


## Chapter 59

# Exploring the Role of Adult Learning Theory in Understanding Employees' Participation in Non-Mandatory Training

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### ABSTRACT

*The theme of employees' non-mandatory training participation intention has been viewed as being supported by limited theoretical foundations, specifically expectancy theory of motivation and perceived organizational support theory. Although contributions made by adult learning theory have long been acknowledged, it is important to recognize the unique role it has played by incorporating three theoretical pillars and consequently providing a strong foundation for employees' non-mandatory training participation intention. By identifying the relationship between employees' non-mandatory training participation intention and one of its closely allied fields, viz. adult education, this article argues that it is actually adult learning theory that provides a foundation and linkage for both fields.*

### INTRODUCTION

In a highly competitive era, it is not feasible for organizations to provide all the trainings that are relevant to their employees in relation to their job, career or personal development. Therefore, the responsibility for learning is put into the employees' hands, which has implications for both the individual employees and the organization as a whole. Due to this, it is necessary that the organization should motivate their employees and arouse their learning intention to get them to participate in the training programs that are

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-8598-6.ch059

relevant to their career, job and personal advancement. For an instance, Renaud and Cloutier (2006) state that in Canada, in response to the new deregulated environment, many banks have chosen a combined training approach both mandatory and non-mandatory trainings. They developed their internal training programs and concurrently facilitated access to non-mandatory training by forming partnerships with colleges and universities as well as the Canadian Bankers Association. With the growing use of distance and online learning, offering non-mandatory training has become more cost effective and easier to accomplish, especially for larger companies with employees stationed around the world (Sweeney & Martindale, 2012).

Apart from that, from the individual employee's perspective, there is evidence of a growing interest in "lifelong learning," often accompanied by the perception that individuals should accept greater responsibility for their own development (e.g., Rosow & Zager, 1988). These learning activities may have no immediate relevance to the person's current job but are advocated to increase self-confidence, interest in new ideas, and enthusiasm for additional learning and to enhance employability and long term career success (Corney, 1995). Further, non-mandatory training may be considered to be the more desirable alternative as Machin and his colleagues have noted that as employees have no choice but to attend training that is mandatory, this may result in lower levels of motivation to learn (Machin et al., 2004).

Hence, employees' learning intention refers to the willingness, readiness or even plan of employees to overcome a gap they are experiencing between their current knowledge, skills and attitudes related to the job and those that are required or assumed to be desirable for a person holding that position, by following a specific educational track or through training (Kyntd et al., 2011). According to Kyntd (2012), the formulation of a learning intention takes up a central role within the decision making process with respect to any engagement in learning activities. Maurer et al. (2003) found that the intention to participate in learning activities was a reliable predictor of actual participation in those learning activities. In addition, a learning intention is considered a proximal determinant of participation in education and training (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Getting employees to commit themselves to involvement in learning activities is considered the first valuable step toward actual participation (Maurer et al., 2003).

According to Fishbein et al. (1975), a person's intention to learn is influenced by his or her attitude toward learning and perception of the subjective social norm (Baert, Rick, & Valckenborgh, 2006; Kyntd et al., 2011). The attitude of an individual is determined by his/ her personal assessment of the advantages, disadvantages, costs and benefits of the educational participation. The subjective social norm is formed through the observation of the norms of significant others and not of all others (Baert et al., 2006). The impact of its influence is also determined by the stronger or weaker tendency of the individual to conform.

At the same time Beier and Kanfer (2009) in the integrated literature review on motivation in training and development, they discussed about voluntary and mandated trainings. It was demonstrated that, in training literature scholars widely assumed that volunteering for training is a behavioural manifestation of training motivation, this was generally supported. The results of several studies show that employees are more motivated to attend training when they make the choice to attend training (Baldwin, Magjuka, & Loher, 1991; Guerrero & Sire, 2011; Hicks & Klimoski, 1987; Mathieu et al., 1992). Findings by Baldwin et al. (1991) also illustrate one important caveat to this finding- organizations that provide employees the choice to attend specific training programs must be prepared to honour the employee's choice, or risk decreasing motivation for training and negatively affecting learning during training. Although voluntary choice to participate in training has been long regarded as having a beneficial influence on motivation during training recent researcher suggests that compulsory attendance may also exert a positive influence

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