

Learning in Multicultural Workspaces: A Case of Aged Care

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Abstract : To be responsive now and in the future, workplaces must address the demands of multicultural teams as they become more common elements of the global labor force. This is especially the case for aged care due to the aging population, industry growth and migrant recruitment. This research identifies influences on and improvements for learning in these environments. Its unique contribution is to illuminate how culturally diverse workplaces can work and learn together more effectively. A mixed-methods approach was used to gather data about this topic in two phases. Firstly, the research methods included a survey of 102 aged care workers around Australia from two multi-site aged care organisations. The questionnaire elicited both quantitative and qualitative data about worker characteristics and perspectives on working and learning in aged care. Secondly, a case study of one aged care worksite was formulated drawing on worksite information and interviews with workers. A review of the literature suggests that learning in multicultural work environments is influenced by three main factors: 1) the individual workers themselves, 2) their interaction with each other and 3) the environment in which they work. There are various accounts of these three factors, how they are manifested and how they lead to a change in workers' disposition, knowledge, or expertise when confronted with new circumstances. The study has found that a key individual factor influencing learning is cultural background. Their unique view of the world was shown to affect their approach to both their work and co-working. Interactional factors suggest that the high requirement for collaboration in aged care positively supports learning in this context; however, it can be hindered by cultural bias and spoken accent. The study also found that environmental factors, such as disruptions caused by the pandemic, were another key influence. For example, the need to wear face masks hindered the communication needed for workplace learning. This was especially challenging due to the diverse language backgrounds and abilities within the teams. Potential improvements for learning in multicultural aged care work environments were identified. These include more frequent and structured inter-peer learning (e.g. buddying), communication training (e.g. English language usage for both native and non-native speaking workers) and support for cross-cultural habitude (e.g. recognizing and adapting to cultural differences). Workplace learning in cross-cultural aged care environments is an area that is not extensively dealt with in the literature. This study addresses this gap and holds the potential to contribute practical insights to aged care and other diverse industries.

Keywords : cross-cultural learning, learning in aged care, migrant learning, workplace learning

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