

# Successful Workplace Learning: Moderating Effect of Organizational Culture

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## Abstract

A main point of this study was that successful workplace learning is depended on workplace environment and its relationship with job performance will be improved in certain organizational culture values and practices. We hypothesized that the relationship between formal, informal and incidental workplace learning with task and contextual performance would be higher in result-oriented cultures. These five hypotheses were supported. We used interaction effect software by examining the strength of relationship in five level of result oriented culture. Our results indicate that these result culture value complement relationship between workplace learning and job performance.

**Keywords:** workplace learning; task performance; contextual performance; organizational culture

## 1. Introduction

Increasing intensity of competition among organizations in the current century, it is always followed Ways to gain competitive advantage and resultant success in the field of competition. Workplace learning is one of the tools Managers gain a competitive advantage for organizations are now considered (Rothwell, 2002; Cromwell and Kolb, 2004; Heilmann, 2007). Nowadays, organizations have changed based on new knowledge and technology. Employees have to constantly update their skills, and knowledge (Lin, 2008), and organizations have accepted their human resources as essential source of sustainable development (Aragon-Sanchez *et al.*, 2003; Park, 2009).

The theoretical argument linking workplace learning to job performance is a well-known theory. “On-the-Job Training” gives organizations an efficient and effective way to meet the demand for skill by the continuous changes in environment and technology (Tracey *et al.*, 1995; Barron *et al.*, 2002; Park, 2009). Workplace learning includes training as formal learning, informal and incidental learning can achieve both individual and organizational performance by individual learning. It would be more logical to employ the term ‘workplace learning’ more than ‘training,’ as it would demonstrate the various learning activities (Park, 2009).

Workplace learning literature that studied learning outcomes as result of workplace learning, they reported various outcomes such as skills and abilities, employees’ work performance, motivation to transfer learning, knowledge, organizational performance, and organizational commitment (Lankau and Scandura, 2002; Enos *et al.*, 2003; Tsai and Tai, 2003; Velada *et al.*, 2007; Dysvik and Kuvaas, 2008; Maurer *et al.*, 2008; Park, 2009). Many researchers argue about importance of learning for improving job performance but they mentioned that is not sufficient (Bates *et al.*, 2000; Velada *et al.*, 2007). The performance elements of HRD with learning build the expertise construct (Swanson and Holton, 1999). They explained the expertise as “human behaviours, having effective results and optimal efficiency, acquired through study and experience within a specialized domain” (p. 26). It shows that we need to study moderating effect of context variable.

The research conducted by Aragon-Sanchez *et al.* (2003) examines the effects of training program on performance. They claimed that training has positive relationship with performance. They conclude that organizations ignore the contribution of training to goal achievement and the effect of training on effectiveness and profitability. In addition, the different types of training activity have different effect on effectiveness and the results of training depend on many factors (Aragon-Sanchez *et al.*, 2003). However, they did not mention about these factors. One question needs to be asked, do organizational factors affect on results of training? Which conditions cause the positive relationship between training and job performance?

In the human resource development, this divide has been characterized as the “micro” domain where the focus is on the individual and the “macro” domain where the focus is on the organization (Klein *et al.*, 1999). Multilevel theory integrates the two by acknowledging the influence of the organization on the individual, and vice versa. From the multilevel perspective, then, neither level is more or less important. In addition, individual learning would

be seen as an essential of achieving individual and organizational goals. Thus, multilevel theories may illuminate the steps organizational actors may take, individually and collectively, to yield organizational benefits (Klein *et al.*, 1999).

Consistent with the line of research on moderators of the workplace learning –performance relationship, we suggest that the variability in the predictive power of workplace learning across studies may be accounted for by how contextual factors moderate the effects of dispositional factors on employee behaviors. The person–workplace interaction framework has suggested the importance of considering the interactive effects of person and organization variables in shaping human behaviors (cf. Eraut, 2002; Clarke, 2005; Elfenbein and O'Reilly, 2007). Magee (2002) suggests that organizational culture is an important contextual variable and recommends that individuals actualize their potential when organization culture is compatible with their own capabilities, workplace values, and interests.

In workplace learning research, there is suggestive evidence that organizational contextual variables would moderate the workplace learning–performance relationship. For example, time pressure, learning contexts, and situational variables point to the importance of different contexts in shaping the workplace learning–performance relationship (Yiing and Ahmad, 2009; Joo, 2012).

Adopting the person–culture interactive framework, we theorize how a contextual factor – organizational culture – would moderate the relationship between workplace learning and two types of job performance – contextual performance (Borman and Motowidlo, 1997) and task performance (Scott and Bruce, 1994).

We discuss why employees learning are more likely to attend to contextual variables. We operationalized contextual cues as result orientation culture (Beugelsdijk *et al.*, 2006). We argue that the existence of strong result-oriented culture in organizations will activate workplace learning and focus it more on high task and contextual performance, an effect that will be weak in cultures with low levels of this orientation. In the following sections, we first examine the workplace learning–job performance relationship and then result orientation as cultural characteristic. Finally, we consider the workplace learning–job performance relationship within cultures characterized by different levels of result orientation.

## 2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

A considerable amount of literature has been published on training as formal workplace learning, but few studies are in other types of workplace learning such as informal workplace learning and incidental workplace learning. The variety of workplace learning definitions shows that the nature of workplace learning is contextual and collaborative (Brown and Duguid, 1991); the key concept is learning, and the importance of informal is more than formal training (Moon and Na, 2009b).

The theory of “work adjustment” claims that individuals and environments impose requirements on one another and that “successful” work relations are the result of adjustments intended to create a state of correspondence between individual and environmental characteristics (Dawis and Lofquist, 1984; O'Reilly III *et al.*, 1991). Although the theory has primarily been used to study person–culture fit, it was clearly intended to apply

to specific organizational settings as well. The existing body of support generated for theory of work adjustment seems directly applicable to the developing body of research on person-organization fit (Elfenbein and O'Reilly, 2007).

Fit with an organization's culture typically focuses on similarity in values and practices. Although streams emphasize fit and draw on similar underlying theories, little research investigates both simultaneously. In a field study with intact teams, cultural fit had independent effects on subsequent performance; however, "deeper" value fit effects were stronger than "surface" demographic fit (Sarris and Kirby, 2005; Elfenbein and O'Reilly, 2007).

There is evidence that person-culture fit, examine as either person-organization or person-group fit is linked with positive work performance and attitudes (O'Reilly III *et al.*, 1991; Cable and Judge, 1997; Kristof-Brown and Stevens, 2001). The benefit of understanding fit for both the organization and employee to select people based on the values that define the organization's culture (Elfenbein and O'Reilly, 2007).

A useful way to conceptualize how culture influences the behavior of employees can be found in the congruence perspective. This point of view is based on the idea that employees adjust and adapt better to their work environment when the organization's characteristics fit their employee orientations (O'Reilly III *et al.*, 1991; Bretz Jr and Judge, 1994).

Elfenbein and O'Reilly (2007), increased fit in terms of person-culture can lead to higher levels of acceptance and social integration (e.g., O'Reilly III *et al.*, 1989), individual performance (e.g., Kristof-Brown & Stevens, 2001). One research discussed with managers and engineers about learning at work with new comers and effect of learning on job performance, retention, and satisfaction. The result showed that how the social norms and organizational culture values affect on new employees (Poell and Woerkom, 2011).

Some organizations emphasize process and/or quality, and innovation, but others emphasize outcomes and efficiency. In this case, what is emphasized in a specific context, for example, in terms of organizational culture, may shape the relationship between workplace learning and task performance?

### **3. Result-oriented culture**

Organizational culture is a set of beliefs and values shared by members of the same organization that influences their behaviors (Schein, 1990; O'Reilly III *et al.*, 1991; Schein, 1996). Culture reflects common ways of thinking and behaving. According to O'Reilly III *et al.* (1991), result-oriented culture is demanding and bent on achieving results. A result-oriented culture emphasizes efficiency and productivity, stresses the importance of getting things done, presses for on-time delivery of products and services, and maintains a faster pace than that of competitors while simultaneously controlling operational costs (Miron *et al.*, 2004). Hofstede (1993) noted that individual cultural orientation affects learning outcomes through learning interactions.

This approach suggests that the result orientation competes with efficiency. The moderating effect of result oriented culture presents a synergistic system whereby cultural orientation can be mutually reinforcing. It may be necessary for organizations to provide rules, routines, and standards, and at the same time emphasize the creation of knowledge. Our intention is to

compare the competing, independent, and balanced approaches in affecting task and contextual performance. The first three hypotheses reflect our prediction regarding the moderating effect of result orientation on relationship between workplace learning and task performance and the second three hypotheses reflects our prediction regarding the moderating effect result oriented on workplace learning-contextual performance.

#### **4. Culture as a moderator of the workplace learning–job performance relationship**

Considering the main characteristics of workplace learning, it provides knowledge and expertise despite the consistent positive effects of workplace learning on performance, the workplace learning–performance relationship has variability. We suggest that this variability can be examined in terms of a contextual variable such as organizational culture values.

As discussed above, workplace learning includes formal, informal, and incidental. These characteristics suggest that employees' learning is more likely to sustain consistent and inordinate effort in completing their work. With knowledge and expertise, it is more likely that employees perform well in their jobs.

Klein *et al.*(1999) argued organizations are multilevel in nature since employees work in groups and teams within organizations. Thus, it is inevitable to have level issues in organizational studies. Garavan *et al.*(2004) also claimed that HRD researchers must consider to the difference between the level of theory and the level of measurement; while the level of theory is associated with the targets, the level of measurement emphasizes on the sources of data.

For example, where data is gathered from individuals to study organizational constructs (such as organizational culture to examine how organizational culture influences the relationship between workplace learning and job performance). Level issues must be recognized (Park, 2009).

The foundational context to transfer learning to performance is organization culture (Watkins and Marsick, 1997) because a desirable learning culture may affect diverse organizational issues, such as leaders' behaviors as well as job characteristics to produce positive organizational outcomes. All these factors are critical for improving employees' job performance, so there is a need for greater focus on understanding the mechanisms through which social and organizational contexts influence employees' job performance (Joo, 2012).

According to Holton *et al.* (2007), learning can improve job performance but transfer of learning to behavioural change is depending on many factors. One of the most significant factors that influence on the relationship between learning and job performance is organizational culture that we can see in Holton model as environmental factor. (Elfenbein and O'Reilly(2007) argued that employee-culture fit can explain by adjustment theory in organization context which seems control the employee behaviour. Therefore after learning we can assume that whether organization gives them the opportunity for applying learning to job or not. It is time to come this idea that what is the effect of organizational culture values, for instance, organization buys new equipments and provide relayed training program as formal learning for using those equipments. What will it happen if organization has powerful result-oriented value?

However, the relationship between workplace learning and job performance is commonly accepted in organizations, but few studies have investigated how specific variable can affect on relationship between workplace learning and job performance (Reio and Callahan, 2004; Kramer, 2007; Moon and Na, 2009a; Chughtai and Buckley, 2011). Base on literature review, there is little understanding about how relationship between workplace learning and job performance is influenced by organizational culture. Several studies have recognized a positive relationship between training and organizational performance, such as organizational growth, productivity, quality, and employees' affective state, organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Rowden, 2002; Jacobs and Park, 2009; Arnolds *et al.*, 2010; Cheung, 2011; Keith and Frese, 2011). However, most studies have argued on training and development as a formal type of workplace learning rather than comprehensively including informal, incidental and formal learning in the workplace. Hence, we propose the following hypotheses:

H1a: A result-oriented culture moderates the relationship between formal workplace learning and contextual performance.

H1b: A result-oriented culture moderates the relationship between informal workplace learning and contextual performance.

H1c: A result-oriented culture moderates the relationship between incidental workplace learning and contextual performance.

In addition to replicating the positive relationship between workplace learning and contextual performance, we also examine the less-studied relationship between workplace learning and task performance. Task performance can be defined as intentional idea generation, idea promotion, and idea realization within a work role, work group, or organization in order to improve individual, group, or organization performance (Scott and Bruce, 1994; Ali *et al.*, 2002; Janssen and Van Yperen, 2004; Park, 2009).

Workplace learning includes activities that reflect being skillful and knowledgeable for performing task (Meador, 2008). As these activities reflect caring for the organization's success or goal accomplishment, experienced employees may also demonstrate task performance given the appropriate organizational context.

Similarly, an organizational context can serve as an important supporting function for employee learning (Lynch *et al.*, 2006).

Task performance is more likely to occur when the culture supports results (Ang *et al.*, 2007). Just as a result-oriented organizational culture can activate an employee's learning to perform on a higher level. This is because a culture tends to provide employees with more flexibility in determining the best way to accomplish tasks and gives them the discretion to take risks (Elfenbein and O'Reilly, 2007). Accordingly, we propose the following hypotheses:

H2a: A result-oriented culture moderates the relationship between formal workplace learning and task performance.

H2b: A result-oriented culture moderates the relationship between informal workplace learning and task performance.

H2c: A result-oriented culture moderates the relationship between incidental workplace learning and task performance.



## 5. Methods

This study was conducted from 13 subsidiaries of the public sector organization in the areas of complex C, Putra Jaya, in Malaysia. Two organizations selected randomly. The data were obtained from the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MOSTI) and Public Sector Department (JPA), Panel surveys, which were conducted in 2012 in Malaysia. All departments from two organizations in Putra Jaya participate in this study. The sample selected by random sampling from these two organizations. The population size is estimated 590 officers from JPA and 273 officers Subject of study from MOSTI. According to the proportion of male and female the sample with the Morgan table is counted which are 217 and 152 that was totally 369. The sample was selected by random sampling from these two organizations.

Respondents were assured that their responses would be kept confidential. A pre-addressed, postage paid envelope allowed participants to return their completed questionnaire directly to the researchers. By deleting the unmatched dyads, the final sample consisted of 322 employees. The response rate for the officers' sample was 87%, respectively.

### 5.1 Subjective measures

To assure measure equivalence in the English versions of the questionnaire, researcher conducted interview by officers and employed pilot test. Expert judges in English also examined the questionnaire to ensure that the items were understandable in context.

Respondents were allowed to self-report their own attitude and perception of reality. Self-reporting surveys allow respondents to record their own perceptions of reality. The reason is that "behavior and attitudes are determined not by objective reality but by actors' perceptions of reality, it is appropriate to focus on the latter" (Ashkanasy *et al.*, 2000, p.133).

Job performance is of two dimensions including: Task and contextual performance (Motowidlo and Van Scotter, 1994). To measure these concepts, two self-reported questionnaires consisting of 22 items ( $\alpha=0.90$ ) were employed. Questionnaire of task performance included 13 items while there were 9 items to measure contextual performance. To identify respondents' perception of job performance, they were asked to indicate the degree of their agreement on a five-point Likert scale (1=Not at all likely to 5= Extremely likely).

To measure the workplace learning variable, 17 items developed by Rowden (2002) were used. Participants were asked to indicate their agreement with statements on workplace learning on a five-point Likert scale (1= Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). Workplace learning consists of three dimensions: 1) formal learning which was measured using 4 items to identify participants' perceptions of planned, organized training activities ( $\alpha = .87$ ), 2) informal learning which was measured with 8 items to identify participants' perception of disorganized and unplanned activities or spontaneous demonstrations leading to perception of job learning ( $\alpha = .83$ ), and (3) incidental learning which was measured with 5 items ( $\alpha = .85$ ) to identify participants' perceptions of normal workplace activities.

Dimensions of organizational culture which have been derived from O'Reilly *et al.*'s study (1991) include innovation orientation, outcome or results orientation ( $\alpha= 0.79$ ) (Hofstede *et*

*al.*, 1990; Verbeke, 2001), team orientation and stability orientation. For the present study, measurement employee or people orientation and communication orientation or open system developed by Hofstede *et al.* (1990) are adopted. These dimensions have been frequently used and supported in many studies (Denison, 1996; Christensen and Gordon, 1999; Detert *et al.*, 2000).

## 6. Results

The individual measures used in the present study had sufficient internal consistency. Subordinates provided information on workplace learning only. To examine the psychometric properties of the variables from the same source (i.e. employees), we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on these variables using AMOS 18. As we had quite a few indicators in our model (44) relative to the sample size after deleting cases with missing data ( $N = 322$ ), we simplified the measurement model by reducing the number of indicators for some of the constructs. The number of items was reduced by averaging the items with the highest and lowest factor loadings from our confirmatory factor analyses. This procedure of reducing the number of indicators has been frequently used in the structural equation modeling literature for increasing statistical power (Mathieu and Farr, 1991; Mathieu *et al.*, 1993). The fit indices yielded acceptable results ( $X^2 = 1091.31$ ,  $df = 449$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ; CFI=0.90, IFI =0.91; SRMR= 0.056; RMSEA=0.07).

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and coefficient alpha reliabilities for the variables used in this study. Table 2 presents the moderated regressions to test our hypotheses (Baron and Kenny, 1986) by conducted interaction effect software distributed by D. Sober, (2013) . We followed the same general procedure for each of the moderated multiple regressions. The first step consisted of entering result orientation culture as control variable as one block into the equation. In the second step, we entered the two independent variables of workplace learning and result-oriented. On the final step, we entered the cross-product term. Support for a moderating effect exists if the  $R^2$  for the interaction term is significant. To support the specific effect hypothesized, the slopes of the interaction terms must be in the predicted direction.



Table 1. Means, standard deviations, reliabilities, <sup>a</sup> and correlations

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Formal Learning	3.36	0.66	(0.87)					
2. Informal Learning	4.05	0.54	0.24*	(0.83)				
3. Incidental Learning	3.21	0.48	0.38**	0.52**	(0.85)			
4. Result-oriented culture	3.01	0.39	0.34**	0.57**	0.40**	(0.79)		
5. Task performance	3.10	0.35	0.25*	0.45**	0.43**	0.46**	(0.88)	
6. Contextual performance	3.83	0.46	0.25*	0.40**	0.36**	0.45**	0.59**	(0.92)

<sup>a</sup> Coefficient a reliabilities estimates are shown on the diagonal. \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01

As shown in Table 2, five one-way interaction terms were significant. However, the one one-way interaction between incidental workplace learning, result-oriented, and task performance is not significant.

Table 2. One-way interaction effects

Path	Main Effect
FWL×ROC→ Task Performance	.10*
INFWL×ROC→ Task Performance	.11**
INCWL×ROC→ Task Performance	.12**
FWL×ROC→ Contextual Performance	.15**
INFWL×ROC→ Contextual Performance	.12**
INCWL×ROC→ Contextual Performance	.07

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

Figure 1(a,b) shows the interactions of two types of workplace learning and result oriented culture with contextual performance. Figure 1(a) shows that when result-oriented culture is low, there is no relationship between formal workplace learning and contextual performance. However, with high levels of result-oriented culture, the formal workplace learning shows high level of contextual performance. Figure 1(b) shows that when the result-oriented culture is high, more employee informal learning shows high level of contextual performance. Moreover, there is no significant interaction effect between incidental workplace learning and result oriented culture with contextual performance.

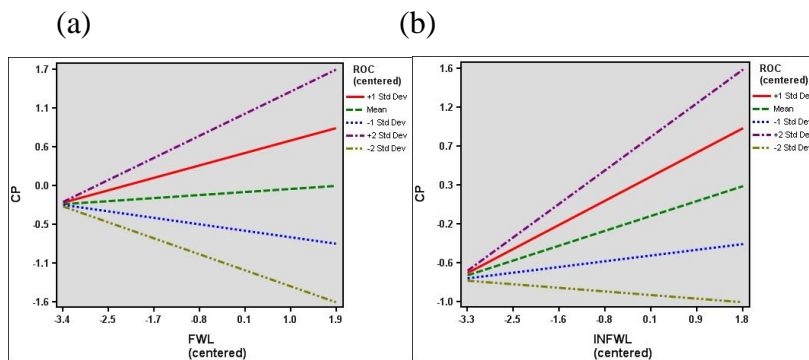


Figure 1. (a) CP: Contextual Performance, FWL: Formal Workplace Learning; ROC: Result-Oriented Culture. (b) CP: Contextual Performance, INFWL: Informal Workplace Learning; ROC: Result-Oriented Culture.

Figure 2(a,b,c) shows the interactive relationships on task performance.

Figure 2(a) shows that when result-oriented culture is low, the relationship between formal workplace learning and task performance is low. However, with high levels of result-oriented culture, the formal workplace learning shows high level of task performance. Figure 2(b) shows that when the result-oriented culture is high, more employee informal learning shows high level of task performance. Moreover, based on Figure 2(c) there is a significant interaction effect between incidental workplace learning and result oriented culture with task performance.

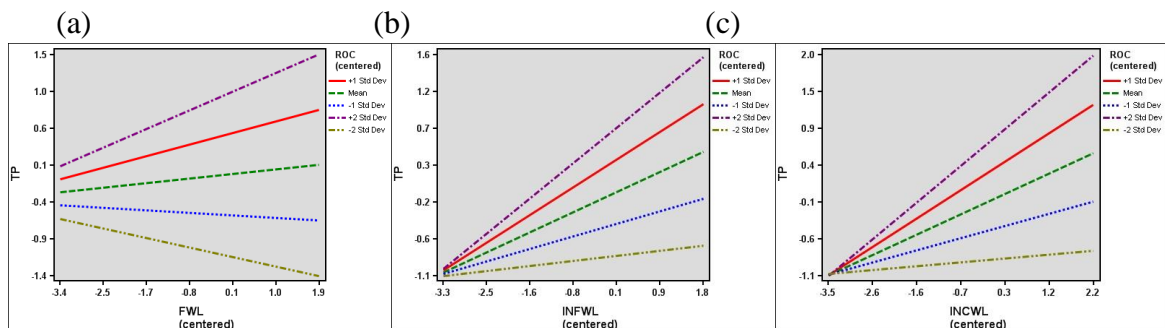


Figure 2. (a) TP: Task Performance, FWL: Formal Workplace Learning; ROC: Result-Oriented Culture. (b) TP: Task Performance, INFWL: Informal Workplace Learning; ROC: Result-Oriented Culture. (c) TP: Task Performance, INCWL: Incidental Workplace Learning; ROC: Result-Oriented Culture.

In summary, the form of the relationship supports the five hypotheses as they reveal that workplace learning activities showed higher task and contextual performance when result-oriented culture is high result than when this culture orientation is low.

## 7. Discussion and conclusions

Using multilevel theory, we hypothesized that workplace learning and contextual performance would be positively related when accompanied by a result-oriented culture and

that workplace learning and task performance would be strongly related when accompanied by a result-oriented organizational culture. The results of our study show that the two-way interactions were significant. However, workplace learning was positively related to contextual (interpersonal facilitation) and task performance when the unit's culture promotes results.

The results of our study suggest that emphasizing one only (result-oriented culture) for employee learning is not good enough for positive organizational results such as higher contextual or task performance. Rather, it is important for organizations to focus on three types of workplace learning such as informal, incidental and formal learning. In support of the interaction approach, our study suggests that the cultural values of result orientation can co-exist (Shader, 1990; Ali *et al.*, 2002; Marsick and Watkins, 2003; Yiing and Ahmad, 2009; MacIntosh and Doherty, 2010; Joo, 2012; Wang *et al.*, 2012). Thus, the norms for producing results on time with flexibility that ensures proper conditions to be best for employee learning in our context.

### **8. Theoretical contributions**

Results of our study make potential contributions to the learning and performance literature. First, we have identified organizational culture, in addition to psychological context and work effort (Mintu-Wimsatt, 2002), social skill, and social skill awareness (Hochwarter *et al.*, 2006) as moderators of the workplace learning and work outcome relationship. Second, as in Wang *et al.* (2012), we examine organizational culture as another theoretically relevant moderator via multilevel theory and extend the theoretical perspective to suggest that the relationships of workplace learning to outcomes depend on the specific organizational context. Variability in contexts can activate individual learning to act in ways that are consistent with the environment they are in. Third, as evidenced by the two-way interactions, our results suggest that a result-oriented culture has neither independent nor competing effects on employees learning for higher contextual or task performance. That is, when the result culture is strong the relationships between workplace learning with interpersonal facilitation and task performance are strong. It is when cultural norms are strong that the relationships between workplace learning and contextual performance and task performance are strong. These cultural norms do have complementary effects in activating workplace learning to make greater contributions to the organization. It is possible that when there is little or no result orientation, employees learning may try too hard and not be focused enough. With a result orientation, three types of workplace learning are much more focused and can direct their effort at task performance. Our results indicate that the cultural orientations have complementary effects rather than having competing or independent effects on workplace learning.

Consistent with previous meta-analytic studies, workplace learning was positively related to contextual performance across jobs and occupations (Reio and Wiswell, 2000; Somech and Drachâ€•Zahavy, 2004; Jo and Joo, 2011). Thus, people who see themselves as hardworking, reliable, and organized appear to perform better than those who believe they do not possess these characteristics. These employees learning also showed higher levels of performance in our sample. Future studies may go beyond studying the associations between workplace

learning with task and contextual performance to include organizational performance. This is because, in order to be competitive, organizations need to find the right balance between focusing on efficiency and productivity versus giving employees the freedom to adapt to problems and opportunities.

### **9. Limitations and future research**

This study has several limitations. The first is that common method bias may be a concern. With the exception of workplace learning, information on most variables in this study was provided by the employees. We also followed the recommendations from Podsakoff *et al.*(2003) for conducting the Harman one-factor test. Results of this test indicated a bad fit and, therefore, we do not believe that common method variance affected our results. Furthermore, common method variance should not be a significant threat in a study that tests moderating effects (i.e. different relationships at different levels of a specified variable). Brockner *et al.*(1997) note that if common method variance explains significant relationships, there is no reason why there should be a significant relationship at one level of a variable but not at another.

Second, our study was conducted in two organizations. Although this may reduce the generalizability of our findings, testing our hypothesized model in two organizations reduces the likelihood that contextual factors such as ministry type might affect our results. However, our findings are consistent with other studies because workplace learning was also positively related to in-role performance and contextual performance. Future studies should examine other contextual situations that may also activate higher levels of contribution in conscientious individuals.

Practical implications and conclusion our findings, together with recent research, suggest the utility of examining the role of theoretically relevant contextual effects in moderating the relationship between workplace learning and job performance. Our results indicated that strong learner can have strong task performance provided that they work in the appropriate work context. It is not enough simply to select the right people and place them in the appropriate jobs. It is also important to provide the appropriate norms or cultural values that can cultivate people's performance.

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