

Workplace Development Programmes for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in Europe and Singapore: A Conceptual Study

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Abstract : With the heightened awareness of workplace learning and its impact on improving organizational performance and developing employee competence, governments and corporations around the world are forced to intensify their cooperation to establish national workplace development programmes to guide these corporations in fostering engaging and collaborative workplace learning cultures. This conceptual paper aims to conduct a comparative study of existing workplace development programmes for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Europe and Singapore, focusing primarily on the Swedish Production Leap, Finnish TEKES Liideri Programme, and Singapore SkillsFuture SME Mentors Programme. The study carries out a systematic review of the three workplace development programmes to examine the roles of external mentors or coaches in influencing the design and implementation of workplace learning strategies and practices in SMEs. Organizational, personal and external factors that promote or inhibit effective workplace mentorship are also scrutinized, culminating in a critical comparison and evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the aforementioned programmes. Based on the findings from the review and analyses, a heuristic conceptual framework is developed to illustrate the complex interrelationships among external workplace development programmes, internal learning and development initiatives instituted by the organization's higher management, and employees' continuous learning activities at the workplace. The framework also includes a set of guiding principles that can be used as the basis for internal mediation between the competing perspectives of mentors and mentees (employers and employees of the organization) regarding workplace learning conditions, practices and their intended impact on the organization. The conceptual study provides a theoretical blueprint for future empirical research on organizational workplace learning and the impact of government-initiated workplace development programmes.

Keywords : employee competence, mentorship, organizational performance, workplace development programme, workplace learning culture

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