “No, I started with Prestige in hotels and then my Op’s manager brought me here. I know what to do, take it from here”.

Participant 8: “No, I just started working. I came from an interview and just came to do deep cleaning and from there I sit and wait everyday if the permanents don’t come to work then I fill in. I went to Life Science and became permanent”.

Personnel structures emerged as a critical element in co workers assistance with settling in, participants shared their different experiences, participant 4: “Tanya helped me. Every time, I needed to know I went to Tanya but I think I was very shy when I started here. I could communicate with other people”.

Participant 2: “Most of the things that was happening, I did know. Quite a few things I couldn’t do so the guys already here teach me how to do it. Yes, the other guys were teaching me because I was not a cleaner before, so then working with them”.

Participant 6 says: “Yes, I was at the stadium and I sort comfort out in my few staff members that became my friends, immediately when I tool on more responsibility, I relied on Richard to show me things and guide me and correct me”.

Participant 5: “No, I started with Prestige in hotels and then my Op’s manager brought me here. I know what to do, take it from here”.

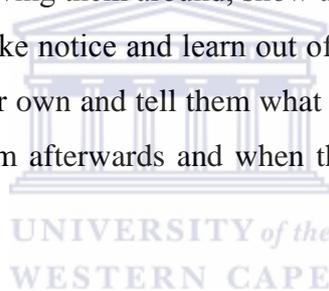
Participant 9: “Everyone, they give each other a chance. He shows me how to clean here and do this where must I start and where must I end and the other one is done with me always come and check how far I am. It just happen no one put it together”.

Participant 13: “They help me my colleagues, the one I start with them, and they already here in Prestige, they make sure, and they know what I’m doing”.

4.3.3 Working with new people, sharing information and kind of information is the foundation for a good working relationship; themes emerging are: Work structures and Social structures

When entering as new employees, they are faced with learning the technical knowledge and familiarising themselves with a sociocultural process, paying particular attention to the norms and values is vital. Understanding these norms and values could facilitate acceptance of the co workers and they could share knowledge and skills.

The responses to this question illustrate how a new employee's integration into a new work group creates informal learning opportunities by that employee's willingness to learn. Work structures must be in place, it is important to clarify scope of work and indicators that would be used to measure the results in an Induction process. This is confirmed by participant 2: "If new people, I'm given a task showing them around, show them how it is done effectively and quickly and in most cases they take notice and learn out of that whenever I'm given a task, I take them and leave them on their own and tell them what to do and then I give them time to do it and I like check up on them afterwards and when the job is done, I give them credit afterwards."



Participant 4: "I like to give them a work schedule of the building and if there is something new they need to know. The first 3 days, I work with them; they get to find themselves in the building until it's time for me to leave". Participant 5: "I will take her and tell her what are my name and the company's regulations. The name of the managers and what the company expect from her. By asking questions, what they do. If there are new rules I'll read and if they don't understand I'll ask". Participant 1: "I share all the information, the sooner the person, I bring them up to guard, and the sooner I can get onto my own work".

Participants pointed out that understanding the scope of work and the pressure of service delivery created a level of empathy and understanding of the vulnerability of new employees. Participants expressed the significance of the Social process by focusing on Co-Worker support, participant 4: "I like to make them feel welcome when I have someone new, I like to introduce them and treat them right and start talking to them". Participant 3: "I find it easy to share information. Anybody will always ask you, sometimes I say, just keep your belongings on you, like your money and then they come and ask you where they must work, it's better

for me to show them everything and where they need to work and what the company wants them to do”. This approach provides co-workers with a sense of security and a feeling of belonging. Employees feel that a genuine interest in their well being is displayed and feel committed to the process of learning.

Participant 6: “It is easy to work with someone who want to learn and than those that don’t want to and do their own thing. Yes, I’m comfortable sharing information, because it’s like I can teach this person what I have learnt where they how can I say”. “Participant 10: “Yes, I do, work related information. I try not to dwell into personal information. I believe it becomes a problem. People feel that they can come to you with everything, I know they can but not with everything. Open door policy, I’m not the type of person that will shun you away, you are welcome to come and sit down and tell me that you not feeling comfortable, that’s policy no. 1”.

These responses illustrate how co worker interaction and participation facilitated opportunities for informal learning that would to lead to better participation in work group tasks. Participant 7 says: “People feel that they can come to you with everything, I know they can but not with everything. I do share, sometime people bring personal information from home then I have to show them. I have to show them to work nicely. Some woman, it’s normally with her children, and then they’ll come to me. Sometimes I’ll say let’s pray God knows, if you ask God everything will happen. When we here at work, you must act as if there’s nothing wrong. I introduce myself from there I take them to the floor; I show them the non smoking area and areas that she will be. What to do there? Then I ask them nicely what time you want to take lunch, some of them, they never work these 11 hours. They feel free, Nomolady 11 – 12. Good communication”.

This suggests that management support plays an integral part in helping a new co worker in facilitating technical and social knowledge that is necessary to perform the job well. Managers facilitate interaction through introducing a new employee to the rest of a team and encouraging participation. The socialisation process reduces the level of stress, co workers are willing to share knowledge and skills with new, and knowledge is easily transferred from existing employees to the new. It is pointed out by participant 11: “I share information with them, even of me. I understand he maybe doesn’t know how to do it and myself it is still happening to me. I can’t just leave him or he doesn’t know how to clean here. New

employees become are comfortable with understanding and accepting the norms and values of the group”.

Participant 11: “Yes, I do share the information for example, like what when you clean the tables department, one must go there by security, that kind of information you must tell. More friendly so that they can see that”. Participant 12: “I share everything, I feel it’s a challenge what is this person all about, sometimes you think when they come in they don’t know the business, but you can learn from them. I would only share my business information. If I’ve got the knowledge, I will share it”. Positive interaction and participation between co-workers was found to enable successful integration into a work group and enhance effectiveness and transfer of learning. Learning in this situation is reciprocal and presents an opportunity for new and existing worker to share their knowledge.

However, if the group dynamics was different and a social process was not forthcoming, there would be adverse effects for informal learning and the induction process would be a challenge, the working environment would lack support to offer new employees.

4.3.4 It was interesting to note the descriptions of the participants based on learning new skills and the preferred method of learning. The emerging themes are adapting learning techniques, research and co worker support.

Learning new information can be empowering. Participants shared their experiences and pointed out, they engaged in informal learning by interacting with employees and people with similar interest and attempting the new tasks. Learning occurred through a need to enquire and explore new activities.

The response to the interviews portrays the reciprocity between co – workers and a work environment that enables positive informal learning experiences to occur. Informal learning occurs by “trial and error, observation and demonstration, listening and questioning, co worker and management support and research. The nature of informal learning is organized, spontaneous and random. Due to the nature, there is a willingness to participate.

Participants focused on adapting learning techniques to the area of work and task required as pointed out by Participant 1: “Adjust and look at ways and means of being more effective

informally, by trial and error”, by observation and demonstration, Participant 3: “There is so much of; I didn’t know about floors, I learned about floors, strip floors and that to communicate with the client and always getting the job done. Learning is good to me, it’s too much, I get it step by step to go up”. Participant 11: “I am eager to learn new things, I prefer learning practically”. Participant 12: “I can say from the start, if I don’t know this thing that you doing, I like to watch first how you going to make it, to check it. It doesn’t matter, maybe go back to school, I like to see things in order to do, especially when it comes to admin stuff. I like to sit and see what you do on your screen, don’t give me a book and tell me, hell no. I look and need to see for myself”. Based on responses and examples listed, action learning was the predominant method of practising informal learning and acquiring new skills.

By listening and questioning colleagues who have similar interest in the workplace, there is a willingness to want to learn. Participant 3 says: “ I have my colleagues here, the manager is also here, if I don’t know something. But the most important thing now is to teach myself on this computer”. This response highlights an experienced employee who is able to recognise new opportunities for informal learning. This enthusiasm that filters through indicates that the employee is confident and keen to try new methods of learning and technology. A positive learning experience is inspiring and displays a commitment to transferring and sharing the knowledge to others who need new skills.

This willingness was also indicated by self directed learning, with doing research they can pass on and transfer the knowledge to their colleagues , participant 6 points out: “Anyway, if I read it, if I can see it, listen to what you say, research, I come early to research’. Participant 10: “If it wasn’t for the internet, I would not have known. Internet was my saving grace most of the time”. Participant 13: “If I get a new chemical, I must read it first, what is this used for, I start from there so I now it match. I know there is a difference so I have to read the instructions”. By sharing the new information, all the employees may be inspired to want to venture into exploring new tasks.

Co worker support appears to be a common denominator, participant 3: “Kirk is here, Richard is also here, they show you something then I know how to type out the attendance register. I struggle a little with the computer and when I do something wrong, I just think to myself, I might delete everything”. Participant 7: “Everything, I like to learn new stuff. I

learn a lot from other people. Before it was Mr. Jacque and Ellen, I learnt new skills. I prefer to learn, like by doing”.

In conclusion, this section depicts the reciprocity of informal learning that was demonstrated in these interviews by focusing on the feelings and actions of participants and a social framework that allowed participation and informal learning opportunities to occur in the workplace. In each interview, beneficial learning environments were created through the experiences of new and existing co-workers and drew attention to social processes that work together and generated a positive work environment for ongoing interaction and informal learning opportunities.

4.4 The Potential of Informal workplace learning

4.4.1 Effectiveness of Informal learning in the workplace,: themes emerging are: Sense of Accomplishment, Co worker support, Employee Development, Management Support and a Learning Culture

Participants were asked to express their perception of how effective is learning in their workplace. They reported that they described the effectiveness of informal learning with intangible aspects that boost performance. The significant themes that emerged was sense of accomplishment that accompanies the value of informal learning, participants felt that with informal learning, you grasp the concept much quicker, therefore it is more easily understood, and mentioned by participant 1 who says: “ Very effective, you grasp much quicker and easier. A person that does things informally failure does not stop them from trying again”.

Co worker support makes a significant contribution in enhancing effective learning, participant 2 explains: “I will first sit down with them and tell them what the task is and ask them if there is anybody that does not understand, have they done this before or listen to what they have to say, we will go to the area that must be fixed. I will do an example and this is how we do it, the best way to get the thing done is teamwork if we work together. So basically I will be like their team leader show them what is expected and how it is done quicker and easier and from there we take it on”.

Employee development emerges and when employees are developing and actively involved in the process and feel empowered then learning should be effective, one participants goes as

far as mentioning that it creates a feeling of ease at work that leads to friendships. Participant 7: “We form a friendship and they are feeling comfortable”. The engagement of employees with staff wellness initiative programmes encourages interaction and as participant 10 says: “So far we getting good results, so far we doing what have been done in the past few years”.

This response demonstrated how participant’s created a workplace environment that enabled and facilitated informal learning for employee development. Participants feel that the effectiveness is achieved by employee’s dedication, as confirmed by participant 2, who says: “I’m dedicated to what I do. I always want to please the manager, the client, so when I’m given a task, I always try my best to accomplish the task... Participant 4 says: “Always when I work with someone, I want to improve their work skills. Subsequently, it leads to empowering the staff. Participant 6 says, “You train your staff to be team leaders, supervisors to develop their people”.

Management support, coaching plays an integral role, participants mentions the manager’s involvement with coaching, participant 2 further elaborate: “ It is very effective, If I’m struggling with something, I can’t accomplish, I come to my manager, and ask how I can do things to get it done quickly”. This response showed how management play an important part in helping the team; it created opportunities that facilitated learning of all in the team by providing a conducive learning environment. Furthermore, it suggests that management plays a significant role in helping employees to be involved with learning new knowledge combined with an enabling and participatory work environment.

Learning styles of individuals and their preference of practising informal learning is a key indicator in fostering a learning culture i and act as an agent for motivating staff, one participant mentioned, “ You adopt different types of learning as you train the staff, different training to different staff members because you know their personalities, they can understand a bit of what you saying then you can go the theory way or a staff member that doesn’t know that much so I’m going to say, show him, not to say that people are stupid but you get different types of people”.

Based on the response of the participants, their thoughts and actions reveal that they consider the key factors such as the sense of accomplishment; co worker support, employee development, manager's support, awareness of diversity and fostering a learning culture as main ingredients in contributing to an effective informal workplace learning.

However, what if there is no strong bonding factors and there is no desire for employees to “fit in” and participate in everyday activities, no willingness to learn new knowledge and transfer knowledge; and the ability to recognise and create new learning opportunities. The next section will highlight the elements that slow down effective learning and hinder the opportunities for creating a positive learning environment.

Motivation for continuous lifelong learning featured, participant 2: “Nothing can stop me from learning. No, I’m always eager to learn.” Participant 11: “You must be broad minded, listen to other people’s ideas and use every detail they give you. Nothing stands in my way you must be eager to learn.” Participation 9:” No there isn’t, first of all, I’m hardworking, I want to make sure you are happy or in your building or in that section.” Participant 2 added: “On most things I teach myself, I like challenges. I’m asking for information on how to do the work but I like to test it on my own, so that I can have a grip of it and how to do it”.

4.4.2 Effective learning in the workplace is slowed down by: financial constraints metacognitive abilities, management issues, social aspects, time constraints

The challenge is the financial constraints, cost implications are continuously highlighted, participant 1 says: “Financial Aspect – if you make mistake informally, like any project you take on, if you mess up, you going to have to break it down and if your material is not reusable and then you’ll have that financial restraint”. Management does not allow for much leeway due to risks attached in performing a task and this can slow down employee’s initiative as the fear of failure with the cost attached can be too overwhelming and at a high risk. Subsequently, practises of informal learning are limited.

Metacognitive skills of employees restrict learning, if an employee is unable to set goals related to working, an employee would have difficulty in understanding their strengths and areas of development. It would be a challenge for them to share information and understand their own learning preference and explain their learning approach to co workers. Hence, an

employee cannot evaluate their own learning to determine whether they have made progress. It is critical that management takes cognisance of metacognitive skills of employees. Participant 10 says: “It becomes too academic for them. The fear that I am not smart enough, that’s one factor, the other”. It could lead to incorrect interpretations by management and lead to a frustrating work environment that is not conducive to learning. Participant 2 says: When there are people in the group, like how can I say, they don’t want to listen to what I’m telling them, I will take time to explain to them this is how we do team work, what works here. The ladies here are a bit stubborn; they see me doing my work. But if I see, they don’t give me a hearing, I bring them to the office and I explain to Richard what is going on, that this person is trying to be hard, I can’t work with him. Please explain what the reason of this behaviour is”.

Management Issues can affect co- worker support; it is a huge challenge, some managers appear to feel threatened by people in the team, they dislike receiving any ideas or suggestions in performing a job. Managers are unwilling to share this information or encourage transfer of information and skills. This is confirmed by participant 6: “Then you get management that don’t want you to teach your staff”. Management’s reluctance to share information and the tendency to restrict important transferring of information may have serious implications for the learning of all in the team. Participant 11 says: “Lack of negotiations and supervisors using their power wrongly, they are talking down.” Frustrations set in, a co-worker restricting knowledge and sharing of skills”. Participant 8 says: “You don’t have what you suppose to have. The knowledge, the standard and because of what the company provide – equipment and if they don’t take time to train the people better to train than me how will I understand”.

Mentorship and coaching, was also mentioned as a management issue, participant 1: “My feeling is maybe selfish also when I have to train somebody else my own work lags behind then this is a disadvantage to me because I have to train somebody and nobody is actually assisting me. The other guys carry on with their daily tasks. And then the time it takes me to train the new person I have neglected my clients, and own people and that’s a negative”. The actions and thoughts of this participant express placing his needs ahead, however expressed earlier, reciprocity should be practised whereby existing co-workers assist each other.

Co workers avoid conflict situations and pass them onto their colleagues to deal which may affect the dynamics of a group. The reluctance to deal with a situation becomes a significant challenge to all in a team. Participant 11: “Just the mere fact that I don’t want to interact with the clients because when it is a difficult client, I take 10 steps backwards rather let operations deal with it than me and maybe that’s not the mentality I should have as a trainer. Just be open maybe the client will have a different way of thinking”.

The social cultural concerns were identified by participants are age and family. Participant 5: “I think people’s age is another factor and they worried about being old and them not making it. I see it happening on a daily basis. I won’t mention names... I almost 50 there’s nothing else I can do, that’s not true”. Family structures have a huge influence on learning and the mid set of the individual; Participant 4 says “I rather think my family stops me from doing anything else they don’t give me, a chance to anything other than house work.” Participant 3 says: “Some of them want to learn and others you can see they not interested and who has problems and I know where the problems are coming from, in the family, you know”.

Time Restrictions, it is all about productivity in the workplace, Participant 6 says: “Time availability, in sorting out the venue... staff doesn’t want to learn... You get lots of events, you can’t always teach the staff, the time you do get to all the staff, you do a lot of training and the staff forgets”.

4.4.3 Elements that enhance informal learning in an organisation are: Taking ownership, intergroup dynamics, management support, planned interventions, evaluation and feedback

A sense of pride creates Taking ownership as participant says: “Pride in your work will push that guy to the end. So that at the end of the day, the guy will say you know what I did it all by myself, bragging rights. Participant 6: “I can teach across the board anybody that need to be taught to broaden my horizons. I taught myself by listening to others and watching how things must be done, taking from that and doing and not realising there is another way. I can make this quicker and easier, I can make it more productive Uhhh then telling somebody else how I made my job easier, they can incorporate it into theirs/ Then they can give me feedback on how to better”.

Intergroup dynamics plays an integral part in enhancing proficiency. Participant 7 says: “They must work as a team”. It is advised that all employees in the team should be involved especially management”. In this, participant 8 says: “I will guide him. The supervisor must make the learning a practical thing with them, they take the step from the senior not just as a caretaker, and they need to be involved. Management on site, my team see me, I’m there... They go to their work, and I believe in leading by example”. Participant 10 says: “ Let staff try and train someone else, with the element of fun also we sitting with empowerment, empowering him he knows so then he lets her know, so she could also see how. They interpret the differences between what I have told them and what others have told them. Staff tends to work together, they start communicating all the time”. Participant 9: “Always to coach him on that level or standard, you were showing him on how to do this? We teaching each other, to show them the right, so that he can or she can be perfect, so like us”.

Management support is vital in intergroup dynamics and has transformed into a role of consultation, to achieve results of performance, participant 11 says: “Negotiations, that’s the best key if you can negotiate on the same level”. Management should capitalise on areas of strength and have interventions in place to assist with areas of development. Focusing on what is done right will be make an employee feel more committed to fixing an areas of development. If the right approach is followed by management, it could yield positive results and be of an immense benefit to an organisation. It should also be understood that informal learning is a gradual process where employees build up required knowledge, skill and behaviour through interacting with co-workers and this creates a positive working environment for lifelong learning.

Employers should focus on cultivating effective learning and making staff more enthusiastic to participate in workplace learning. It encourages teamwork and builds stronger links with co-workers. Effective informal learning is the responsibility of all, employers and employees, consultation and sharing best practise can be the onset of fostering a valuable culture of learning.

Learning in the workplace should have planned interventions, as well. The proposed interventions should be based on the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP’s) and Training Competency checklists of these SOP are which should be assessed. The competency checklist is based on the standard operating principles of the workplace. Participant 10: “To make this

learning more effective to staff, I think you ought to have a classroom environment with them once a month, obviously with value added merits. They can go once a month to the training centre... Things like that staff like. The learnership programmes as participant 3 says: “Learnership to this people, you know where they coming from, you can see some of them can’t read or write, people that can’t do it...”

Completion of learning programmes and issuing of an attendance or competency certificate adds to the employee’s feeling of self worth, a sense of pride and a client regard it as adding value to staff. This is evident by the response of Participant 12 that points out: “learnerships that our cleaners are on, clients like that when you see that, I must be honest, a lot of clients is for it, if you give certificates to a cleaner, it is a wow factor.” It strengthens client relationships and in this organisation creates opportunities for building a threefold relationship. The employee benefits by acquiring a recognised and accredited qualification from a structured learning programme that includes both theoretical knowledge and workplace learning. The employer has an employee that adds value, understands and committed to increasing their performance. The client gains more value from an organisation providing the service.

Evaluation and Feedback is a critical factor in assessing the employee’s cognitive abilities and determining the Return on Investment of learning. It is about understanding each one’s level of comprehension and capabilities. Sensitivity need to be demonstrated, as mentioned by Participant 1 indicates: “First of all, you have to assess the person’s ability, the ability as to what type of personality where so you pick up quicker the formal way or informal way and put the person that learns better informal or formal where they can grasp before they start so that it doesn’t break their spirit. So you must be very careful of what type of training you apply to the person and the person’s personality. Have they done this before or listen to what they have to say, we will go to the area that must be fixed”.

There was an indication the written assignments was not a preferred method of competency evaluation, as pointed out by participant 1: “Informal learning helps me a lot, it’s going to be a problem to you again give me all the training you want to but the assignments to do there is no time, but don’t ask me to write something down”.

4.4.4 The barriers of Informal learning: Orientation programme, Performance Appraisals, Acknowledgement and Recognition, Personnel practices, Management Issues.

Participants feel that not much time is spent on orientation programmes, participant 1 says: They put some, somebody in a position much too early. They give minimum training and they expect professional results. Participant 10: “A difficult one Astrid, because what I would do is not concentrate on the numbers, 90% of informal learning takes place on the night of the event, so having 50 brand new people on the night of an event and taking them through a cleaning process is tiring and everyone knows the pressures of an event. If we would scale that down and have some sort of way, introduce a few temps per week to come in, then actually you can start getting the guys, ones you know on site, then they will know what to do on all the other sites. If you work here, you can work at any other site with ease. Then we all source, keep one standard and not this one train there and that one knows that, they all in line. We won’t have a problem; everyone will be able to work exactly the same”.

At all occupational levels, performance appraisals should be conducted. Performance agreements should be in place with clear and agreed key performance indicators, which is appraised in the set timelines. Subsequently, from a Performance appraisal, a personal development programme can be actioned, strengths can be rewarded and coaching can be implemented in areas of development, as participant 9: “Help me make my learning better, To give us more time, then person that I am training that train him, I must gave him a chance to improve what I am showing him. To show him every time, everyday, to make him understand and when I’m done, I ask him are you ok now, I mustn’t just leave him”.

Participant 6 says: “The staff on this pay level look for some kind of reward, you do it by merit system. You qualify for this; more merits you qualify for it will push people to go further, a qualification or just a promotion. It takes time which is a long term goal try and makes short term goals that add value, for the staff members. I think it will add value to them informally or formally”.

Acknowledgement and recognition plays a critical role in promoting informal learning in an organisation. Cognisance must be taken of constant referral to recognition and the method of recognition by a certificate is noted by the participant’s. It goes further than the workplace,

participant 3, says: “Some of the people you can see from what community they come from, they have money problems, housing problems, they don’t feel like it, if you put someone in a place like that, for instance, I took one of my staff members that day to run with eight people, not as a supervisor but as a Team Leader. She is proud of it, but what benefit is there, she says Beri just picks me every time but I’m not going to award or give papers, it’s just for that day, sometimes you let them down, sometimes you picking that one”. Participant 11:” I think if, they make the informal and encourage us with certificates. I think that they can give people a chance”. It extends further and the client that the organisation is exceeding the service level agreement by demonstrating the commitment towards their employee’s, a transactional relationship is also transformed, as participant 12 says: “By presenting it to our clients, the clients then get a bigger picture; the client can see what the real thing is about”.

Personnel practises have been mentioned as a factor that could disable informal learning. Participant 10 says: “Something that I noticed that we don’t do, that happens. I’m going to mention hospitality and I feel that is will work a lot for the staff. When we don’t add onto the Supporter’s Club, at a site. I’m not saying spend money or a fortune on something, ok, we have a little fun afternoon called fish. Throw a ball around and give scenarios of what could happen if I throw you more balls, then you start dropping them. This is what happens when I give you too much. But if you pass on again, just little things, employee wellness, motivational wellness. The guy feels part of the team and not just a number. We not just here to do this, supporters club is great but we need to add on to it. I don’t think it’s enough. Getting a mug is great but not ok”. Employee wellness initiatives are implemented as a short term fix to address employee needs. The programme should be ongoing and new innovative ideas should be encouraged by all to cultivate an encouraging organisational culture.

A concern raised was a management issue; an employee’s autonomy is restricted. It hinders opportunities for future growth and decision making. The management of a team is not involved with decision making. There is a lack of consultation with direct managers and no involvement with appointments, participant 5, “if you need to promote someone, talk to someone that is day and night on the floor. And take it from there, we know the person’s standard of work. It’s good if you observe that person day by day. If he does wrong, help him then tomorrow as years go by watch the ways and attendance, there is a lot of things you must observe”. There should be mutual involvement and communication.

A shortage of resources to perform tasks is extremely frustrating. Participants regard the availability of resources as an important component in task accomplishment. Participant 13: “If the company can provide us with equipment then we can take whatever we need and do”. Organisation need to stay abreast of trends, to maintain the competitive edge. The participant 12 added: “Information Technology always changes we need to move with times, we behind, we always last in line to start things, we doing different and we behind. I think the company need to change and move forward”.

In summary, based on the perception and experiences of participant, it was revealed that employees are willing to learn and create opportunities. Participants acknowledged that each one had the own way of practising learning and performing tasks. The perceptions and experiences placed more emphasis on how effective learning opportunities can be created and revealed that informal learning is a social phenomenon. However, participants also indicated that there are barriers that restricted their learning. Adapting to change and learning new ways of communicating their ideas could be used to overcome the challenges and enhance performance and satisfaction in the workplace.

4.4.5 Reflection and feedback of Informal learning in the workplace was discussed in the last section of the interview with the participants. Themes emerging are Motivation, Employee engagement, socio-cultural structures and management issues.

Twelve out of the thirteen participants pointed out that they learned from their supervisors and managers.

Interaction between co-workers seem to encourage both parties to learn something new, share information and transfer information and knowledge that is accurate and helpful to the job. Motivation for continuous lifelong learning featured, participant 2: “Nothing can stop me from learning. No, I’m always eager to learn”. Participant 11: “You must be broad minded, listen to other people’s ideas and use every detail they give you. Nothing stands in my way you must be eager to learn”. Participation 9:” No there isn’t, first of all, I’m hardworking, I want to make sure you are happy or in your building or in that section.” Participant 2 added: “On most things I teach myself, I like challenges. I’m asking for information on how to do the work but I like to test it on my own, so that I can have a grip of it and how to do it”.

Participants also expressed that they enjoyed classroom training, it gave them an opportunity to engage and share ideas and best practise ideas of colleagues that are on the same occupational level, participant 3: “More training, as I say the first time I was in training class, there is like meeting new people, I don’t know anyone and I was introduced to the other supervisors”. It allows them to become ambitious, participant 3: “Training, almost like educate me more, education programs. I like to learn more about anything else that I don’t know about, like for example, just looking over UWC, I’d like to fit myself in because I would like to be a social worker”.

However there are difficult conditions that exist that which affects a social - cultural structures for learning, age as pointed out by participant 6: “I think I’m too old, my time is running out, don’t have much time”. Awareness like this demonstrates how co-worker interaction can raise sensitivity and by sharing information and participation the older employees still feel included, productive and resourceful. These interviews showed that for some co-workers, adjusting to change, accepting new co-workers and learning new skills and knowledge was not easy.

Management issues as pointed out by participant 10: “a lack of input from you would consider a senior manager when you would ask for advice, there would be lots of oohs and aahs, call that one, you get pushed from pillar to post and it’s not easy”. Participant 8: “If the equipment is not up to standard. Without equipment the person cannot do the job properly. Equipment, major, mainly you can do the job but there’s no equipment which is a stumbling block and I think most of the time, knowing that you can do it but not allowed to do it”.

Furthermore, unreasonable expectations from clients as indicated by participant 12 that says: “Normally the client needs things done, that are not normally what you suppose to be doing, I’m busy and he wants you to do something that’s not at our level. You can’t do it because the client won’t allow you to do it... a stumbling block”. Participant 9: “Even the staff that is here is on a different level, such as packing chairs right, they get bored with that, they don’t want to do that. They want to do cleaning, it has become a science, it has been introduced like a science.” Participant 7: “Like now, I work with different people, some people – floods everybody called us, we are the cleaners, please can you do this but she is aggressive”.

In summary, these themes revealed that positive social behaviour could lead to better work performances and facilitate an acceptable and approachable work environment. The interviews also pointed out that employee engagement enables a better work performance and social acceptance of members of a work group.

The interviews also provided evidence that attention should be drawn to sensitivity of social cultural structures. The experienced employees who felt age was a stumbling block were able to make their own opportunities for learning new knowledge and skills, and were willing to share their knowledge and skills and participate in learning activities and adapt to changes. These experiences that have been shared by the participants illustrate the importance of the relationship between co-workers in the workplace where informal learning occurs between co-workers as part of everyday experiences and participation in the workplace.

However the challenges of the social process need to be taken into consideration and how it can have an impact. The perceptions of the participants included: financial constraints; limited metacognitive abilities; non conducive workplace environment; a lack of enthusiasm to learn new knowledge and skills and an unwillingness to share and pass on knowledge to new co-workers. The ultimate challenge remains adapting to change, transferring knowledge and skills acquired from co-workers and acknowledgement and recognition for using opportunities gained from informal learning and making a worthy contribution to increasing the productivity of a team.

4.5 Conclusions

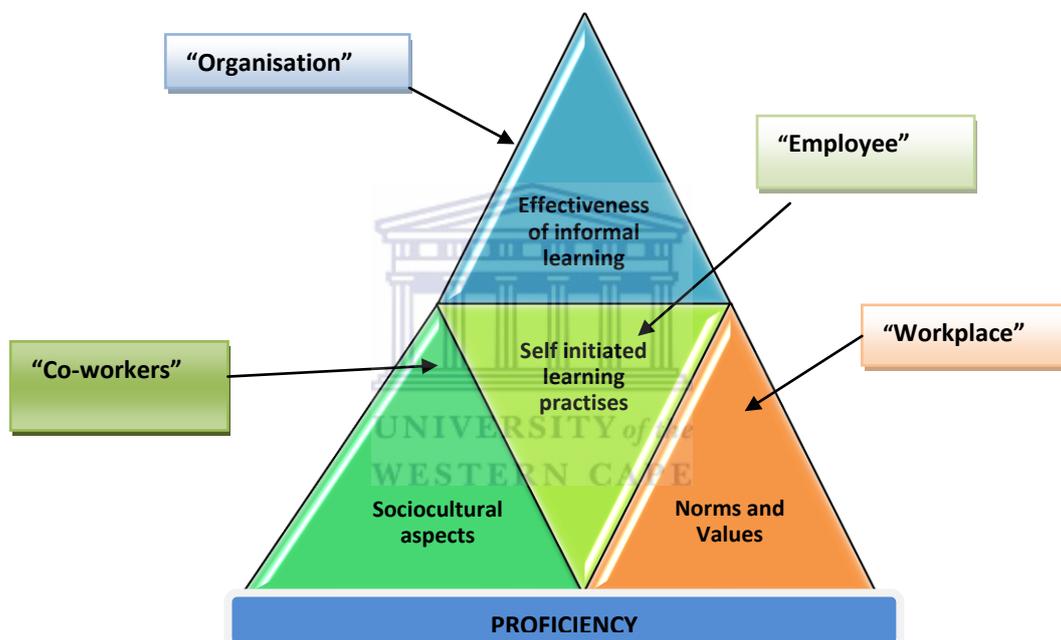
In all of the interviews, the quality of responses of participants gave insightful descriptions and understanding of how informal learning can enhance. They openly shared their daily experiences regarding effectiveness of informal learning and sociocultural perspectives of learning. Participants shared their inputs and felt that each one in the organisation should be engaged and responsible for the effectiveness of informal learning.

Spontaneous and self initiated learning practices create opportunities for informal learning by means of solving work problems through actions, observation and demonstration, trial and error and learning interventions. Informal learning cannot be effective without positive social interaction in the workplace. Participants pointed out those positive social interactions cultivate the expected norms and values in the workplace. Each element in this model forms a

critical feature for the effectiveness of learning in the organisation, ultimately enhancing the proficiency of employees in the workplace.

The World of work model (Fig 4.2) that was introduced at the beginning of this chapter, to create structure in the interviews evoked the emerging themes which are illustrated in this model. In essence, it is remarkable to note that ME, WE, WORK and WORLD have been adapted to present the results of the research to the employee, the co-workers, the workplace and organisation.

Figure 4.2: Results of World of Work



Despite the negative impressions and barriers of informal learning, participants expressed ways of overcoming these obstacles. With this approach, it highlighted that participants all felt that effective informal learning provides opportunities for personal development and enhancing proficiency in the organisation. What is clear an unchanging is that effective informal learning in the workplace enhances proficiency in the workplace if opportunities are created for workplace learning. The aim of effective informal learning is to provide a stimulus for the proficiency of employees in the workplace.

Chapter 5 attempts to entwine the above perspective and analysis into the theory of previous literature. Limitations of this study, conclusions and future recommendations are presented in the final chapter. The critical issues that emerged from these findings are explored in detail in the following chapter.



Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

Organisations that support informal learning in the workplace encourage their employees to capitalise on strengths and natural aptitude and skills to overcome challenges. They encourage action problem solving in a natural, logical manner and more importantly share information for all to benefit. This brings to light , that sociocultural traits of informal learning provides an opportunity to build and promote workplace relationships that tie into creating opportunities of quality learning at work. Informal learning occurs when self – directed learners take initiative and ownership to solve problems and acquire new knowledge and skill that will assist with improving their work performance and add value to the workplace goals (Cross, 2007).

This chapter discusses themes which emerged from the research and is aligned with previous reviews of literature and allows the researcher to integrate it against findings from previous research. It is comprised of four sections. The first section briefly summarises results, organised around three research themes that guided the empirical study. The second part is a discussion of major findings and interpretation. The third section reflects on limitations of the methodological approach adopted for the empirical study. The final section suggests direction for further research. The subthemes emerging suggest that informal learning may be connected to an organisation’s long term planning, performance appraisal process and grounded in an individual’s daily work. The theme seeks to highlight a balance of employee needs, priorities and requisites of a workplace (Cunningham & Hillier, 2013, p. 47).

5.2 An overview of the effectiveness of Informal Learning

Conlon (2003) argues that despite the significant role and impact of informal learning in developing professional expertise in the workplace, there is no current theoretical paradigm that exists in informal learning within the industry that examines a balance between roles of individual and how the organization can benefit in a global context. This study seeks to examine informal learning in depth and pose questions for future research, as well as to identify how informal learning may contour new human resource development (HRD) and propose dynamic interventions in the diverse workplace. It also seeks to address and identify challenges facing the workplace where informal learning may be involved.

5.3 Summary of Results

The purpose of this research is to examine the effectiveness of informal learning in the workplace. An empirical study was conducted on spontaneous, natural daily experiences of informal learning activities people engage in at work. More specifically, the research examined (Berg & Chyung, 2008): sociocultural structures of informal learning engagement; and perceived factors that affect informal learning engagement in the workplace.

The findings are discussed as follow, first, current perceptions of informal learning in the workplace and then sociocultural constructs in the workplace that influences informal learning. Finally, the potential and effectiveness of Informal learning are explored. It was evident that all employees learn informally in the workplace; however the challenge remains how employees learned and how the desired effect and value of learning differed. The common interwoven thread of learning in the workplace is the critical role that relationships play in informal learning (Alonderien, 2009).

5.4 Findings and Interpretation

When the participants were asked about the effectiveness of informal workplace learning, they described learning activities and processes underlying them, impact of sociocultural constructs and outlining factors that could affect the potential of effective informal workplace learning.

The purpose of these questions is to examine the effectiveness of Informal workplace learning that can be observed or deduced. This section addresses how the results of the study inform the three research questions. An illustration of key results of the empirical study are portrayed and summarised in table 5.1.

- How do employees learn informally in the workplace?
- Why does the sociocultural constructs have an impact on informal workplace learning?
- What factors affect the potential and pathway of informal learning in the workplace?

Table 5.1: Summary of the Key results:

Research question	Key Results
<p>How do employees learn informally in the workplace?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Solving problems through actions create opportunities for exploration, trying and testing different methods of learning by trial and error. Informal learning has been described as learning by sharing information. ▪ By observing more experienced co-workers and then demonstrating. It was interesting and insightful to note that attending training programs was also listed alongside the importance of demonstrations and observations. ▪ Employees need to understand their work situation and recognise what knowledge is relevant and applicable. The knowledge and skills are transformed and integrated with each new situation. ▪ Individuals learn through action in performing a task and learning is affected by social, cultural and cognitive contexts. Therefore to enable performance through action, the socio cultural and cognitive process need to be supported, bearing in mind the fundamental focus still remains the individual. ▪ In response to probing employee engagement, participants shared very clear descriptions and daily activities. Individual utilises knowledge and skills by injecting new ideas. Co-workers have an effect on an individual's behaviour through engagement by participation and sharing information, providing resources and enabling opportunities to willingly work together ▪ The participants described the concept of learning by distinguishing between informal and formal learning structures and creating a unifying framework. Formal learning was described by participants as predominantly theory and informal learning, regarded as practical. The formal learning settings were classroom based and more formal seating with assessments in place to determine a level of competency. Current trends pointed out in practice are that informal and formal learning are often inextricably interwoven. ▪ Self-efficacy has been strongly linked to motivation to learn. An individual's self esteem is impacted by feedback from managers, job designs and trust in co workers as competent people, the opportunity to experience success and receive acknowledgement and recognition for it. ▪ By adopting a proactive behaviour, employees become more willing to participate and achieve goals required to boost job performance. Proactive individuals are keen to take on tasks, are committed and dedicated to achieve an end result. Nearly, all specialists in the workplace agree that employees should be proactive, reflective and creative; they take initiative and ownership which is a highly valued trait. ▪ Capability is described as a continuous ability to perform, which implies having current skills and knowledge as well as readiness to aspire and develop for future desires. By working in challenging and supportive environments, self-monitoring, engaging in deliberate practice, and solving ill-defined problems, employees develop proficiency

<p>Why does sociocultural constructs at the workplace have an impact on informal learning?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sociocultural constructivism claims that employees acquire knowledge and skill from interacting with different cultures and people and examining norms, value and practices in the workplace. Informal learning can be highly effective if interaction takes place between co-workers. ▪ Thus positive intergroup relationship is a sound base for Group Dynamics. It fosters a positive working environment. In most cases, participants feel they can reciprocate the knowledge and skill that they have acquired and pass to others who are now part of their team. ▪ The social processes occurring between employees can be created through participation. Participants value a supportive and cooperative work environment. When co-workers take responsibility to facilitate learning in their team especially with new employees, it creates a productive and interactive workplace environment. Consequently, it reinforces the values and norms of the workplace. ▪ An orientation programme that facilitates Induction of new employees should take the social process into account. It should not only be for Mandatory reasons that induction takes place but rather to facilitate a process of promoting a supportive workplace environment. ▪ The interrelationships of co workers are important as it has an influence on make new employees feel comfortable and experienced employees feel a sense of value. During a process of settling in, employees learn new work procedures and technical skills, including social knowledge that lead to successful integration into a team. ▪ When entering as new employees, individuals are faced with learning technical knowledge and familiarising themselves with a sociocultural process, paying particular attention to norms and values. Understanding these norms and values could facilitate the acceptance of the co workers. ▪ A new employee's integration into a new work group creates informal learning opportunities by employee's willingness to learn new knowledge and acquiring skills. ▪ Reciprocity between co – workers could initiate positive informal learning experiences. Informal learning occurs by “trial and error, observation and demonstration, listening and questioning, co worker and management support and research. The nature of the informal learning is organized, spontaneous and random. Due to the nature, there is a willingness to participate.
---	---

<p>What factors affect the potential and pathway of informal learning in the workplace?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The shift in leading industries is moving towards a knowledge society, workplace learning is a key part of this, driven by the impact of changes in skills demands, technologies, and people’s relationships and roles within the workplace. ▪ Overall, the effectiveness of informal learning is grounded in employees that seek to find value in accomplishment of tasks whilst working with their team. Support of co workers and management and organisational factors tended to contribute to this process in a dynamic way. ▪ Management support, especially coaching and mentorship plays an integral role, participants mentions the manager’s involvement with coaching. Co worker support makes a significant contribution in enhancing effective learning. ▪ Managers may have a joint influence on employees and actively be part of their career motivation. Employees that are motivated to develop themselves in their jobs and careers are positively engaged in informal workplace learning activities. ▪ The culture of the workplace and the way that learning is planned, organised and supported by all stakeholders in the workplace determines what can be learnt and how it is learnt. ▪ Workplace learning is becoming more than a performance management tool, the weighting has increased, businesses may use it to gain competitive advantage (recruitment and selection of employees, talent management, development of innovative practices, and the production of new knowledge and skills. ▪ Employers should focus on cultivating effective learning in the workplace and making staff more enthusiastic participate in workplace learning. It encourages teamwork and builds stronger links with co-workers.
--	--

5.5 Current Perceptions of Informal Learning

The question to consider is **how do employees learn informally in the workplace?** One major finding of the empirical research is that all employees had descriptions of how they learned informally through daily experiences. The three salient emerging themes describing informal learning opportunities include learning activities, learning structures and process and attributes of informal learning.

During the interviews, participants reflected and shared their understanding of informal learning and how it can create the opportunities to perform tasks and boost personal development and achievement of workplace goals. The salient emerging themes highlighting how employees learn informally are: **Informal learning activities, learning structures and employee development.**

5.5.1 Activities describing Informal Learning

Participants provided evidence of how they viewed informal learning as spontaneous and self initiated learning practices that create by solving work problems through actions, observation and demonstration, trial and error and learning interventions. They focused on adopting learning techniques to the area of work and task required as pointed out by Participant 1: “Adjust and look at ways and means of being more effective informally, by trial and error”, By observation and demonstration. Based on the responses and the examples listed, action learning was the predominant method of practising informal learning and acquiring new skills. Action learning relies on the ability of the employees to set challenges and support each other. The subsequent result could be an increase in employee’s skills in building and maintaining relationships, dealing with complexities and enabling them to operate with confidence and agility (Silverman, 2003).

According to Cunningham and Hillier (2013), when employees were asked about learning activities, they used examples to describe of key processes or dynamics that facilitated informal learning. Employees use their experience to understand the workplace situation, structure it, recommend an action and then reinterpret the situation in relation to the actions. Participants indicated, “what you experienced now stays in your head, I’ve done it myself so next time, I know how to go about it”. Learning is enhanced when employees are allowed to redesign or enlarge their responsibilities beyond the job description. This is confirmed by a participant that says: “you grasp much quicker and easier. A person that does things informally failure does not stop them from trying again”.

Participants expressed their most preferred method of practise for informal learning as solving problems through actions and indicated that using this practise allowed them to deal with a situation by active participation where they would gain firsthand knowledge and skill in performing the task at work. Solving problems through actions created opportunities for exploration, trying and testing different methods of learning by trial and error. Participant 2 says: “Well mostly when I’m given a task, I’m just asking to do it and I use my own discretion, I just think before I start with my job and see what will be the best way. I go about and if I see things are not done right, I choose a different tactic to do it...yeh”. This learning technique provides the opportunity for taking initiative and sharing best practice with both new employees and existing employees. Employees felt that these activities provided

opportunities to learn and grow in their jobs and to build relationships (Cunningham & Hillier, 2013).

Informal learning has been described as learning by sharing information, participant 9: “The information that I have we can share ... something like a debate, debate sharing your views, so that we can communicate ideas”. Participant 11: “When you learn something...you must learn information. You have to research the information and get the answers yourself...on site and get all your information on a specific site”.

5.5.2 Learning structures and processes creating opportunities

Informal learning is spontaneous; it can either be planned or unplanned. Therefore, consciously it might not be documented by a learner as learning. It includes self-directed learning, learning through actions, by watching and demonstrating, reflection and giving feedback, and learning by research, watching television, listening and asking questions whilst talking to colleagues (Alonderien, 2009). The concept of informal learning is empowering and emerges from the term “lifelong learning”.

The participants described the concept of learning by distinguishing between informal and formal learning structures and creating a unifying framework. Formal learning was described by participants as predominantly theory and informal, regarded as practical. The formal learning settings were classroom based and more formal seating with assessments in place to determine the level of competency. Participants views are expressed as: “Formal learning will be academic, sitting in a classroom listening to a lecture, doing presentations, giving paperwork,... you study sit down, learn that and you will test me on that”. With informal, “Take note of what you doing, and then you know how to go about doing it the next time. I have done this at that moment and this is the way to go”.

Current trends as several authors pointed out in practice at the workplace, informal and formal learning are often inextricably interwoven. Although the authors make reference to the difference, it is more beneficial in finding ways in the workplace to merge together these learning to more effectively support development and growth in the workplace (Marsick, 2005).

Fuller, Felstead, Walters and Quinn (2003) described informal learning by using boundaries that indicate a measure of control and by predicting the outcomes. The measure of control is

determined by a learner and is higher in an informal learning environment since the learner can choose an area, activity and task, they wish to perform and allocate a time required to perform a task as well as the methods of practise. It was confirmed by participants understanding of informal learning, “you teaching yourself to learn from what you are doing and then next time which way to go and how to start...something that is not taught your perception of something that is done and you use it to your benefit”.

It has been argued an emerging analysis is focussed on understanding how people learn through practice. Individual’s response to positive and negative examples of informal learning is described by the core learning activities and processes (Cunningham & Hillier, 2013, p. 42). The focus is more on the effectiveness of learning in the workplace than the difference between the two. Fuller et al., (2003) postulate that the effectiveness of informal learning is determined by the relationship between learning, performance and productivity of the workplace. This is supported by a participant that says: “I use my own discretion, I think before I start with my job and see what will be the best way. I go about and if I see things are not done right, I choose a different tactic to do it”.

In the research, participants provided evidence to support, Beckett and Hager (2002) ‘emerging paradigm’ describing the ‘informal practice-based workplace learning as natural, relevant, current and activated by collaboration. There is a win-win situation. Participants expressed their most preferred method of practise as solving problems through actions. Participants indicated that using this practise allowed them to deal with a situation by active participation where they would gain firsthand knowledge and skill in performing a task at work. Solving problems through actions created opportunities for exploration, trying and testing different methods of learning by trial and error. Furthermore, observation and demonstration are connecting techniques that initiates spontaneity, as one of the participant’s indicates: “it creates a more natural approach to performing the task”.

The transfer of knowledge from colleagues with higher level of expertise or accessibility to these colleagues may increase the level of an employee’s self-efficacy and facilitates active knowledge transfer. Therefore, the shared expertise of colleagues within a knowledge social networking enhances knowledge transfer. An expected reciprocity to a certain extent is dependent and influenced by the colleagues level of expertise. High level of expertise within networks could increase participation amongst co workers. However, if the manager and co

worker's are all novices with little expertise, an expected reciprocity from them could be minimal (Kang & Kim, 2013). The response of a participant confirms and says: "person that I am training that train him, I must gave him a chance to improve what I am showing him... To show him every time, everyday, to make him understand and when I'm done, I ask him are you ok now, I mustn't just leave him".

5.5.3 Attributes of Informal learning

Participants acknowledged that informal learning is beneficial and enhances proficiency. The effectiveness of Informal learning is grounded in employees that take ownership of their learning. In the interviews, participants shared and expressed their views on how informal learning can be beneficial, participant 1 pointed out: "you do it yourself". It's an experience...On the job training is better." Participant 2 says: "What you benefit ..., you experience what you were doing now stays in your head... I've done it myself so next time I know how to go about it and people teach you something then you put that into an exercise then afterwards you can say well now I know how to do it and how to go about doing it".

It is noteworthy, that the focus is solidly on an individual, with the assumption that an individual acquires the knowledge and skill, shares information and then transfer the learning in a group. The primary purpose of learning is about developing individuals and exploring how they learn, not only focusing on producing skills and innovation for a workplace (Billet, 2004).

The key components identified in enhancing the effectiveness of informal learning is how to promote individuals' self-directed learning capability and how to understand a relation of work to an individual's developmental processes and learning styles (Billet, 2004). The participants pointed out and confirmed: "First of all, you have to assess the person's ability, the ability as to what type of personality where so you pick up quicker the formal way or informal way and put the person that learns better informal or formal where they can grasp before they start so that it doesn't break their spirit. So you must be very careful of what type of training you apply to the person and the person's personality. Have they done this before or listen to what they have to say, we will go to the area that must be fixed".

Research should be gearing towards what conditions positively affect individuals' learning and how to generate these workplace conditions and boost the performance of the team. In response to probing employee engagement, participants shared very clear descriptions and

daily experiences. A participant's response confirms the influence of positive engagement: "Let staff try and train someone else, with the element of fun also we sitting with empowerment, empowering him he knows so then he lets her know, so she could also see how. They interpret the differences between what I have told them and what others have told them. Staff tends to work together, they start communicating all the time". Co-workers have an effect on individual's behaviour through engagement by participation and sharing information, providing resources and enabling opportunities to willingly work together (Billet, 2004).

In this study, it became apparent based on the responses that to enhance the capability of employees in the workplaces, focus should be directed on strong bonding factors that contribute to effective informal learning which includes; employee development, co worker support and management support and acknowledging accomplishments.

Fuller and Unwin (2004) suggest that employee development is dependent on the quality of learning at work and individual engagement. Individual engagement is described as a process by which an individual decides to use opportunities that are present. It is normally a decision determined by a participant's values, knowledge, understandings and learning abilities.. Proactive individuals look for opportunities and act on them, show initiative, take action, and are persistent in successfully implementing change. Therefore, proactive behaviour is more crucial than ever because of the changing nature of work (Joo & Ready, p. 279). Participant 10 confirms by indicating: " I taught myself by listening to others and watching how things must be done, taking from that and doing and not realising there is another way. I can make this quicker and easier, I can make it more productive Uhhh then telling somebody else how I made my job easier, they can incorporate it into theirs/ Then they can give me feedback on how to better".

As with experiences shared during interviews, participants have confirmed a strong level of willingness to share information. By taking ownership, engaging with employees and transferring knowledge and skills, personal development is inevitable. Informal learning creates the opportunities to perform tasks and may boost personal development; employees can achieve their goals and enhance confidence. A sense of accomplishment raises the level of their self esteem and self directed learning could increase. When employees are comfortable with using an approach that is empowering and they can see results, it could

enhance their capabilities and may strengthen support amongst each other and from management. Participants feel that effectiveness is achieved by employee's dedication, as confirmed by participant 2, who says: "I'm dedicated to what I do. I always want to please the manager, the client, so when I'm given a task, I always try my best to accomplish the task... Informally I can do anything. I just read up the actual settings of the job I am one of the good supervisors".

Bryson, Pajo, Ward and Mallon (2006) focussed on development of individual capability within a work-place setting. Capability was recognised as a continuous ability to perform, which implies having current skills and knowledge as well as readiness to aspire and develop future desires. Thus, to think about capability expands requirements for building learning capacity to keep abreast with trends. Joo and Ready (2012) found that proactive disposition may predict agent behaviors relevant to career development, such as motivation to learn and engagement in development. Participants' confirm and point out: I use my own discretion, I think before I start with my job and see what will be the best way. I go about and if I see things are not done right, I choose a different tactic to do it... I like to ask questions to explain to someone whatever equipment they need whatever papers, I'll write it down... Observation, interaction, show and tell you have to watch very closely the person that is teaching you".

Participants shared experiences, thoughts and actions of their natural tendency to be interacting and engaged in daily experiences of learning. They shared their experiences by describing when they feel they are adding value, by sharing knowledge and skills with their co workers and managers, participant 2: "Nothing can stop me from learning. No, I'm always eager to learn". Participant 11: "You must be broad minded, listen to other people's ideas and use every detail they give you. Nothing stands in my way you must be eager to learn." Participation 9: "No there isn't, first of all, I'm hardworking, I want to make sure you are happy or in your building or in that section". Participant 2 added: "On most things I teach myself, I like challenges. I'm asking for information on how to do the work but I like to test it on my own, so that I can have a grip of it and how to do it".

Although the organisation provide training sessions at the workplace to provide learning opportunities and support, what manager's do after the training influences the behaviour of the employee far more than what facilitators and co-workers do in the training session. The

manager is responsible for directing, motivating, observing, evaluating and improving the employee's performance and has the influence to inform the employees what and how to do it. How well a manager performs this function can enable or disable the transfer of new knowledge into improvements that can value to the workplace performance (Eraut, 2004).

Employees need to understand their work situation and recognise what knowledge is relevant and why is it applicable and the value it has once transformed and integrated with new situation. With the transfer of knowledge and skill, participants illuminated the benefit of informal learning, by using an example "What you benefit out of that is, I will answer like this, you experience what you were doing now stays in your head. I've done it myself so next time I know how to go about it and people teach you something then you put that into an exercise then afterwards you can say well now I know how to do it and how to go about doing it".

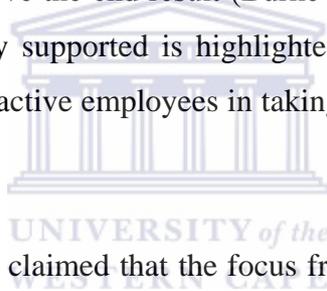
Conlon (2004) maintains that it is important to take cognisance that informal learning is also shaped by employee emotions, which may react differently to individual circumstances. Emotions influence employee attitudes based on thoughts and actions toward learning needs, but also act to support learning and behaviour change in general. Emotion is also often connected to change and can be used as a property of change that can be celebrated or manipulated, or, in helping people adapt to change through formal or informal processes. Emotions create the platform for the level of empathy, being supportive and giving recognition becomes part of the value system at work. Participant 5 confirms and says: "I observe whatever he does his happy with the job and I'm happy, I'll give him a tap on the shoulder kind of reward, you do it by merit system... Fun, educational and motivational. Add onto the Supporter Club. There has to be interaction. You have to watch very closely the person that is teaching you. So far we getting good results, so far we doing what have been done in the past few years".

Eraut (2004) describes self efficacy as a specific concept that relates to an individual's ability to execute a specific task or successfully performing a job. In a work place, the individual's self esteem is impacted by feedback from managers, job designs and trust in co workers as competent people, the opportunity to experience success and receive acknowledgement and recognition for it. Fenwick (2010) points out that much emphasis has been placed on self-efficacy and it has been extensively researched in the literature of

employee development, particularly with learning in the workplace. Self efficacy affects the individual characteristics and influences motivation and participation.

Self-efficacy has been strongly linked to motivation to learn, post-training self-efficacy and transfer. It has also been found to have moderate relationships with training outcomes such as declarative knowledge, skill acquisition and job performance). Thus developing a framework that facilitates examining this interplay of personal dispositional factors and organisational/situational factors is important (Fenwick, 2010).

Nearly, all specialists in the workplace agree that employees should be proactive, reflective and creative in the workplace; they take initiative and ownership which is highly valued trait. The proactive behaviour increases the willingness to participate and achieve the goals required to boost job performance. Proactive individuals are keen to take on tasks and are committed and dedicated to achieve the end result (Burke et al., 2009). Participant's interest in being actively and responsibly supported is highlighted; this could lead to encouraging employees to be engaged and proactive employees in taking charge of their own learning and career growth.



According to Fenwick (2010), he claimed that the focus frequently was on the translation of learning to capabilities or capital that adds value to organisational resources. Being proactive at work raises the value of human capital investment in the workplace. Taking the initiative and being proactive at work are linked to individual self efficacy and self esteem.

Being proactive, creates a sense of pride creates and individuals take ownership as one participant says shares an apt example which demonstrates her Self-efficacy, “Pride in your work will push that guy to the end. So that at the end of the day, the guy will say you know what I did it all by myself, bragging rights. Participant 6: “I can teach across the board anybody that need to be taught to broaden my horizons. I taught myself by listening to others and watching how things must be done, taking from that and doing and not realising there is another way. I can make this quicker and easier, I can make it more productive Uhhh then telling somebody else how I made my job easier, they can incorporate it into theirs/ Then they can give me feedback on how to better”. How does proactivity influence individual engagement with effective workplace learning?

It was evident that some participants that are proactive individuals made more of any available developmental opportunities than others, even in cases where the learning environment was not conducive to learning. Among the employees, the staff regarded as more proactive have involved themselves in activities, such as familiarising themselves with new skills or acquiring more in depth knowledge, consequently there would be a positive ripple effect in the work place.

These instances show that despite a restrictive learning environment, proactive individuals can work to shape the nature of developmental affordances. This need for proactive behaviour extends throughout the company: Participant 2 says: “Well mostly when I’m given a task, I’m just asking to do it and I use my own discretion, I just think before I start with my job and see what will be the best way. I go about and if I see things are not done right, I choose a different tactic to do it...yeh”.

Conlon (2004) claimed that reflection and feedback are critical components of informal learning and can be facilitated by establishing or allowing supportive coaching, mentoring relationships to flourish, between co-workers and between managers and team. The individual will receive feedback on areas of development whilst in action and this assists with enabling good work ethics. More importantly, the individual will receive feedback on areas of strength and can capitalise on it for the benefit of the individual, team and organisation.

Boud and Middleton (2003) maintain that the metacognitive abilities are a key factor in learning, if the employee is challenged by his cognitive abilities; the level of comprehension could take longer than the team. Participants could take longer to understand the expected standard in the workplace due to language barriers, cultural diversity and learning styles. With informal learning the best method of performing the task might not be the first choice hence the employee need to practice more. The transfer of formal learning to the workplace could be a tedious process and not that easily transferable. However, the extent of control and access individuals have in their learning, development and career pathway is questionable. This is confirmed by the response of a participant that says: “First of all, you have to assess the person’s ability, the ability as to what type of personality where so you pick up quicker the formal way or informal way and put the person that learns better informal or formal where they can grasp before they start so that it doesn’t break their spirit. So you must be very careful of what type of training you apply to the person and the person’s personality”.

Billet (2004) postulates and highlights that management responsible for employee development should include the importance and relevance of integrating development initiatives into job design and the key responsibilities of a manager as a coach or mentor. A development initiative acts as tool to measure performance and simultaneously, influencing the employees capability thereby enhancing proficiency. Managers and Human Resource (HR) and Organisational Development (OD) professionals can support employee career satisfaction by developing, improving, and delivering the relevant practices, ensuring that the climate and HR practices are such that career satisfaction can occur (Joo & Ready, 2012, p. 279).

The manager's role in motivating employees and providing them with access to development opportunities is vital to the service industry, and it was clear that in some cases, this was not happening. When responsibility for company initiatives is delegated to line managers, it is important that they receive correct guidance, ongoing support and opportunities for feedback from senior management to enable them to carry out the function with success and vigour (Billet, 2004). This is confirmed by participants: "The supervisor must make it a practical thing with them, they should take it step by step, not act as a caretaker, they need to be involved and lead by example...coach them on the level of standards". Supervisor support and transferring of learning have shown to have a positive effect on the employee's motivation to transfer. This implies that value of learning in the workplace is amplified when all stakeholders value the positive impact of informal learning in the workplace.

The role and responsibilities of a leader has changed from a traditional hierarchical director to being supportive and non-controlling. In this light, Human Resource and Organisation Development professionals should be attentive to coaching and mentoring processes. Specifically, managerial coaching, or manager-as-coach is more emphasized in a number of organizations (Joo & Ready, 2012). Participant 2, confirm the value of coaching and support, by indicating: " I will first sit down with them and tell them what the task is and ask them if there is anybody that does not understand, have they done this before or listen to what they have to say, we will go to the area that must be fixed. I will do an example and this is how we done it .The best way to get the thing done is teamwork if we work together. So basically I will be like their team leader show them what is expected and how it is done quicker and easier and from there we take it on".

Other feelings expressed in the interviews were financial and time constraints and recognition and acknowledgement, which initially became a source of concern amongst employees. More value is attached to formal learning and it appears that receiving certificates validates the knowledge and skill more and employees feel empowered. Participants respond and says: "to show something that you are qualified. Formally you get a certificate of something...be recognised as somebody that is competent in that field or area you have experience you proficient".

The challenge in the workplace with the financial constraints is cost implications and time which was continuously highlighted. Management does not allow for much leeway due to risks attached in performing the task and this can slow down employee's taking the initiative as the fear of failure with the cost attached can be too overwhelming and negatively affects productivity. Subsequently, practises of informal learning are limited.

In the light of challenges that constrain informal learning in the workplace, metacognitive skills of employees should be taken into account that restrict learning in the workplace, if the employee is unable to set goals related to working, the employee may have difficulty in understanding their strengths and areas of development. It would be a challenge for them to share information and understand their own learning preference and explain their learning approach to the co workers. Hence, the employee cannot evaluate their own learning to determine whether they have made progress. It is critical that management takes cognisance of metacognitive skills of the employees. Opportunities need to be well planned and structured to avoid information overload and balance the ability with performance of skill (Cunningham & Hillier, 2013).

Other workplace learning theorists are also beginning to recognise the importance of context and, in particular the relevance of how work is organised, skills are defined and jobs are designed to the quality of learning opportunities available to workers (Fuller et al., 2003). In this study, a lack of context can be demonstrated by management issues that can affect co- worker support; it is a huge challenge, some managers appear to feel threatened by the people in the team, they dislike receiving any ideas or suggestions in performing the job. Managers are unwilling to share this information or encourage transfer of information and skills in the workplace. More importantly, the full potential of mentorship and coaching in the workplaces is restricted.

In sum, the metacognitive abilities, financial aspects and management issues can constrain opportunities for informal learning in the workplace in the same that it can afford it. In this study, the results pointed out that these constraining elements had an impact on how knowledge was shared and transferred in the workplace. It is the responsibility of all employees to cultivate and enhance informal learning, from the most junior staff to the most senior executive in the workplace.

5.6 Sociocultural constructs of informal learning in the workplace

Learning is active, dynamic and empowering and can contribute positively to an individual's and organisation's development. If a company focuses only on building social networks among employees without considering embedded resources within networks, employees may not be able to access necessary expertise even though they have active relations with one another. Thus, a company should ensure that each employee has appropriate social networks through which they can access all the expertise necessary for a job. Therefore, cross-functional teams, task force teams, or communities of practice that link employees with diverse expertise can facilitate active knowledge transfer (Kang & Kim, 2013, p. 720).

Previous research and theory highlighted critical elements to consider when employees become part of an organisation and go through sociocultural processes. The results of this study focus on these elements as described by the participants and unveil **why does the sociocultural constructs have an impact on informal learning?** Two salient themes highlight the sociocultural systems underlying learning: sociocultural relationships, workplace and personnel structures.

5.6.1 Sociocultural relationships

Successful interaction and participation in the workplace played an intricate and critical role in promoting effective learning. The challenge is when individuals enter the organisation; existing employees create the parameters of the extent of knowledge, skills and application of how to perform and execute the task. New employees who are willing to fit in are mindful and acknowledge these parameters to gain acceptance into the workplace.

Le Clus (2008) points out that the constructivist view of learning claims that individuals construct knowledge through experiences and interpretive interaction and participation with employees in the workplace, this was discussed in the previous section where the focus was

on how employees acquire knowledge and skill through informal learning. Sociocultural constructivism claims that employees acquire knowledge and skill from interacting with different cultures and people in their workplace and examining the norms, value and practices in the workplace. Socio-cultural constructivism contends that knowledge is sourced through individuals' interaction with a socially determined world, in the forms of its culture, communities and practices.

In this research study both viewpoints have been taken into account to examine the construction and acquisition of knowledge and skill. This view of cognitive development emphasises guidance by social and cultural conditions. Guidance and support is seen as being either proximal whereby the direct interpersonal guidance is provided by a more experienced co-worker or indirectly guided by the social norms and rituals of the way workplace determines practice (Le Clus, 2008). Most of the employees, in the study appeared to have adjusted and adapted to operating within the sociocultural boundaries of the workplace. When co-workers take responsibility to facilitate learning in their team especially with new employees, it creates a productive and interactive workplace environment. This is pointed out by the participants. Participant 9: "I can describe myself as good and they good to see me and they helping each other, doing the same, we show others what they must do." Participant 11: "Working as a team, everything we do, we do as a team... Everyone, they give each other a chance. He shows me how to clean here and do this where must I start and where must I end and the other one is done with me always come and check how far I am".

Application of knowledge is normally idiosyncratic and based on the personal experience and the nature of how individuals acquire knowledge. Therefore individuals' initial perceptions and demonstration of knowledge are different. However, participation in workplaces leads to an increasing congruity and utilising the knowledge where it is required. Therefore, daily tasks and participation of co workers continuously provide opportunities for an increase in knowledge, it should constantly be appraised thus providing feedback and evaluation could reinforce the effectiveness of learning and create linkages among different practises of knowledge (Le Clus, 2008).

Relationship dynamics play a key role in fostering positive relationships, clear communication by listening to each other, building trust in mentoring and coaching, co worker relationships, mutual respect by nurturing a positive relationship and developing

positive connections by developing good matches in mentoring and peer relationships in a natural, positive working connections (Cunningham & Hillier, 2013). This is confirmed by a participant that indicated, “Working as a team, everything we do, we do as a team... the team is hardworking and committed”. Furthermore, participant 10 says: Immediately, when I took on more responsibility, I relied on Richard to show me things and guide me and correct me, what I haven’t done...I was promoted to my own site, he still then mentored me on how to get the staff to respect you..at supervisor level, if it wasn’t for him I would not have been there”.

Participants also felt that positive relationships dynamics could promote a sense of awareness of the extent of diversity and foster a level of empathy. Participants described their views of the importance of empathy, mutual respect, trust of people and commitment. Participant 5 says: “For Me, they are like a family because most of the time I’m here.” Participant 10: Working as a team, everything we do, we do as a team. In a work sense, words that come to mind are hardworking, committed. Commits to what they doing, maybe sometimes, compassionate and caring.” Participant 3: “Some of them, how can you say, they can work for you but it’s not only about working, you must always want to have a chat with them that day, so if you know your staff member has a problem, you can make a joke, you speak to her and she is doing your work.” It provides the platform for employees to become familiar with the knowledge and skills of job and the dynamics of the team.

A significant feature of informal learning was pointed out by one of the participants, maintaining a level of professionalism, participant 10: “I think we should have a balanced relationship that we know when it’s time to work and when play. So, I think that I can describe it as balanced, that goes for when I’m managing and when I am being managed, it’s a perfect balance; you have to keep the balance.” Participant 7: I must make a good relationship, because I need help with a good job. I don’t need a bad result.”

Workplace environments are negotiated by what is afforded and restricted, hence cultural norms and values with regard to professionalism is being exercised through work practise (Billet, 2004). Furthermore, Filstadt (2004) points out new employees are more accepted by other co-workers if they showed commitment and dedication to the new work environment. When starting at in a new team, participants reported being faced with the challenge of learning the workplace practises and acquiring the social skills that were necessary for a

successful acceptance by the existing team members. They reported the importance of communicating how the job must be done and the norms and values of the team in an orientation programme. The role of the co workers and the working environment are important and has a significant influence on make new employees feel comfortable in a group. During the process of settling in employees learn new work procedures and technical skills, including the social knowledge that lead to successful integration into the team

The concept of co-participation at work is the reciprocal processes of learning shaped by interactions between two entities, the first one, what is afforded by the workplace. Secondly, how individuals elect to engage with what is afforded (Billet (2004). These findings illustrate those who are strongly committed to the workgroup are more favoured by existing employees and management especially when they are contented that the new co worker will not deviate from the norm or cause an imbalance in the workplace.

Participants expressed the significance of the social process by focusing on co-worker support, participant 4: “I like to make them feel welcome when I have someone new, I like to introduce them and treat them right and start talking to them.” Participant 3: “I find it easy to share information. Anybody will always ask you, sometimes I say, just keep your belongings on you, like your money and then they come and ask you where they must work, it’s better for me to show them everything and where they need to work and what the company wants them to do.” This approach provides co-workers with a sense of security and a feeling of belonging. Employees feel that a genuine interest in their well being is displayed and feel committed to the process of learning. It also helped reduce new co-workers uncertainties such as how to do their job and how to identify social behaviour that is normal to the work group.

A good Intergroup relationships helps co-workers deal with challenges of diversity, by “getting along”, to get the job done, participant 13: I can say, I am working with different types of people, sometime I have to be pressured, you know you working with different people, otherwise they alright. Participant 12: “People have different mentalities some of them are pathetic, maybe some say I’m pathetic but we in an environment of people, I would say you get the good ones and bad ones. I interact with both of them and sometimes I just laugh it off.” Employee’s ability to work together despite their difference in other departments, workplaces areas or a different organisation has become a key competence sought after by other companies (Silverman, 2003).

Social support especially when motivated by supervisors is one aspect of the work environment that is believed to play an important role in the degree of transfer of learning. In the present study there was sufficient evidence of the importance of management in how co-workers participated daily in their workplace and granted access to new knowledge, skills and sharing information about the job. This suggests that management support plays an integral part in helping a new co worker in facilitating technical and social knowledge that is necessary to perform a job. Managers facilitate interaction through introducing a new employee to the rest of the team and encouraging participation.

The socialisation process could reduce the level of stress, co workers are willing to share knowledge and skills with new employees, and knowledge is accessible and easily transferred from the existing employees to the new. It is pointed out by participant 11: “I share information with them, even of me. I understand he maybe doesn’t know how to do it and myself it is still happening to me. I can’t just leave him or he doesn’t know how to clean here. New employees become are comfortable with understanding and accepting the norms and values of the group.

5.6.2 Workplace and personnel structures

Work structures must be in place, it is important to clarify scope of work and discuss the key performance indicators that should be used to measure the results. This is confirmed by participant 2: “If new people, I’m given a task showing them around, show them how it is done effectively and quickly and in most cases they take notice and learn out of that whenever I’m given a task, I take them and leave them on their own and tell them what to do and then I give them time to do it and I like check up on them afterwards and when the job is done, I give them credit afterwards.” Given that learning arises from the kinds of participation in work and support to secure what cannot be learnt alone, how work practice and interests within it regulates these opportunities will influence the quality of individuals’ learning experiences. In all these, the exercise of power and control is evident in the regulation of opportunities. Therefore, workplace learning experiences are not ad hoc, informal or unstructured. They are structured by power and interests (Le Clus, 2008).

Workplaces represent a socially constituted and contested learning space whose participatory practices are key pedagogical devices. Individuals are not always passive in their participatory practices and learning at the different occupational levels. Employees who were

successfully integrated into the work group were granted access to the type of social and technical knowledge and skill required that could enhance their work and participation in the work group (Le Clus, 2008).

Employees also act as changing agents and determine the extent of their engagement in work practice and what is learnt through that engagement. The response to the interviews portrays the reciprocity between co – workers and the work environment in enabling positive informal learning experiences to occur. This is confirmed by participants: “I had a slight knowledge of the work as a contracts manager, supervisor, I had the support of management. But when I was in operations... I was on my own.. it was just trial and error...Only when I over to operations, I was given the position and never given training, it was swim or die. I died half way but I eventually reached the surface, it was a bit difficult for me it was hell but I’m glad I’ve been there for what I know today”.

Billet (2004) proposes workplaces as learning environments that are negotiated and constructed by employees, mediated by what is afforded and controlled by the team to achieve the goals as well as the cultural norms and practices being exercised through the work practice to achieve these goals. Participation in the workplace activities, when reflected in a positive way, was also a dynamic way for established co –workers to learn informally. In the study, employees referred to the way they interacted with their team in everyday activities. The quality of their relationships with other co workers was evident, as pointed out by one participant who expressed the significance of the social process by focusing on employee support, participant 4: “I like to make them feel welcome when I have someone new, I like to introduce them and treat them right and start talking to them. Ongoing participation and interaction with each other may be essential for individuals to secure the capacities required for work. More than one research source of initial learning has proclaimed that participation in work practices is increasingly becoming an ongoing prerequisite to maintain competence with workplace practices and transforming goals (OECD, 1998).

Billet (2004) argues that in the workplace, change of an individual’s behaviour and participation in learning activities are likely to have consequences for other employees this participation may be actively encouraged, motivated, welcomed, not accepted or outright opposed. Conversely, workplaces intentionally regulate individuals’ participation; it is not ad hoc, unstructured or informal. In the service industry, there are service level agreements that

stipulate contractual agreements and structure the workplace learning. Those who control the processes and standard operating procedures of labour, including interests and affiliations within the workplace, regulate participation to maintain the continuity of the workplace through regulatory practices (Billet, 2004).

Billet (2001), highlighted and indicated in the research discussions that new and existing employees, informally learn and acquire new knowledge that enabled participation in workplace. Awareness of cultural norms and values are important in establishing and maintaining a positive, supportive work group culture. In the study, participants were asked to report on the difficulties they experienced when joining the company. The responses to “No difficulties” are validated by having past experience, their determination in taking ownership and willing to fit and support from the team in the workplace.

The difficulties expressed by the participants are related to stress and anxiety. In the induction process of new employees there should be a co worker adjustment process whereby the new employee is appointed a coach to assist with difficulties in learning the knowledge, acquiring the skills and understanding the sociocultural process.

The relationship between new co workers and established co-workers generates affordances for informal learning for better participation in workplace activities. Effective informal learning opportunities emerged when needed by the individual and were often unpredictable, spontaneous experiences that occurred just in time and were context specific. The cultural context in which informal learning occurred was significant and welcoming for both new and established employees. It would be difficult to understand learning and development in the workplace without consideration of the sociocultural context in which learning occurs (Le Clus, 2008).

The findings emphasise that individuals' participation at work is an interactive role that is goal directed and results driven in obtaining the knowledge and acquiring skills and making that knowledge and skills accessible to the employees in the workplace. The findings suggest that where management support is available (Billet, 2004), and they are involved through co participation in the workplaces, they too can benefit in creating a culture that can facilitate the learning of the hard-to-learn knowledge required for occupational practice and the transfer thereof. It seems that for workplace learning to proceed effectively, how workers are afforded

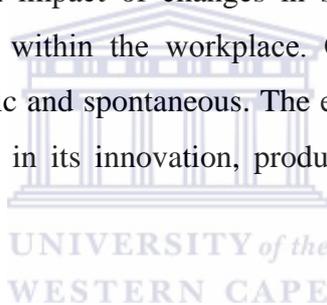
opportunities to participate and be supported in this endeavour will shape the prospect of rich in depth learning outcomes that promotes lifelong learning.

5.7 Potential of Informal learning in the workplace

The remainder of this section is organised by the question, **what factors influence the potential of informal workplace learning?** Overall, the effectiveness of informal learning is grounded in employees that seek to find value in accomplishment of tasks whilst working with their team. The salient emerging themes highlighting the factors that affect the potential of informal workplace learning are: employee development, co – worker and management support, personnel practice and challenges of informal learning.

5.7.1 Employee Development

The shift in leading industries is moving towards a knowledge society, workplace learning is a key part of this, driven by an impact of changes in skills demands, technologies, and people’s relationships and roles within the workplace. Careers are no longer static and programmed entities, it is dynamic and spontaneous. The extent of supporting learning in an organisation can be instrumental in its innovation, productivity and profitability (Vaughn, 2008).



Understanding a knowledge society is therefore integral to understanding workplace learning and encouraging employees to take ownership and engage in learning. In response to probing employee engagement, participants shared very clear descriptions and daily experiences. Participant 10: “I’ve done it myself so next time I know how to go about it I understood the pressure first, so I understood the job first before the academic. I was trained in service.” Workplace learning is dynamic; it has become face pace, the organisation need to prepare employees with the skills and competencies for the ever-changing demands and pace of the workplace (Vaughn, 2008).

Participants were asked to express their perception of how effective is learning in their workplace. They reported that they measured the effectiveness of informal learning with intangible aspects that boost performance. Participants felt that with informal learning, you grasp the concept much quicker, therefore it is more easily understood, and mentioned by participant 1 who says: “Very effective, you grasp much quicker and easier. A person that does things informally failure does not stop them from trying again”. In addition, “Adjust and

look at ways and means of being more effective informally. There is so much of; I didn't know about floors, I learned about floors, strip floors and that to communicate with the client and always getting the job done... Once, I started going on the basic training, certain items, I started absorbing things but I have already learnt it. Also learning through trial and error on site”.

Billett (2001) argues that a key determinant of the quality of workplace learning lies with a workplace's “keenness” to embrace and afford opportunities for learners to engage. These opportunities to engage, in combination with worker's utilisation of opportunities, are called “affordances”. Affordances are critical to the success of any learning environment and high-quality learning outcomes are associated with rich affordances through opportunities to participate in work. The participants pointed out the importance of communicating how the job must be done and understanding norms and values of a team. This is confirmed by participant 10: “Introductions to the people and premises you working on. Introduction to the pros and cons as in health and safety of the premises, the do's and don'ts is of great importance”.

Learning styles of individuals and their preference of practising informal learning is a key indicator in fostering a learning culture, one participant mentioned, “ You adopt different types of learning as you train the staff, different training to different staff members because you know their personalities, they can understand a bit of what you saying then you can go the theory way or a staff member that doesn't know that much so I'm going to say, show him, not to say that people are stupid but you get different types of people”. Cunningham and Hillier (2013) highlights and cautions that if the job assignments or tasks are enlarged then informal learning need to be well planned, structured with clear agreed goals, so there is no overloading or intimidation of other staff members.

Workplace conditions and learning opportunities may be available however without an understanding of the level of comprehension and preferred choice of practising informal learning, workplace learning cannot be effective. As with any learning, metacognitive abilities become the key focus when enhancing proficiency. Employees learning backgrounds should be assessed in conjunction with the level of literacy and numeracy, age and the participation in the group. It is also important to take into account their past experiences of

learning and thoughts and actions of learning now—their “career aspirations” or desires to learn and beliefs of their capabilities.

A learning career evolves and develops in different phases, the individual is not always conscious of the different phases, however they are conscious of the learning they have acquired and have contributed towards the decisions they make in the workplace (Vaughn, 2008). Learning new information can be a empowering. Participants shared their experiences and pointed out, they engaged in informal learning by interacting with employees and people with similar interest and attempting the new tasks. Learning occurred through a need to enquire and explore new activities. The examples of participants response highlights different ways of practising and points out: “Anyway, if I read it, if I can see it, listen to what you say, research, I come early to research...If it wasn’t for the internet, I would not have known. Internet was my saving grace most of the time... Observing, so I go forward I can say from the start, if I don’t know this thing that you doing, I like to watch first how you going to make it, to check it”.

The response to the interviews portrays the work environment in enabling positive informal learning experiences to occur. Informal learning occurs by “trial and error, observation and demonstration, listening and questioning, co worker and management support and research. The nature of informal learning is organized, spontaneous and random. By listening and questioning colleagues who have similar interest in the workplace, there is a willingness, to want to learn. Participant 3 says:” I have my colleagues here, the manager is also here, if I don’t know something. But the most important thing now is to teach myself on this computer”. This response highlights an experienced employee who is able to recognise new opportunities for informal learning. This enthusiasm that filters through indicates that the employee is confident and keen to try new methods of learning and technology. A positive learning experience is inspiring and displays a commitment to transferring and sharing knowledge with others who need new skills.

5.7.2 Co - worker and management support

Co worker support makes a significant contribution in enhancing effective learning, participant 2 explains: “I will first sit down with them and tell them what the task is and ask them if there is anybody that does not understand, have they done this before or listen to what they have to say, we will go to the area that must be fixed. I will do an example and this is how we do it, the best way to get the thing done is teamwork if we work together. So basically I will be like their team leader show them what is expected and how it is done quicker and easier and from there we take it on”.

Management support, especially coaching and mentorship plays an integral role, participants mentions the manager’s involvement with coaching, participant 2, further elaborate: “ It is very effective, If I’m struggling with something, I can’t accomplish, I come to my manager, and ask how I can do things to get it done quickly”. This response showed how management play an important part in helping the team to develop; in creating opportunities for empowerment that facilitate learning and create a favourable environment. Cunningham and Hillier (2013) maintain that mentoring, coaching and temporary job restructuring activities or assignments are prominent in increasing effectiveness of informal learning experiences.

Coaching involves demonstrating sensitivity to individual subjectivities, learning priorities and styles, monitoring performance and providing questioning feedback, support and guidance. Moving beyond coaching, more far reaching learning outcomes for individuals might result from mentoring, a process which requires, “developing the individual rather than training them” with a view to enabling the person to “question assumptions” and “shift mental context” However, managers felt a tension between the pressures of their day-to-day responsibility for the delivery of results and the need for people development. Manager’s prioritise staff learning, but with customer or client satisfaction being the highest priority (Warhurst, 2013, p. 42).

Taking into account coaching and mentoring, managers may have a joint influence on employees and actively be part of their career motivation. Employees that are motivated to develop themselves in their jobs and careers are positively engaged in informal workplace learning activities. Once their career goals have been identified, they are willing and eager to

manage tasks, improve their knowledge and skills and use every opportunity to participate in learning activities (Van Rijn et al., 2013).

Productivity can be achieved if all employees take ownership and management support an informal learning process. Management could capitalise on areas of strength and have interventions in place to assist with areas of development. Focusing on employee's strengths may increase the level of commitment and encourage working on the areas of development. Cunningham and Hillier (2013) draw attention to job enrichment and illustrated a significance of enriching the job by providing higher level supervisory activities. Engagement in these job enrichment tasks often is determined by individual's learning and career stage.

5.7.3 Personnel practice

Billet (2001) points out that participation and learning in the workplace is underpinned by how a workplace affords opportunities for individuals to engage in and be supported in learning in the workplace.

Accordingly, to enhance workplace learning there may be a need for:

- (1) Appropriate development and implementation of workplace environments that are conducive to learning; an encourages and promotes taking ownership
- (2) A tailoring of a workplace learning curriculum to particular enterprise needs, including the readiness of both employees and managers. The planned interventions should be clear, meaningful, add value to productivity and should have measurements in place for evaluation and feedback.
- (3) Encouraging participation by both those who are learning and those guiding the learning; especially between co-workers and co-workers and management.
- (4) The appropriate selection and preparation of the knowledge, skills required to practise learning should be in consultation with the employees.

The world of work is becoming more multifaceted and unpredictable as old workplace structures and fast paced change makes it difficult to predict occupational features and very specific acquiring of skills. Employees need to adapt and innovate. Workplace learning is becoming more than a performance management tool, the weighting has increased and businesses may use it to gain competitive advantage (recruitment and selection of employees, talent management,

development of innovative practices, and the production of new knowledge and skills (Vaughn, 2008).

Supporting employees were interpreted as “caring” for staff and “understanding” their feelings and what was happening in their lives. Nonetheless, a real management challenge lay in enabling staff that were defined by one as “hard cases”, to grow and develop through not avoiding “difficult conversations” the focus is rather on “open doors” and “not push staff through”, others felt a need to be more active (Warhurst, 2013).

5.7.4 Challenges of informal learning

The study have identified the challenges of Informal learning in an organisation as: orientation programme for new employees, structured process of performance appraisals, limited acknowledgement and recognition, personnel practices that facilitate ongoing learning and management Issues.

From the evidence of the study, participants feel that not much time is spent on orientation programmes, participant 1 says: “They put some, somebody in a position much too early. They give minimum training and they expect professional results. A participant explains: “The supervisor must make it practical thing with them, they take the step from the senior not just as a caretaker, and they need to be involved... leading by example. Always to coach him on that level or standard, you were showing him on how to do this? We learning each other, to show them the right, so that he can or she can be perfect, so like us”.

While some organizations have no formal training programs and near completely rely on informal learning, particularly, informal learning alone can leave an employee feeling helpless and directionless; an induction process of a new employee should be supported with an orientation programme (Conlon, 2004).

At all occupational levels, performance appraisals should be conducted. Performance agreements should be in place with clear and agreed key performance indicators, which is appraised in set timelines. Subsequently, from a Performance appraisal, a personal development programme can be actioned, strengths can be rewarded and coaching can be implemented in areas of development, as participant 9: “Help me make my learning better, To give us more time, then person that I am training that train him, I must gave him a chance

to improve what I am showing him...To show him every time, everyday, to make him understand and when I'm done, I ask him are you ok now, I mustn't just leave him".

Bryson et al., (2006) use an example of a skills matrix at lower occupational level, all that it requires is for employees to work their way through different "grades" of tasks, which are normally the scope of work, then being assessed and "ticked off" when the employee can demonstrate that they are competent and have mastered each specific task in line with a documented standard operating principle. As an employee progress, different grades are recorded, recognition and acknowledge is provided. In practice, this skills matrix provides evidence of skills gained.

Acknowledgement and Recognition plays a critical role in promoting informal learning. Cognisance must be taken of constant referral to recognition and method of recognition by a certificate is noted by the participant's. Personnel practises have been mentioned as a factor that could enable informal learning through Employee Wellness programmes. These initiatives may possibly cultivate an encouraging and participatory culture which could reduce challenges such as age and adapting to new conditions as pointed out by participant 6: "I think I'm too old, my time is running out, don't have much time". Some interviews showed that for some co-workers, adjusting to change, accepting new co-workers and learning new skills and knowledge was not easy. Employee wellness initiatives can raise sensitivity and by sharing information and participation, the older and new employees still feel included, productive and resourceful.

Management issues and restricting an employee's autonomy hinders opportunities for future growth and decision making. There is a lack of consultation with direct managers and no involvement with appointments, participant 5, "if you need to promote someone, talk to someone that is day and night on the floor. And take it from there, we know the person's standard of work. It's good if you observe that person day by day. If he does wrong, help him then tomorrow as years go by watch the ways and attendance, there is a lot of things you must observe. "There should be mutual involvement and communication. A shortage of resources to perform tasks is extremely frustrating.

Investing in the interest of staff could lead to a higher service delivering, leading to a satisfied client. The challenge remains as pointed out by a participant that says: “a lack of input from you would consider a senior manager when you would ask for advice, there would be lots of oohs and aahs, call that one, you get pushed from pillar to post and it’s not easy”.

‘Communication skills’ and ‘problem-solving skills’ seeks to address challenges that constrain effective informal learning in the workplace. These skills enable co-workers to rise above any resistance (their own or others) and to embrace the goals and challenges of the terms and conditions of work desired by the employer (Jackson & Jordon, 2000). Participants have continuously pointed out the value and impact of communication and problem solving skills, “the information that I have, we can share it, and begin ... a debate, sharing your views, so that we can communicate ideas... You have to learn to explain properly, people can understand practically and verbally”.

5.8 Summary

Dale and Bell (1999) explored informal learning and investigated how it can contribute to the success of an organisation. The findings of their research have been used as a conceptual framework for results and findings of this research study.



The key findings of a study and research of Dale and Bell (1999) have been integrated and illustrated:

- Informal learning leads to development of skills and acquiring of knowledge to perform the task, it enhances employability and creates positive benefits for managers, co workers and an organisation.
- Informal learning needs to be directed; managers’ active involvement is critically important as they would have to assess an end result, but they also need appropriate skills to support and assess learning to be able to coach further.
- Informal learning forms is spontaneous, natural and forms part of everyday activities, and everyday activities create opportunities and support learning;
- Many different activities can aid informal Learning and employees have an opportunity of practising a method they prefer. These include problem solving through action, observation and demonstration and role modelling, trial and error, research and constructive feedback;

- Other sociocultural factors influence a sort of climate in which learning flourishes, including participation and interaction amongst employees. Being open and transparent about company performance, providing access to resources, being ready to review and listen to ideas, recognising and acknowledge of achievement and contribution, being uncompromising about quality of standards, importance and value of continuous learning;
- Informal learning can be integrated with other work processes, such as quality audits and health and safety control checks;
- Informal learning supports and is supported by formal learning activities and is regarded by most theorist as one in the workplace.
- Task breakdowns and checklists help to structure learning by charting progress and linking to other processes; this facilitates ongoing assessments.
- Informal learning can develop task skills and know-how and communicates “social” norms and preferred patterns of behaviour; and employees are engaged in the process and collaboration is practised.
- Informal learning is not easy to codify or accredit; however, it should be assessed, the level of competency of an individual based on criteria such as taking the initiative, taking ownership, leadership, results oriented, team player.
- Informal learning does not replace formal learning; it complements it and has some drawbacks if not supported by the organisation.

5.9 Conclusion

The aim of the study was to examine the effectiveness of informal learning and gaining insight into this phenomenon from individual’s experiences and descriptions of informal learning. Literatures on informal learning has been examined and claim that informal learning involves learning which takes place at work, relates to an individual’s performance of their job and is natural and spontaneous and not formally organised into a programme. Furthermore, the study explored why sociocultural constructs in the workplace have an impact and what factors influence the potential of informal workplace learning?

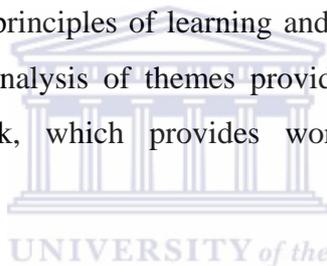
Learning in all its forms, should be an incorporated in all areas of the workplace and form an integral activity in achieving workplace goals. Its vast contribution to both the employability of employees and the long term success of the company involved in the study has to be

acknowledged. To meet the challenge to attract and retain talented employees, organizations are to support employees to develop their own careers and increase their career satisfaction. HR/OD professionals can play a pivotal role in enhancing employees' career satisfaction by providing supportive leadership such as coaching and mentoring and by facilitating the change of organizational learning culture, and hiring and selecting the right people (Joo & Ready, 2012, p. 291).

According to Kyndt, Dochy and Nijs (2009), for practitioners and training departments, to be able to improve workplace learning, they should be supporting the condition of “feedback and knowledge acquisition” as it has the contributes the most. This means that scheduling time for feedback, debriefings or peer feedback are imperative for employees.

5.10 Application of best practise principles

The application of best practise principles of learning and emerging themes of the research study has been integrated. An analysis of themes provides information that allows us to generate a heuristic framework, which provides workplace learning principles and recommendations.



The purpose of using this framework is to gain insight and use recommendations to propose interventions that can contribute to the quality of learner's experience and positively influence employees to adapt and thrive in a rapidly changing and demanding business environment. Table 5.2 display important considerations in providing and implementing proposed structures and climate for workplace learning. The first column illustrates the high level principles in workplace learning literature and the second column the proposed solutions to work with these principles (Vaughan, 2008).

Table 5.2: Workplace principles and recommendations

	Workplace learning is effective when...	These recommendations could be adapted and adopted for different workplaces
Workplace Learning structures and Climate	Formal and informal learning are integrated and the focus is more on achieving the outcome.	Create opportunities for employees to share expertise and best practise and learn from each other in their daily work activities by sharing information. Schedule time for feedback and evaluation. Understand that formal and informal learning may be relevant and applicable in different ways or at different times and the one does have not have more weighting than the other.
	Clarity of goals and set targets are in place. Workplace learning is aligned with and reflects the (desired) workplace culture practised by all. The strategic directions of the business and the nature of its challenges and opportunities are communicated to the all stakeholders and a collaborative working environment is nurtured. The aims and process of the organisation is reflected in the workplace learning	Be sure that the learning reflect the degree of difficulty of the workplace Be sure the learning opportunities are relevant to the individuals development plan and the organisational goals Plan and co ordinate a suitable fit between the approach, content and Co-ordinate a good fit between approach, content and rationale (for example, be creative and innovative ideas) Use trainers to facilitate in the identification of performance gaps between the individual learning and the workplace. Management and Senior Management are engaged and collectively support and take ownership with the employees in achieving the desired level of performance. Line managers or senior management can request feedback of the impact of learning. Advise learners and be transparent about the process with regard to approaches, the criteria for assessment, how they will be assessed, the agreed timelines and what support is available.
	Adequate resources and support is provided by management and team, with competent employees and correct tools to utilise.	Make sure the facilitators have a sound knowledge of workplace learning methodology especially the understanding of different learning styles. They are familiar with the fundamentals of the different theories and approaches that highlight it, such as ideas from adult learning, action learning and learning organisations. Make provision for the leaders such as managers, supervisors and trainers opportunities to learn about facilitate effective workplace learning. Adequate learning materials should be well designed, applicable and relevant to the individuals and organisation.
	The organisation is committed, supports and engaged to all employee's learning, at all levels of the organisation	Everyone should be involved in the design, development and implementation process of workplace learning that is employers, learners, trainers, all stakeholders. Make sure that professional development plans are in place and workplace learning Ensure that ongoing professional development and workplace learning are essential to all employees' work. Access is learning granted for all including, temporary and permanent staff)
	Opportunities to learn are spontaneous, ongoing and part of daily experiences and not only regarded as an add-on.	Learning is structured into daily practices and relationships at work, as well making provision for formal workplace learning interventions.
	Learning is recognised and measured by the team's performance and outcomes achieved. High Performing individuals are identified and succession planning is implemented to retain the talent.	The organisation should monitor and track performance based on facts not on opinions. Trainers need to consult and have regular meetings with managers and provide effective communications to employers to keep them informed of learners' progress. Some workers may be identified and be good mentors for other employees.

Source: Vaughn (2008)

It is important to recognise and acknowledge changing trends and demands of a work place and how it fits into the global knowledge economy, within which South African enterprises are operating and competing with international markets. To achieve high levels of economic growth and address the social challenges, everyone must work together and take ownership to invest in skills development.

To address the critical need for skills development, the National Skills Development Strategy III (NSDS III) was formulated and implemented by the Department of Higher Education and South African Services Seta to ensure that there is an increased access to learning and skills development opportunities and achieving fundamental transformation of inequities linked to class, race, gender, age and disability in their society. The main objective was to cultivate a skilled and capable workforce that shares in, contributes to, the benefits and opportunities of economic expansion and an inclusive growth path.

This NSDS strategy is aimed at providing improved access to quality learning programmes, an increased relevance of skills development interventions and building strong partnerships between all stakeholders and social partners. The key driving force of this strategy is improving the effectiveness and efficiency of a skills development system. The strategy is committed to encouraging and providing opportunities to link skills development with career growth, career pathways and promoting sustainable opportunities for all

<http://www.sasseta.org.za/content/tinymce/plugins/openfile/uploads/NSDS%203.pdf>.

5.11 Research boundaries

This section of the chapter raises some limitations associated with research methodology used in the empirical study. This study used qualitative methods, rather than quantitative, to gain an in depth understanding of informal learning in the workplace. Therefore, the validity and reliability of data depended on skills and abilities of the researcher. Willig (2009) point out that the method of analysis could lead to surface questionable information rather than in depth findings because it captures what is presumed to be “natural, organic setting” of an environment in a prescribed way. The data cannot be cross-examined.

The research was designed from a constructive and sociocultural perspective, in attempt to determine, how employees gained knowledge and acquired skills, why a complex social

system has an impact, afforded or constrained informal learning in the workplace. The constructivist perspective focussed on current perceptions of employees and how they acquired their knowledge and skills. Emphasis was placed on the preferred practise of informal learning and benefits of learning. The sociocultural perspective on learning assumed that within a shared social setting, informal learning opportunities could be afforded or constrained by co-workers. Hence, the approach taken in this study was informed by phenomenology.

Adopting a phenomenological perspective allowed rich descriptions of co-workers informal learning experiences and their participation in everyday workplace activities to be illustrated. As Polkinghorne (1995) proposed, phenomenology is an attempt to understand human experiences in its natural setting. Employers shared their thought and actions and provided their own accounts of what they perceived as informal learning in their everyday activities.

The critical question normally asked by a phenomenologist is: why, what, how are the experiences alike? The researcher designed the study in a manner that could facilitate a response to the questions. How individuals participated in everyday workplace activities at a particular workplace, how co-workers interacted with each other, and what factors influenced informal learning. The phenomenological approach was also suitable to address the informal learning issues that were presented in the theoretical framework of Chapter 2.

The method of interviewing was used to collect data on understanding the effectiveness of informal learning, how they learned new knowledge and skills, why sociocultural constructs afforded or constrained informal learning and what the impact of informal learning is. The purpose of interviewing in a phenomenological study is to gain valuable insight from descriptions of participant's feelings, thoughts, intentions and experiences. To gain a full analysis of the data, the interviews were audio recorded for transcriptions.

The semi-structured interviews gave participants greater freedom and flexibility in their responses and allowed the researcher to shape a discussion through the use of open ended questions and probe further if a need be. Prior to the interview, the researcher explained what the research project was all about, placing emphasis on confidentiality. The researcher took notes during the interview and with permission of each interviewee, each interview was recorded.

Despite the researcher explaining why a recording was being made and how the data would be used, there was still a degree of discomfort demonstrated, participants may not have been completely comfortable and at ease whilst being recorded and this may have affected what was being said (Willig, 2009).

In this study, the aim was to present data in a manner that would draw a reader into a phenomenon experienced by employees in their workplace and provide concrete and descriptive details that could allow the reader to identify relate and live in a moment with experiences of each participant. This was achieved with the interview, which analysed from a phenomenological approach to investigate informal learning in the workplace.

Connely (2000) claimed interviews assist with giving the employees an opportunity to express their views and share experience; it helps them to make sense of their lives whilst sharing and describing an experience. In recorded transcripts, a reader creates and discovers meaningful data. Interviews are meaningful and valuable, as a tool of communication as it arouses emotions and a sense of empathy, readers are inclined to read transcripts and live the experiences with participants. However the difficulty that researcher's could experience is in measurement and collection of data especially in areas of feelings, emotions and attitudes (Le Clus, 2008).

Being a qualitative study, the size of the sample may not be representative enough. This can limit the rigour of the findings and it may not be possible for a researcher to meet all the hallmarks of science (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). The researcher attempted to handle this by writing down any observations or comments which was made outside of the interview window. Given the fact that the researcher was an employee at the same organisation where the study was conducted, information provided was insightful and could be used.

The researcher acknowledges that there may be bias in an interpretation of data, steps have been taken to rectify this by ensuring that evidence of an analytical findings exist in the data and that different interpretations of the data be reconciled. As recommended by Holloway (1997), at the beginning of a transcribing process, the researcher listened to the audio recordings of each interview to familiarise with what is being said by a participant. In the study, the researcher was mindful to remove a perception of each participant and their experiences.

After the interviews, all participants were invited to listen to an audio recording to ensure that the researcher's interpretation of their experience was accurate. The process added to the rigour of the research. During the documenting process of transcripts, the researcher was aware of concerns raised by Feldman, Skoldberg and Brown (2004); he expressed that although researchers are skilful when analysing data and rigorous methods of analysis are valuable when documenting data research. It must be added that there were challenges in presenting data due to the subjectivity of the researcher.

Cross sectional studies may restrict the research as data is only collected at a single point. The researcher may not be able to gather accurate feelings or emotions at that particular moment when the data was collected. The main objective of an exploratory cross section study is to understand causal processes over a period of time and cross sectional studies determine their conclusions based on data collected at only one time (Babbie & Mouton, 2008).

In the study, it may be that the scope of this research project is too small due to financial and time constraints. Despite the fact that the researcher used an appropriate sample, the format of the questions and extent of bias or inaccurateness in capturing the responses may result in the research not being rigorous enough. The sample may not be diverse enough and the research may exclude individuals from all departments in the organisation which restrict the scientific value and usefulness. The more scientific the investigation, the greater the degree of confidence portrayed by a study. More statistical analysis could be required to measure the relations between the items, construct and reliability of the findings (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010).

In qualitative research, where participants are required to respond based on their perceptions and understanding informal learning, responses may be weakened due to researcher's subjective influence and participant's response in sharing experiences. With a small sample size (n=13), it may be difficult for a researcher to extrapolate data from a sample to previous research in the study of informal learning in organisations (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). The major shortcoming of content analysis is that it is often limited to data that had already been required through written or oral methods and may not be subject to further scrutiny (Babbie & Mouton, 2008).

The interview situation is unfamiliar to many participants and as a result both researcher and interviewee can adopt another role during the process (Babbie & Mouton, 2008). The researcher relied on the relationship and trust established with participants over a period of time as well as a professional code of ethics that has been practised in the past.

There is no obvious answer to conducting a qualitative study, except for the fact that within a qualitative study, it requires a fair amount of flexibility, a logical understanding of an assessment process, steps involved and adhering to fundamental assumptions of a paradigm (Schilling, 2006). Given that a qualitative researcher finds their own tools and techniques to suit their specific study, it provided the researcher with an opportunity to be creative and flexible with a continuous outlook to improve the research process (Babbie & Mouton, 2008).

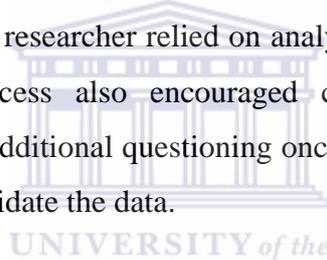
Some restrictions of the research should be noted and pointed out to be able to put the findings into a broader context. The sample of participants in this exploratory study was small (n = 13), it made it impossible to determine representativeness of those employees that participated. All data were collected using semi structured interviews. The data were collected at one point in time making it difficult to determine causality. Finally, all respondents worked in a single organisation.

In qualitative research, it is a necessity to address the degree of validity and reliability. The nature of a qualitative research advocates that these are difficult to determine as uniqueness of each participants experience cannot be generalised. For this reason, Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed and used four alternative “naturalistic” criteria for measuring the quality of a qualitative research: Credibility; transferability; dependability and confirmability. Firstly, credibility is described as confidence, a researcher can have in the truth of findings and can be determined by using different methods. The method in this study was triangulation and member checking. Participants were given an opportunity to listen to their audio recording. During this process, participants had an opportunity to confirm that the data collected reflects their informal learning experiences and they are comfortable to share for purposes of research.

Second, transferability, this study presented findings with rich and in-depth descriptions of informal learning phenomena through the use of documented responses in the interview. Transferability provided the researcher with enough information to judge and review

appropriateness of application and validates findings to other settings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) claimed that transferability takes into account the generalisability of findings and results of a study to adapt to other settings, situations, populations or circumstances. In this study, interviews provided the reader with a first account of a phenomena and the informal learning experience. Thirdly, dependability was achieved by providing documentation of data, methods and decisions about the research process. This approach emphasised a need to give consideration to an ever changing background within which the research occurred, including changes that occurred in a setting and how these changes may have affected a research process.

Finally, analytical triangulation was applied to ensure confirmability. To enhance confirmability, procedures for checking and rechecking the data throughout the study were documented and accounted. A data audit was also performed that examined the data collection and analysis procedure allowing the researcher to make judgements about potential for bias or misinterpretation. The researcher relied on analytical triangulation and participant feedback to confirm. The process also encouraged communicative validation where confirmability could be ensured additional questioning once the researcher had re entered the field and asked participants to validate the data.



The vigour of both the phenomenological approach and qualitative method, however directs to its main limitation. The data were collected from a few individuals in an organisation who provided self reports, meaning that findings cannot be generalised to a larger population. The study is too small to make broad generalisations about informal learning in the workplace. However, the researcher is aware and takes into account that while data from this study provides valuable information and insights into informal learning in one particular workplace, the experiences and perceptions of employees in other organisations may be different.

On the other hand, the main purpose of a phenomenological research is to understand experiences of the participants as it occurs in its natural setting on a daily basis, along with it does not claim to generate theories or laws. The goal of the phenomenology is reached when the researcher gain a better understanding of the manner participants sees things. In this study the goal is achieved, when a reader develops a better understanding of how effectiveness of learning in the workplace enhances proficiency.

Another limitation of the methodology is that the only source of data collection was interviews. More methods of data collection could have been used such as observation, surveys and document analysis. The nature of the study and research questions indicated that the most effective way to investigate employee's experiences were thorough interviews. Small in depth interviews, provided an opportunity for the researcher to gather rich and in depth information which quantitative methods do not allow and observations alone cannot reveal.

5.12 Summary and Conclusion

Although this study only investigated the effectiveness of learning in the workplace, specific themes on relevant perceptions, sociocultural phenomena and behaviours is visible from the findings. This study provides evidence that given favourable conditions, learning in the workplace can be enhanced by improving opportunities for productive engagement in a wide range of work processes. Moreover, it is supported by the findings of Eraut (2011) that claims working alongside a co worker for a while provides someone an opportunity to learn, by asking questions and receiving feedback about shared activities and achieving workplace goals. It allows the learner to see how a colleague reads a situation, monitors them and takes decisions. These activities are largely tacit and difficult to explain. Working in groups with people who have different kinds of expertise helps one to understand the nature of that expertise and make better use of it (Eraut, 2011).

Eraut (2011) further indicated that over a wide range of professions and workplaces, informal workplace activities provided between 70 – 90% of the learning but informal learning was treated as only an occasional by-product. Hence most discussions of learning deal only with formal, organised events and appraisals lacked collaborative dialogue. Management and supervisors are still placing more emphasis on formalised learning to address performance gaps, instead of recognising the value of informal learning by mentoring and coaching their staff.

In light of these findings, there is a lot more to the concept of informal learning, “learning is the only sustainable advantage”. Cross (2007) argues that managers leave informal learning to chance. Ignoring the value undermines the contribution of employees in the workplace. He further adds that employees need to be co participants and actively be engaged.

This study drew attention to two major findings. The first finding was that informal learning was defined and described by daily work activities that is highly flexible, spontaneous and can be planned, intentionally or unintentionally. However, unfortunately, companies don't take the process seriously enough to justify the value of informal learning. An enlightened organisation can benefit tremendously by improving its learning ecosystem (Cross, 2007).

The second major finding of this study was that relationships between co workers afforded or constrained informal learning. The degree of participation and interaction revealed important sociocultural processes that influenced the effectiveness of informal learning. The process of thriving informal learning was seen through participation, interaction and co operations between co-workers. These processes were influenced by how the individual engages as a changing agent and the social system that was central to how informal learning occurred.

The third major finding focus on encouraging dialogue, it is the most powerful instructional technology being used globally. Employees learn better and deeper when they converse with the right people at the right time in the right place. Cross (2007) suggests that it becomes apparent that existing employees learned informally new skills and knowledge from subject matter experts to keep up with workplace changes and technological advancements. Informal learning enabled better participation in workplace activities and is the conceptual glue that holds a high performing organisation together.

Human Resource (HR) professionals could play an active and dynamic role by focusing on career development and motivation as it stimulates employee's engagement in informal workplace learning. HR could encourage employee development by enhancing their career motivation, for example, by scheduling different managing practises and interventions like coaching functions by supervisors, helping employees set clear career goals for themselves, providing positive and constructive performance feedback and providing job related challenges. Furthermore, designing and developing effective learning programs for employees. On the other hand, employees should shape and build up their own informal workplace learning activities in keeping with their career aspirations (Van Rijn et al., 2013).

5.13 Suggestions for future research

Future research needs to have a larger and representative sample of participants drawn from several different organisations. In addition, qualities and constructs examined enabled an inclusion of many different concepts inside of the organisation and it may be useful to focus only on themes that would expand the understanding of the relationship of informal learning with individuals and organisational contexts. In addition, future research should include longitudinal designs to permit examination of causal directions and reciprocal relationships. Incorporating measures of informal learning in the workplace at an individual, team and organisation levels would illuminate the link between various levels of analysis.

The study collectively shaped experiences of the participants in one workplace who have made visible some informal learning opportunities in that workplace. More research is required across the workplace to provide holistic representation of how co-workers learn and interact and add value at an individual, group and organisational level. Furthermore, research is required to examine the relationship between informal learning and business productivity. Informal learning is a strategy for organisations with long term values and vision for success (Cross, 2007).

Chapter 5 concludes this research study. The findings produced three salient themes that revealed the effectiveness of informal learning in the workplace; firstly, the current perceptions of informal learning, secondly, the sociocultural constructs that affects informal learning and thirdly, and the factors that influence the potential of informal workplace learning.

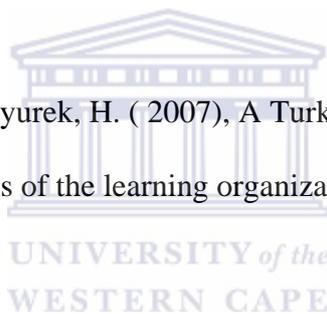
References

Alonderiene, R. (2009). Enhancing informal learning to improve job satisfaction Perspective of SMEs Managers in Lithuania. Baltic Journal of Management, 2010, (5), 257 -287

Amdin. (2007). Training Manual: Module 1 : The context of education, training and development practices. South African Management Development Institute (SAMDI) retrieved on April, 16 2012 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Informal_learning

Babbie, E., & Mouton, J. (2008). The practice of social research. 8th edition. Oxford Press: South Africa

Basim, H., Sesen, H., & Korkmazyurek, H. (2007), A Turkish Translation, Validity and Reliability study of the dimensions of the learning organization questionnaire, World Applied Sciences Journal, 2(4), 368-374



Beckett, D., & Hager, P. (2002). Life, work and learning: Practice in Postmodernity. Routledge International Studies in the Philosophy of Education 14, London and New York: Routledge.

Berg, S.A., & Chyung S.Y. (2008). Factors that influence informal learning in the workplace, The Journal of Workplace Learning, 20 (4), 229-244

Billet, S. (1995). Workplace learning it potential and limitations. Education and Training, 37(4) 20-27

Billet, S. (2001). Learning through work: workplace affordances and individual engagement. Journal of Workplace Learning, 13 (5), 209-214

Billet, S. (2004). Workplace participatory practices conceptualising workplaces as learning environments. The Journal of Workplace Learning, 16(6), 312-324

Blom, R., Parker., & B. Keevey, J. (2007). The recognition of non formal and informal learning in South Africa. Country Background Report prepared for the OECD Thematic Review. Unpublished document. Johannesburg.

Boud, D. & Middleton, H.(2003). Learning from others at work: communities of practice & informal learning. Journal of Workplace Learning, 15(5), 194 -202

Bryson, J., Pajo, K., Ward, R., & Mallon, M. (2006). Learning at work: organisational affordances and individual engagement. Journal of Workplace Learning, 18 (5), 279-297

Burns, J.Z. (2008). Informal Learning and Transfer of Learning: How New Trade and Industrial Teachers Perceive Their Professional Growth and Development. Career and Technical Education Research, 33(1), 3-24.

Burns, N., & Grove, S. K. (2005). *The Practice of Nursing Research: Conduct, Critique, and Utilization* (5th Ed.). St. Louis, Elsevier Saunders

Conlon, T.J. (2004). A review of informal learning literature, theory and implications for practice in developing global professional competence, *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 28 (2, 3, 4)283 -295

Connelly, F.M & Clandinin, D.J.(2000). *Narrative inquiry*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc.

Corbin, J., & Morse, J. (2003). The unstructured interactive interview: issues of reciprocity and risks when dealing with sensitive topics. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 9, 335 -353

Cresswell, J.W. (2003). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*. (2nd ed.). California: Sage Publications.

Cross, J. (2007). *Informal learning: Rediscovering the Natural Pathways that inspire Innovation and Performance*. San Francisco: Pfeiffer



Cunningham, J & Hillier, E. (2013). Informal learning in the workplace: key activities and processes. *Journal of Education and Training*, 55 (1). 37-51.

Dale, M. and Bell, J. (1999). Informal Learning in the Workplace, DfEE Research Report No. 134, Department for Education and Employment, London, available at: www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RB134.doc (accessed 20 September 2013)

Duke, C.E. (2009). Learning and Development in 2011: A Focus on the Future. Duke Corporate Education. Retrieved on March 10, 2012.

[http:// www.dukece.com/papers-reports/documents/FocusFuture.pdf](http://www.dukece.com/papers-reports/documents/FocusFuture.pdf)

Edwards, C.P. (2002). Evolving questions and comparative perspectives in cultural/historical research. *Human Development*. 45, 307 -311

Elo, S., & Kyngas, H., (2008). The qualitative content analysis process. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*. 62 (1), 107–115

Enos, M.D., Kerhann, M.T., & Bell, A. (2003). Informal Learning and the transfer of learning. How Managers Develop Proficiency. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*. 14 (4).

Eraut, M. (2004). Informal learning in the workplace. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 26(2), 247-273.

Eraut, M (2011). Informal Learning in the workplace: evidence on the real value of work based learning. *Development and Learning in organisations*, 25(5), 8-12

Evans, K., Hodkinson, P, Rainbird, H. and Unwin, L. (2006) . *Improving Workplace Learning*. London: Routledge

European Labour Force Survey (2004)

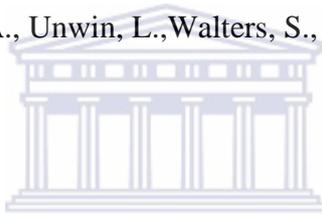
http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/statistics/search_database (Accessed on 24 October 2013) European Parliament (2004).

Feldman, M.S., Skoldberg, K., Brown, R.N, & Horner, D.(2004). Making sense of stories: a rhetorical approach to narrative analysis. Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, 14(2), 147 -170

Fenwick, T. (2010). Workplace learning and adult education . European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults, 1 (1-2), 79-85

Filstad, C. (2004). How newcomers use role models in organisational socialisation. Journal of Workplace learning, 16 (7), 396 - 409

Fuller, A., Ashton, D., Felstead, A., Unwin, L.,Walters, S., & Quinn, M.(2003). Final Report to the DTI.



Gaglio, B., Nelson, C., & King, D. (2006). The role of rapport: lessons learned from conducting research in a primary care setting. Qualitative Health Research, 16(5), 723 – 734.

Haralalka, A., & Tung, L.C. (2012). Why Strengths Matter in Training?

<http://gmj.gallup.com>. Retrieved on April13, 2012.

Harrison, J., MacGibbon, L., & Morton, M.(2001). Regimes of trustworthiness in qualitative research: the rigirs of receprocity. Qualitative Inquiry, 7, 323 -345

Hartas, D. (2010). *Educational Research and Inquiry: Qualitative & Quantitative Approaches*. London: Continuum International and Publications.

Henning, E.H., Van Rensburg, W. & Smith, B. (2010). Finding your way in qualitative research. Van Schaik Publishers: Pretoria

Holloway, I. (1997). *Basic Concepts for Qualitative Research*. Oxford: Blackwell Science

Joo, B., & Ready, K.J. (2012). Career satisfaction The influences of proactive personality, performance goal orientation, organizational learning culture, and leader-member exchange quality. Career Development International, 17 (3), 276-295

Kang, M. & Kim, B. (2013). Embedded resources and knowledge transfer among R&D employees. 17(5), 709 - 723

Kyndt, E., Dochy, F., & Nijs, H. (2009). Learning conditions for non-formal and informal workplace learning. Journal of Workplace Learning, 21(5), 369-383

Le Clus, M. (2008). Affordances and Constraints of Informal learning in the workplace: A sociocultural perspective. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of Murdoch

Le Clus, M. A. (2011). Informal learning in the workplace: A review of literature. Australian Journal of Adult Learning, 51(2),355-373

Lee, T., Fuller, A., Ashton, D., Butler, P., Felstead, A., Unwin, L., & Walters,S. (2004). Learning as work: Teaching and Learning processes in the Contemporary Work Organisation, Learning as Work Research Paper, 2

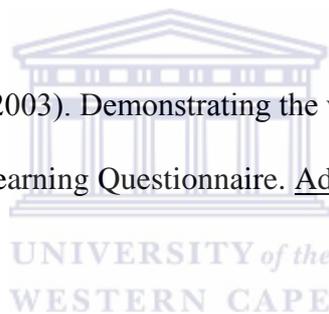
Leedy, P.D., & Omrod, J.E. (2010). *Practical Research Planning and Design* (9th ed.), New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc.

Lincoln, Y.S & Guba, E.G (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Newbury Park: Sage

Malcolm, J., Hodkinson, P. & Colley, H.(2003). The interrelationships between informal and formal learning. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 15 (7-8), 313-318

Marsick, V.J., & Watkins, K.E. (2001). Informal and Incidental learning. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 89, (25-34).

Marsick, V.J. & Watkins, K.E . (2003). Demonstrating the value of an organisation's learning culture: The Dimensions of the Learning Questionnaire. *Advances in the Developing Human Resources*, 5(2). 132 -151



Marsick, V.J. (2009). Towards a unifying framework to support informal learning theory. research and practice. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 21(4), 265-275

Maxwell, J.A. (2005). *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach*: Sage Publications

Mayring, P. (2000). Qualitative Content Analysis. *Forum: Qualitative social research*, 1(2)

Munro, A. J. (2011). Ethics and Design Research at South African Higher Education Institutions: A prolegomenon. *Paper presented at the Sixth International DEFSA Conference*. South Africa.

Ospina, S. (2004). *Qualitative Research*. Robert. F. Wagener Graduate School of Public service, University of New York. London: Sage Publications

National Skills Development Strategy 111, South Africa, April 2011, publishing retrieved on the October, 24 2013

<http://www.sasseta.org.za/content/tinymce/plugins/openfile/uploads/NSDS%203.pdf>.

Parry, K. W. (1999). Enhancing adaptability: leadership strategies to accommodate change in local government settings. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 12 (2), 134 - 157

Patton, M.Q.(1990). *Qualitative evaluation & Research Methods* (2nd ed.), UK: Sage Publications

Rambau, S.T. (2005). *Transfer of Learning: Constraints of experienced by Management Trainees in the Private Sector*. Unpublished master's Thesis, University of Pretoria, Pretoria

Rossmann, G.B., & Rallis, S.F. (2003). *Learning in the Field: An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. (2nd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication

Saldana, J.(2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications

Schilling, J. (2006). On the pragmatics of qualitative analysis: designing the process for content analysis. *Journal of psychological assessment*, 22(1), 28-37

Sekaran, U. & Bougie, R. (2010). *Research Methods for Business: A Skill Building Approach*. (5nd ed.). USA: John Wiley & Sons Inc.

Silverman, M. (2003). Supporting Workplace Learning: A background paper for IES Research Network Members. The Institute for Employment Studies

Sunassee, N.N. & Sewry, D.A. (2002). A Theoretical Framework for Knowledge Management. In *Proceedings of the 2002 South African Institute of Computer Scientists and Information Technologists Annual Conference*, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, A.

DEVILLIERS, M. CONRADIE, AND S. SINGH, Eds.

Van der Heijden, B., Boon, J., Van der Klink, M., & Meijs, E. (2009). Employability enhancement through formal and informal learning: an empirical study among Dutch non academic staff members. *International Journal of Training and Development*. 13, (1), 19-37.

Vaugh, K. (2008). Workplace Learning: New Zealand council for Educational Research. A report prepared for Competenz., The New Zealand Engineering Food and Manufacturing Industry Training Organisations Incorporated.

Van Rijn, B.M, Yang, H., & Sanders, K. (2013), Understanding employees' informal workplace learning. *Career Development International*, 18(6), 610-628

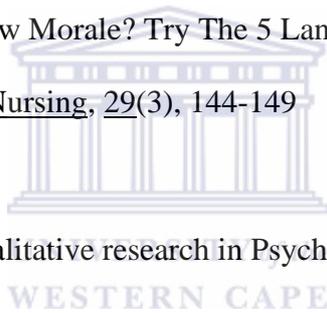
Wallis, E., Panagiotakakopolus, A., & Stuart, M. (2007). On-the-job- Methodologies Literature Review. Centre for Employment Relations Innovation and Change, Leeds University – Business School Report:

Warhurst, R.P. (2013). Learning in an age of cuts: managers as enablers of workplace learning. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 25(1), 37-57

Werquin, P. (2010). Recognising Non Formal and Informal Learning OUTCOMES, POLICIES AND PRACTICES. OECD Publications

White, P.E. (2012). Unhappy? Low Morale? Try The 5 Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace. *Journal of Christian Nursing*, 29(3), 144-149

Willig, C. (2009). *Introducing qualitative research in Psychology*. 2nd edition. Open University Press: United Kingdom



Addendum

Thesis: PROFICIENCY ENHANCEMENT IN THE WORKPLACE THROUGH INFORMAL LEARNING

Research Interview Questions:

Work Group	
Age	
Job Title	
Length of service	
Level of Education	

Interview questions:

Section A: Current Perceptions of Informal learning

1. Explain what is meant by Informal Learning
2. What is the difference between Formal and Informal Learning
3. What are the benefits or advantages of Formal and Informal learning?
4. Do you have any negative impressions of the two?
5. What techniques have you been exposed w.r.t Informal Learning?
6. How have these enhanced your proficiency?
7. How effective do you think is Informal Learning in the Workplace?
8. How do you think this organisation can promote informal learning?
9. What factors would you consider to enhance Effective learning?
10. What factors inhibit Effective IL?
11. Please state how staff members practise informal learning in the workplace
 - Solving work problems through actions
 - Learn from own trial and error
 - Observation of others
 - Search the web (including intranet)
 - Read professional magazines or journals
 - Talk with other people at work or via email
 - Attend a training program
 - Other methods, please describe

Section B: Exploring the Social Context

Relationship between co workers

12. How would you describe the people you work with (Co operative, difficult, helpful etc?)
13. How would you describe the relationship, you have with other people in your work group or other work groups?

New Co workers

14. Did anyone help you settle in or provide you with induction? How did this happen?

15. Did you experience any difficulties with fitting in?

Established Co workers

16. How do you feel when someone new starts working here? In your work team

17. Do you share information with new people about the job?

18. What sort of information? Can you give me an example?

19. What do you do to help new people fit in?

Section C: Informal Learning at Work

20. How do you learn new skills at work?

21. How do you prefer to learn

22. Do you learn from other people?

23. Is there anything that helps you to learn? / if not what hinders your learning

Probing questions:

These will include:

- ✓ Can you give me an example
- ✓ How did that make you feel?
- ✓ Would you have done anything differently?
- ✓ Is there any way you could have made that experience better?
- ✓ In your view, how do your co-workers feel about that?
- ✓ How do you deal with that situation?

