

Connecting Research with Policy



The Learning Paths of Low Skilled Workers



Partnerships in Learning

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Workplace literacy and essential skills programs are catalysts for further learning at work.

Key Finding:

Employee participation in a formal workplace literacy or essential skills training program acts as a catalyst for the various informal learning activities that occur back on the shop floor. Worker awareness of the importance to learn is heightened as a result of the program along with the literacy skills to try their regular job tasks in different ways through continuous informal learning.

Policy Implications:

Employees, employers and governments can exert some degree of influence over the types of workplace education programs that are delivered at the work site. By offering essential skills programs for low skilled workers, small, medium and large companies create a learning culture which helps to engage the full potential of their employees in ways that are now recognizable.

“It was like employees were re-awakened to their own learning capabilities as a result of the program and this provided a different viewpoint about their workplace and their jobs.”

— WORKPLACE INSTRUCTOR



Employees with low skills can easily identify the types of informal workplace learning that happens from day-to-day.

Key Finding:

Employees with low literacy skills engage in five very different types of workplace informal learning. These types of activities include: observing from knowledgeable; practicing without supervision; searching independently for information; focused workplace discussions and mentoring and coaching.

Policy Implications:

Employee – employer co-operation can be effective in promoting increased informal work-related learning. Workers decide to participate in informal learning because they want to do the day-to-day job requirements better. Motivation for such learning is not based on credentials or chances of career advancement but in recognition of being a better worker.



“You forget about education when you are working all these years and then I realized I learn new things everyday. After all these years I’m still learning.”

— EMPLOYEE



**Workers learn differently
in formal training programs than they do
when learning informally in their daily work.**

Key Finding:

Learning informally on the job involves workplace trigger events like a safety concern; individual worker attitudes towards lifelong learning such as self-directedness; and an inner recognition of increased self-esteem.

Policy Implications:

Employers need to consider a wider framework for understanding, formal and informal learning for workers with low skills – one that is not dominated by measurable changes in performance. A new understanding by employees and employers takes into account newly acquired worker confidence, opportunities for doing regular work differently and supportive co-worker relationships.



“Lifelong learning is about working smarter – finding an easier way or better way of doing something.”

— EMPLOYEE