

## Extension Material 11.2

### The relationship between learning and work

According to Stern and Sommerlad (1999), these beliefs translate into the following representations of the relationship between learning and work.

1. In the first instance, learning and working are spatially separated: they exist at different times, with forms of structured learning activities (training) occurring off the job. This usually involves in-company training, using dedicated training rooms and expert instructors, with opportunities for experiential learning and practice.
2. In the second instance, the workplace is itself conceptualized as an environment for learning. The emphasis on on-the-job learning methods encompasses those that are highly structured and those that are located at the informal end of the spectrum. According to Stern and Sommerlad (1999: 2), learning is primarily intentional and planned, and is aimed at training employees 'by supporting, structuring and monitoring their learning'.

The two main forms of on-the-job training that emerge from this conception are:

- Experience-led learning opportunities, through such means as job rotation, job enlargement, the sequencing of the learner's activities, and increasing the variety and complexity of tasks.
- Training on the job, through coaching, mentoring, work shadowing, supervision, instruction, and feedback.

A third form of learning is associated with the concept of 'continuous learning'. Learning, from this perspective, is seen as an everyday part of the job and the working experience. Employees become learners and teachers, with knowledge and ideas being shared among what Lave and Wenger (1991) call 'communities of practice', within which learning emerges out of the social interactions between co-workers and customers/clients. Contemporary thinking about HR development is also concerned with the characteristics and learning implications of the workplace. Clark (2005), for example, claims that:

**developing a supportive learning climate has come to the fore of the human resource development literature.**

Interestingly, he argues that the environment is not simply a source of learning opportunities and practices, but that certain aspects of the environment are likely to influence the learning of individuals and groups. These aspects include:

- culture;
- HR policies;
- interpersonal dynamics;
- work practices;
- line manager capabilities and orientations.



#### REFERENCES

Clarke, N. (2005) 'Workplace learning environment and its relationship with learning outcomes in healthcare organizations', *Journal of Human Resource Development International*, 8(2).

Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, Cambridge University Press.

Stern, E. and Sommerlad, L. (1999) *Workplace Learning, Culture and Performance*, Institute of Personnel and Development.