UNIT -12   LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Structure

12.0   LEARNING OUTCOME

After reading this unit, you should be able to:

- Know the concept of the Learning and Development;

- Understand the need for Learning and Development in an organisation;

- Find the nature of Learner; and

- Note the relationship between Learning and Development.

12.1   INTRODUCTION

Learning is a continuous process and invariably, those involved in different activities in various organisations need to get themselves engaged in learning and development processes for the purpose of *reorienting* and revisiting the knowledge gained and expertise acquired in the past. It is understood that a large number of organisations, in the contemporary period, have started providing unstinted support and importance to the learning and development of their employees. In order to get maximum benefits out of

learning and development, it becomes imperative to have a proper understanding of the concepts of 'learning' and 'development'.

12.2   THE MEANING OF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Learning is a process through which an individual goes through qualitative changes in comparison to what has been conceived by him or her earlier in life (Burgoyne and Hodgson, 1983).

Learning is a process within the organism which results in the capacity for adjustment in changed periods which can be related to experience rather than maturation". (Ribeaux and Poppleton, 1978)

Binsted (1980) has referred to learning process as not just a cognitive process, which involves the assimilation of information in symbolic form, but also as an effective and physical process. In keeping with this view, it could be stated that an individual's emotions, nerves and muscles are involved in this process, which can be effectively undertaken and which brings forth changes for the learner. Certainly, with *conscious attention*, learning can be much more effective.

Development is mesmerising and soothing concept. Everybody wants it, many chase it, but only a few get it. Those who get it are the ones who make conscious efforts towards it and do the needful to regulate the changes. It is worth mentioning here that change is imminent; whether one likes it or not, it is bound to happen. Of course, change can be towards the development of an individual, if properly regulated. It will not be wrong to mention that development, by virtue of learning and maturation, has emerged as a process of increasingly complex nature, quantitatively elaborate and sufficiently differentiated.

Differentiation and increasing complexity in organisations paves the way for newer potentialities actively responding to the organisational micro and macro environment. It brings forth and furthers opportunities to learn and the process continues. Thus, learning could be stated as the pathway to development. Of course, it is not its synonym but without learning, it becomes difficult to develop.

Primarily, it is the thinking pattern of the individual, which is, based on the results of his/her learning and development. Individuals' retrospection of self-concept and self-esteem, besides their responsive capabilities make them to work for learning and development. It has been stated by Daloz (1986) that "learning and development is a journey that starts from the familiar world and moves through 'confusion, adventure, great highs and lows, struggle, and uncertainty………… towards the new world' in which nothing is different yet all is transformed, and its meaning has profoundly changed".

On going through the viewpoints of scholars and practitioners on learning and development and distinguishing between learning and development, it becomes amply clear that learning and development are significant *for both individuals as well as organisations*. (Refer Unit 10 for more details on the concepts of Learning and Development).

12.3   NEED FOR LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Organisations crave for excellence, therefore, the use of concepts of learning and development for properly equipping their personnel are gaining currency. It is an

established fact that such moves of the organisations make personnel more effective and pro-active. They are able to cope with the existing challenges and plan for future strategy implementations appropriately.

To keep pace with change, organisations are emphasising quality along with regular improvement, coupled with flexibility and adaptability in order to enable the personnel to be conversant with the new work requirements and work relationships instead of focusing on erstwhile training and inculcating required skills among the work force. The focus now is on developing employees towards work-oriented thinking and standards. It calls on them to learn how to think, what to think, when to think, why to think, and under which circumstances to think for forwarding the organisation on the path of development with the help, cooperation and support of the management to make the organisation a truly, 'learning organisation'. For an organisation to be committed to learning and development, the concepts of quality and flexibility occupy the place of prime significance.

A.   Quality

Public or Private organisations have quality of service to be provided to their clients on the top of their agenda. It becomes very much difficult to ensure quality in work and service without meeting the expectations of the clients and by ignoring the prevailing circumstances and competition without gearing to a much called for focus on continuous improvement in the structure, processes, products and services (Hodgson, 1987). Quality cannot be in place unless there is consistent effort made by all concerned in the organisation in the right direction. It thus ensures that employees make quality as the core-part of the work assigned and responsibility assumed by them. Total Quality Management (TQM) is on cards in almost every organisation so that it could ensure clients' satisfaction, stress on required initiatives in the process and product, personnel involvement and participation needed, free-flow of communication, teamwork, updated management information system, periodic review of personnel performance, reorientation of employees and reskilling of the workforce, etc. To be on the podium of quality, there is the much required need for thorough and timely learning and development in organisations. In the present market-driven global economy, it is rather difficult for organisations to shine by emphasising on training and retrieving or reorientation of employees for quality operations to be in place (Unit No. 15 of this course deals with TQM at length).

B.   Flexibility

Organisations, for the purpose of fulfillment of their mission and timely accomplishment of targets, cannot afford to adopt a rigid posture. They have to be flexible in their approach. Crofts (1990), has stated that one of the pre-requisites for on organisation to be flexible is a body of highly skilled officials, which stake a human resource direction for the enterprise. To be on the advantageous end in the prevailing competitive settings, it becomes necessary for the organisations to make ample use of the human resource, which need to be multi-skilled for efficient and effective performance to be on cards. It is a fact that organisations adhere to set norms and established practices. Along with it, there is the important need for organisations to leave enough space for the participants in its workforce to get involved in thinking process. This is expected to enable them to coin out new ways of dealing with the work at hand besides contributing to the development of organisation for future challenges and growth. Gone are the days when workers were given responsibilities based on 'daily defined tasks'. The workers are to be treated as assets which requires their participation and meaningful involvement in organisational decisions, which is probably not possible through a rigid approach and by making the

functioning rules, regulations oriented, and strictly as per pre set processes set earlier. Thus, flexibility is much in place in comparison to rigidity because through it the commitment of the personnel can be ensured. However, it does not mean than rules, regulations, processes, etc., formulated in the past should not be regarded but it means constant revisiting of the established norms and practices for achieving greater success.

12.4   THE NATURE OF THE LEARNER

Learning is not only a continuous process but is also natural. Since learning affects the individuals, it is not just a cognitive activity and all of us remain engaged in it, almost all through the life.

Learning and Development throughout Life

Individuals right since birth keep on learning and a majority of them craves for more and more learning for excelling in walks of life. We learn and develop in the environment around us, may it be family, community, school, college, work place, religious organisation, etc. Various agencies of socialisation, as referred to above, facilitate the learning endeavors of the individuals, who use the knowledge gained and skills inculcated, for the advantage of the organisation, formal or informal, public or private, big or small, etc. The process of learning never ends and the more we learn, the more is the quest for acquisition of better knowledge and constructs. At times, people do not get the required encouragement from the outside environmental forces, yet it does not kill their instinct for learning. However, it could be affected by discouragement but will reappear when the circumstances favourably improve. Irrespective of the setting; office or home, people tend to learn and accordingly grow.

It is an admitted proposition that individuals, who are endowed with thinking potentials by the nature, have to their credit a lifetime experience of being learners, though some of them may not have been satisfied and happy with the situations around. It is also in place that not all of them may be able to possess required competence or confidence. From the analysis made above, it becomes clear that life long learning means regular and continuous adaptation. It is through the increased knowledge and improved skills that the individuals are capacitated for adapting to the existing environment and for making changes in the environment, wherever required. It is through learning that far reaching changes are generated in the individual and thus the development through learning is promoted. The process of learning and development is not always smoothly conducted, as at times there are barriers to learning and development. The subsequent table refers to such barriers.

Barriers to Learning and Development

With middle and top-level managers in focus, Mumford (1988) has identified the following significant blocks to learning:

Blocks to Learning

Perceptual	Not seeing that there is a problem.
Cultural	The way things are here.
Emotional	Fear or insecurity.
Motivational	Unwillingness to take risks.
Cognitive	Previous learning experience.
Intellectual	Limited learning styles. Poor learning skills.
Expressive	Poor communication skills.
Situational	Lack of opportunities.
Physical	Place, time.
Specific environment	Boss/colleagues unsupportive

Since each coin has two sides, there are positive results of learning and development, and there also exist a number of barriers to the same, which have been referred to above. However, in order to be more conversant with different types of learners in varying age groups, it shall be worthwhile to analyse each group of learners, as explained in the succeeding text.

A.   Adult learners

Primarily, it is understood that it is the young minds that need to be imparted instructions and knowledge for doing the things rightly. Other than the young people, there are the adults, which have different needs and experiences. With regard to adult learners, Knowles (1984) has suggested that:

- "The adult learner is self-directing;

- Adult learners have experience on which to draw and learning events need to consider this. They may have developed poor learning habits, and may be defensive about their habitual ways of thinking. However, their former experience is a source of self-identity and so must be approached sensitively and with respect;

- Adults are ready to learn when they become aware that they need to know or do something so that they can be more effective: they 'do not learn for the sake of learning'. Learning experiences, therefore, have to be as per needs and situation;

- What motivates people most are their needs for 'self-esteem, recognition; better quality of life, greater self-confidence, and self-actualisation".

B.   Older Workers

It is said that old habits die hard and the work practices, one gets used to, become difficult to be changed or discarded overnight. Thus, there is a need for older workers to be properly imparted knowledge, skills and instructions for development. Further more, the older workers at times attempt to seek re-employment. Thus, to be in consonance with the job requirements, it becomes imperative that the stereotyped thinking process of the older workers gets overhauled. In this category, there could be some workers, who demonstrate their desire and ability to learn continuously throughout their lives. It becomes possible only with the support of the employers and other fellow colleagues.

C.   Other Classes of Workers

It is being felt that employees from women, differently abled people, cultural and ethnic minorities etc., are socialised and educated in a manner, which at times does not go alone with the requirements of the organisations. By virtue of the treatment given to them, some of them are at low expectations and aspirations. It has been argued that women look at their world as 'a web of relationships' in comparison to men who look at their world as 'a hierarchy of power' (Gilligan, 1977).

It is, therefore, required that all employees, men or women, strong or weak, belonging to minorities or majorities, etc., are to be put on path of learning so that they can contribute towards organisational growth and development.

12.5   THE OUTCOMES OF LEARNING

Learning is an exercise and a process that never goes wrong. It always results in positive benefits to the individuals and organisations. The following outcomes of learning are of much concern to Human Resource Managers, who have the responsibility to develop the workforce for accomplishing organisational goals and targets.

A.   Skill

Skill is required for performance of almost any work. It amounts to not only efficient but also effective performance of the assigned task. It is, thus, required for old skills to be refurbished and new skills to be inculcated. Skills are required at not only the shop floor level but also at the middle and top management levels. It is through skills that competence of the individual gets sharpened and renewed. Different steps are initiated by different organisations for inculcation of skills among employees. Thus, there is need to appreciate the variety and different levels of skills. Learning can take place through various levels of thinking skills, viz., knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation etc.

12.6   APPROACHES OF THE LEARNING PROCESSS

As explained above, learning, which is a continuous activity, is a process. Two major approaches of the learning process are as follows:

A. Behaviourist Approach

Learning evokes specific and particular response. The Behaviourist Approach postulates that learning stimulates and leads to experiences, desirable or undesirable.

It can amount to two kinds of conditioning:

(a) Classical conditioning (it occurs when a stimulus amounts automatically to a response, for example, an individual having liking for a particular food, gets attracted with its flavour); and;

(b) Operant Conditioning (such conditioning follows a desired response, which gets revitalised and increases the chance of the similar response being repeated on recurrence of the stimulus).

B. Information Processing Approach

Learning has been referred to as an information processing system by this approach. It is enunciated by this approach that a signal on information is transmitted to the receivers. Of course, its receipt is subject to the communication barriers like noise and disturbance, etc. It is necessary for the sender to encode the information and for the receiver to decode it before making use of the same. The emphasis in the approach is that in learning the signal containing data or information is filtered through the senses, which are recognised by the receiver, decoded accordingly through the interpretive process of perception and put in action by selecting required responses. Much success of the learning effectiveness depends on the amount of attention attributed to the relevant component of stimuli, efficient choice of adequate response, and providing periodic feedback on data about its positive or otherwise effect on the system. There is possibility of system breakdown at any of these phases.

12.7 ELEMENTS IN THE PROCESS OF LEARNING

After having discussed the need of learning, outcomes of learning and approaches of learning, it is required to understand other significant elements of the learning process, which plays an important role in formulating, imparting or facilitating learning. These are as follows:

A. Feedback

It has been pointed out that any high achiever has four characteristics, that is, moderate risk taking, perceived occupational level, satisfaction with accomplishment, and, need for immediate feedback. No learner can be regarded to be on the path of effective learning unless he is informed of what has been learned, what has not been acquired, what are the advantages of the learning imparted or which other steps need to be in place for better performance, etc. A learner can get internal as well as external feedback. Based on the knowledge imparted and skills inculcated, a learner gets the response from within regarding whether the job is performed in the way it should be performed. Learners also get external feedback from the fellow workers, bosses, clients being served, etc., as to whether they are performing as being told or taught or trained for. The feedback received by the learners has to be taken up by them in the proper stride and they should not consider the same as their criticism. It is equally important for the boss to be positive in his approach while giving feedback to the performer and not being unnecessarily negative or for being so for the sake of it.

B. The Choice of Whole or Part Learning

We often wish that whole knowledge were imparted in a single shot. It is not possible in all circumstances that the entire process of learning takes place in one go. In fact, it depends on the circumstances, level of participants, comprehension of participants, maturity and art of trainers, etc., which could determine whether the whole or a part of learning is to be accomplished. In cases, where the complexities involved are rather high, it becomes difficult to go in for whole learning. Of course, if the temporal dimensions do not permit and exigencies have to be met immediately, the choice of part learning is not worthy of consideration.

C.   Role of Memory in Learning

Learning is imparted to the living beings. The human beings, who have the potential of becoming, are, though keen to learn, yet at times have their attention on other issues, which stand in the way of acquiring through the process. The individual, who is bestowed by nature to think and rethink, often stores such information, which is considered important, in one's memory. It has been on record that memory involves three kinds of information storage. The sensory memory receives and stores the data sensed or event seen just for a couple of seconds and unless it is transferred to the short-term memory or primary memory, the data sensed gets lost. The primary memory stores the information received for about thirty seconds unless specific and required attention is paid to the information received. In comparison to the limited capacity of the short-term memory, the long-term memory has unlimited capacity and can hold data or information for years together. It is, therefore, essential for those engaged in making others learn to adopt such mechanism and strategies whereby the learners not only understand what is being told but also are also able to retain it in the long-term memory. Since the human mind gets involved in social, economic, personal aspects, etc., and not exclusively in the organisational functioning, it, at times, becomes difficult for properly understanding, comprehending and retaining whatever is imparted. Depending on the context, at times, it becomes difficult to record and retain the aspects and techniques as being seen or told. Furthermore, the individual's mind filters the concepts told and draws own inferences for elaborating further on them in his own way.

12.8   THE CONCEPT OF DEVELOPMENT

Development is holistic in nature and is an on-going process. Unless dissuaded by certain prevailing circumstances, the individuals crave for development. Development is significant for both the employees and employers. It is irreversible and adds on to people's comprehension and change adjustment through life. A planned approach to development facilitates the participants to acquire such possessions, which could contribute to the betterment of their life and functional styles. There is no end to the process of development and like learning; it goes on all through the life of an individual. The advantage of being developed is reflected through the methods used and techniques adopted for performing the job assigned. It spreads through all levels in the organisation and so to feel that it is only the lower level or middle level of management, which has to be developed, is wrong. In fact, more developed top or middle management, can develop the potential of the middle or lower level management in a profound way. Thus, one does not talk only of lower echelons to be developed, as one does not say that it is for the developing or under-developed nations to be on the path of development, and not that of the developed countries. In fact, those who stand developed today could get redundant if they do not attempt continuous and periodic development. It is necessary to keep the pace of development going on for accomplishing the pre-fixed targets and for drawing

agenda for the time to come. Lack of such efforts will stand in the way of organisations to compete with others in the contemporary global economy. Through development of human resources, the organisations look for development of infrastructure, processes, goal fixation, job designing, organisation change and development, etc. It also certainly leads to more confident, capable and responsible workforce in place in an organisation.

It is understood that individuals develop all through their lifespan. It leads to achieving greater degree of confidence and transformation. There is need for development achieved to be sustained also for all times to come or at least until newer and better initiatives are put in place. For sustaining developed human resource, it is required for organisations to focus on motivation, communication, promotion, feedback, participation, control, and so on.

12.9   CONCLUSION

It is possible to have learning process in a continuous manner. It makes the organisational personnel to gain required knowledge and skills, as per the needs of the work. Learning helps the staff members to develop in their overall interest and in the interest of the organisation.

12.10   KEY CONCEPTS:

Learning Styles: Choice of right learning style is also a matter of administrative decision. It may not be proper to arrive at an a priori choice regarding the learning style preferred with respect to a particular programme. The appropriate learning style may be

Life Span Development: Life Span Development is an important component of employee capacity building strategies. Looking after the health and strength of workers is part of corporate social responsibility. The extent to which such intervention would be successful depends on a number of factors some of which may be outside the ambit of organisational coverage. Researches have shown that life span development strategies, dealing with employee health and safety measures have been successful in ameliorating the state of organisational health.

Nature of Learners: Good listening capability is a prerequisite for success of a learning process or exercise. By means of attitude surveys, employees' could be categorised as per aptitude or proclivity shown towards learning. Desired behavior changes could then be induced or encouraged by means of positive reinforcement to aid development of proper and required aptitude for learning a specific programme.

on- the- job learning with regard to a specific case and likewise.

Process of Learning: Cooption of knowledge imparted is understood as the process of learning. This process is both an inadvertent and a conscious deliberate process through which proceeds the process of knowledge attainment. Right learning process in a given set of

circumstances or for a particular subject is a policy decision which might determine the success or otherwise of a learning process.

12.11   REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

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12.12   ACTIVITIES

1. Explain the need for Learning and its advantages towards better work performance.

2. What are the outcomes of Learning and how these help organisations' functioning?

3. Critically examine the concept of Development.