

Workplace affordances and individual engagement at work

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This paper discusses factors that influence how learning in workplaces proceeds. It focuses on the dual considerations of how workplaces afford opportunities for learning and how individuals elect to engage in activities and with the support and guidance provided by the workplace. Together, these dual bases for participation at work, and the relations between them, are held as being central to the kinds of learning that workplaces are able to provide. Accordingly, the readiness of the workplace to afford opportunities for individuals to engage in work activities and enjoy the benefits of both direct and indirect support is a key determinant of the quality of learning in workplaces. These affordances are salient to both structured workplace learning arrangements, such as mentoring, as well as the contributions to learning accessed through everyday participation at work. Evidence and illustrative examples of enterprise readiness and its consequences are provided through the findings of an investigation of guided learning in workplaces (Billett, McCann & Scott 1998). It was found that guided learning strategies (*Modelling, Coaching, Questioning, Analogies and Diagrams*) augmented individuals' learning through contributions that cannot be realised through everyday activities alone. However, across the five enterprises in the study, the frequency of guided learning strategy use and perceptions of their value were diverse. Factors such as variations in enterprise size, activities or goals did not fully explain these differences. Instead, from this study the salience of the enterprises' readiness to afford activities and guidance were identified as a key factor. Overall, learners afforded the richest opportunities for learning and engaged with what was being afforded reported the strongest development. This readiness goes beyond the preparedness for guided learning to proceed. It also includes factors associated with the norms and work practices that constitute the invitational qualities for workers to participate in and learn through work. Therefore, the degree by which workplaces provide rich learning outcomes through everyday activities and intentional interventions will be determined, at least in part, by its readiness to afford opportunities and support for learning.