MANAGING THE CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH THE ORGANIZATION OF WORKSHOPS AT UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

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ABSTRACT: *Using the theory of adult learning, this study examined management challenges associated with the organization of workshops at University of Education, Winneba. A sample of 150, made up of academic staff of the University of Education, Winneba (UEW) participated in the survey. Questionnaires were used to gather data from randomly selected the University lecturers. Descriptive statistics was employed in the data analysis. The results revealed that participants agreed that complex workshop session guides and inadequate period or time for workshop training sessions in the University major challenges affecting their career development sessions. Averagely, 74% advocated for repetition of workshops to enhance mastery of learning outcomes, timely availability or workshop learning materials, decentralizing training workshops, accommodation of participants views, and integration of computer technology into training sessions. The study has concluded that career development initiatives that fail to account for adult learning characteristics might not deliver efficient workshop sessions. Strategies to overcome HRD programs in adult learning settings and recommendations had been provided for the consideration of higher education professionals.*

KEY WORDS*: adult learning theory, workshop session, higher education administration*

INTRODUCTION

Training needs of employees must, therefore, be of huge significance not only for the employee involved but also for the employers, the institutions and subsequently for the nation at large (Bottery, 2004; Bottery & Wright, 2000). Knight (2002) corroborates this view and adds that employee professional development is at the core of organizational improvement. O'Donoghue (2003) states that there was evidence to suggest that attending training programs build collaborative staff and help to meet organizational needs. The human resource literature has often described employees as "glue" that binds all other assets such as financial and physical towards the achievement of the of any organization' objectives (Mathis & Jackson, 2011). As a result, training and developing employees' skills and knowledge through workshops are critical for effective job outcomes. A workshop is a working atmosphere that allows participants to acquire skills and self-knowledge. A workshop can be described as a flexible setting or environment in which coaching, different types of activities, work and learning takes place. Workshops support participants' personal development and empowerment, active participation, employability and work skills through collective coaching with an emphasis on practical work.

According to Cole (2006) methods used in workshop include work training and personal and group coaching. In my view, different sorts of coaching styles should be adopted with respect to specific needs of each participant. Indeed, duration of the working day, number of days within a week and the work plan could be all adapted to suit individuals' capabilities. It is a common knowledge that Workshops

are usually coordinated by either resource persons from within or outside the institutional setting and are aimed at refreshing participant's knowledge, skills and innovations in work Villegas–Remiers, 2003.

The key objective of a workshop is to coach or train individuals through work. As one of the major functions within human research management, training has for long been recognized and thus attracted great research attention by academics (Gordon 1992; Beardwell, Holden & Claydon 2004). Gordon (1992) defines training as the planned and systematic modification of behavior through learning events, activities and programs which result in the participants achieving the levels of knowledge, skills, competencies and abilities to carry out their work effectively. Similarly, Cole (2006) advanced employee outcomes such as lower turnover, efficient production cost, and increased confidence and motivation. Some researchers argue that the recognition of the importance of training in recent years has been heavily influenced by competition, technological innovations, and organizational change are probably influencing firms' investment (Beardwell *et al.,* 2004). Arguably, the greatest argument for training and development has been attributed to constant changes in the working conditions of employees together with an increased effect of information and communication technologies (Evans, 2011).

Sharma (2015) identified incoherent agenda, low or inconsistent attendance by key stakeholders, timing and frequency, supporting material and requirement conflicts as common problems faced in workshops.. The current study maintains that work shop training sessions are key tools that keep employees well-informed of current organizational developments, assist them implement innovations, and enhance their job performance. One of the most effective and efficient ways to bring change, job performance improvement and the professional growth and developments of employees is through well-organized in-service programs in a form of workshops, conferences, and seminars.

Despite the increasing benefits of training organizational employees, it appears developing countries experiencing a paucity of literature on human resource development issues (Debrah & Ofori 2006). Knowledge on such human resource development initiatives such as workshops is no exception in the University of Education, Winneba. The mandate of the Institute of Teacher Education and Continuing Professional Development (ITECPD) among others is to promote teacher professional development in the University mentorship programs for faculty and students and regular workshops in the University. However, achieving these mandates have not been without challenges. Evidently, challenges of career development has been espoused by Egan, Upton, and Lynham (2006). Egan et al, questioned scholar practitioners inability to develop employees' careers. Within the context of human resource development (HRD), scholars are beginning to theorize and conceptualize the context of career development (CD) (Desimone, Werner, & Harris, 2002). Using McLagan's (1983: 7) conception of HRD as the "integrated use of training and development, career development and organization development to improve individual and organizational performance," this study investigated challenges associated with employees' career development through the organization of workshops and the theory of adult learning at University of Education.

Two main research questions guided the study:

1. What are challenges associated with the organization of workshops at University of Education, Winneba.

2. What strategies can be employed to manage the challenges associated with the organization of workshops at University of Education, Winneba.

Theoretical Background of the Study

A significant theory that helped the current study to explore adults learning behavior in a workshop context was the theory of adult learning by Cross (1991). She attempts to outline the characteristics of an adult learner in the context of lifelong learning. This theory attempts to integrate other theoretical frameworks for adult learning such as experiential learning by Rogers (2012) and pedagogy and andragogy by Knowles (1980). According to Cross (1991), these Rogers and Knowles' models are based on basic assumptions about adult learners that adults are independent learners; they carry with them a lifetime of experiences; see an immediate application of the learning; and are more driven by an intrinsic rather than extrinsic motivation to learn.

Cross adds that this model consists of two distinct variables namely, personal characteristics and situational characteristics. Personal characteristics are those things as age, life phases, and development stages. These characteristics have different influences on individuals regarding personal development training programs. For example, an employee desirous of professional development is likely to continue learning. Life phases and developmental stages such as marriage, job changes, and retirement involved a series of plateaus and transitions which may or may not directly affect professional development, Cross, submits. Adults come to learning situations with a variety of motivations and expectations about teaching goals and methods. Moreover, as much of adult learning involves 'relearning' rather than new learning, adults often resent the 'student' role. Incentives for adult learning usually come from within the person, and feedback is more important than are tests and evaluation (Knowles, 1978). It is important, therefore, to respect the group's previous knowledge and experience, their motivation to learn, their potential resistance to change, and their ability to serve as co-learners.

As Douglas and his colleagues (1988) state, workshops are often designed to develop a skill on the part of the learner. It may be a diagnostic skill, such as the evaluation of patients with unique symptoms; it may be a psychomotor skill, such as flexible sigmoidoscopy; it may be a teaching skill, such as giving feedback; or it may be a research skill, such as designing a research project. Hence, training practitioners need to consider individual traits likely to impact learning outcomes during workshops. In view of the Cross' (1991) theory of learning, learning environments for workshop participants must also be of priority for adult learners. Workshops are particularly suitable learning environments for people who find learning in a traditional classroom situation challenging. Bottery (2004) believes that participants can improve their skills and competences through practical work, learning by doing within a conducive learning atmosphere.

The flexibility of the operating, working and learning environment of a workshop makes it possible to take the individual needs of participants, their pace of progress and strengths into account. Different working and learning modules and activities can be created flexibly within the workshop and its networks. Adult learners must always be guided by learning outcomes (Morrison, Ross, Kemp, & Kalman, 2007). Workshops must have objectives, practical activities and the means of achieving them,

which the coach or facilitator and the participants use as evaluation framework. . A realistic timetable must also guide the workshop (Sharma, 2015).

METHODOLOGY

The current study employed a survey research approach to examine challenges associated with the organization of workshops at the University of Education, Winneba. The population of this research comprised academic staff of the University of Education, Winneba. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 150 senior members. Simple random sampling guarantees that each element in the population has an equal chance of being selected (Hammond & Wellington, 2013)

Instrumentation and Data Analysis

The research methods used for this study are interviews and survey. Structured questionnaire and interview guide were constructed and used as the research instruments to collect data (see Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2008). The researcher used semi-structured interview to gain in-depth information on participants' perceptions of associated with the organization of workshops at University of Education, Winneba. Questionnaire and interview guides were used for data collection. The interview data was presented as embedded responses to the questionnaire data with charts, percentages, and frequencies according to the research questions that guided the study.

Research Question One: Challenges Associated with Workshop Organization

*What are challenges associated with the organization of workshops at University of Education, Winneba***?** This question sought to ascertain the challenges associated with the organization of workshops at University of Education, Winneba. One hundred and fifty lecturers rated workshop content and facilitating conditions during a three-day workshop organized by the Institute of Teacher Education and Continuing Professional Development (ITECPD). The results are displayed in Figure 1. Indeed, 70% (n=99) of respondents reported that timing for workshop training sessions had been a problem.

Figure 1: Workshop Organization Challenges at the University of Education, Winneba

In addition, 86% (n=126) of the workshop participants expressed concerns about the complex nature of workshop materials supplied. Respondents expressed favorable views on regularity of workshop in the University (70%; n = 105); interactive approach (73%; n =108); and relating theory to practice (80%; n =117). The findings corroborate Sharma's (2015) finding that timing and frequency, low or inconsistent attendance by key stakeholders and supporting materials were common problems faced in workshops. According to Gordon (2004), major challenges identified during professional training programs include a lack of trained facilitators, time constraints on the part of employees, absence of coordination between the stakeholders, and less commitment on the part of the stakeholders. In his studies, Guskey (2004) opines that a lack of uniformity of the professional training programs formats and the absence of guidelines about what should be included in the workshop session guides can be problematic for participants.

Research Question Two: Strategies for Effective Workshop Organization
Research Question 2 examined workshop participants views on strategies for managing workshops challenges at university of Education, Winneba. The results are presented in Table 1 overleaf. The interview data was used to support the frequencies. Averagely, 74% (n = 112) advocated for repetition of workshops to enhance mastery of learning outcomes, timely availability or workshop learning materials, decentralizing training workshops, accommodation of participants views, and integration of computer technology into training sessions.

Using a triangulation approach where interview data was used to support the theme on "Repeated workshops" (see item 1 in Table 1), participants reiterated the need to organize frequent workshops on operational issues confronting employees. For instance, a lecturer shared, "W*hen there are certain issues at hand, workshops should be organized immediately for its impact to be realized.* Another lecturer added, "*Repeating the workshop again shall go a long way in enhancing better understanding of the issues raised." Similarly, senior lecturer echoed the earlier view to organize regular workshops in this comment," I had a little misunderstanding on some of the tropical issues we were enlightened on. Therefore, repeating it [such training workshops] shall enhance my career as an academic."* A professor from the Faculty of Education lamented on the infrequent nature of training workshops for staff in this statement, *"I cannot remember the last time such a workshop was held at my campus. It is usually restricted to this place."* The urge to learn new skills can be seen in Kirkpatrick's (2000) four levels of training program evaluation – learning.

The findings on flexible training in this study coheres with Hustler et al.'s (2003) position that for the effective implementation of training programs, there should be flexibility in terms of accepting trainees' views on issues as part of formative assessment strategies. employees In line with this Kennedy (2005) concurs that professional development that is of longer duration and time span is more likely to contain the kinds of learning opportunities necessary for employees to apply new knowledge to practice.

Table 1: Strategies to manage the challenges associated with the organization of workshops at University of Education, Winneba

Statement	Agree (n)	% Agree	Disagree (n)	% Disagree	Total (n)
Workshops should be repeated	111	74	39	26	150
Timely availability of workshop materials	123	82	24	16	147
Decentralization of training workshops to academic departments	114	76	30	20	144
Advocacy for flexibility to accommodate participants' views	108	72	42	28	150
Computer integration into training workshops	105	70	42	28	147
Incorporate videos into the presentation.	108	72	36	24	144
Average	**112**	**74**	**36**	**24**	**147**

Source: Field work data (2019) $n = 150$

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Understanding the behavior of workshop attendees is crucial for any organization committed to the human resource development is key. The University of Education's effort to develop employees' careers to perform their duties obviously comes with cost. Applying the theory of adulty learning, the current study illustrated the need to address participants' views on timing and reader friendly workshop materials. Finally, most of the workshop participants advocated for repetition of workshops to enhance mastery of learning outcomes, timely availability or workshop learning materials, decentralizing training workshops, accommodation of participants' views, and integration of computer technology into training sessions. These findings obviously provide premise for discussing effective utilization of scarce financial resources to Ghanaian public tertiary institutions with the drastic reduction in funding of Ghanaian higher education from 0.7% of GDP in the 1970s to between 0.1% and 0.2% of GDP during the economic crisis of the 1980s (Effah, 2003).

Perhaps, the funding challenge confronting universities today has even worsened with thee reliance on internally generated funds for staff development and supporting consumables. Therefore, the study recommends that workshop training guides and material should be simplified to enhance comprehension and efficient career development outcomes for higher educational institutions.
Above all, HRD scholars and practitioners should continue to advance arguments for employee's trainings by accounting for demographic variables such as age, experience, education, and organization type. Integration of formative assessment and multimedia presentation tools into HRD programs could greatly assist workshop attendees to achieve learning outcomes.

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