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Training Venusians or Martians?

Earthy explanations for gender differences

Training courses for workers are a vital part of an organization's efforts to keep ahead of the game. Gone are the days when people are trained for a job and then said "goodbye" to learning forever. Now continuous training – providing educational opportunities for employees to better understand their role and meet new challenges, particularly those that occur in a dynamic marketplace and as a result of technological advances – ought never to be overlooked or avoided.

New techniques need to be taught; new skills need to be demonstrated and practiced. Learning "on the job" or "by experience", while valuable in themselves, are no longer behaviors which will deliver the desired result of an up-to-date, competent workforce.

Even training workers in how to carry out routine or mundane tasks – such as holding meetings, communicating by email, preparing and delivering a presentation – can result in more effectiveness and efficiency, with a resulting positive impact on the organization's performance.

As employees' working lives are now characterized by rapidly changing skill requirements, and as there is an accelerating demand for skilled personnel, recognizing the necessity of worker training becomes even more important. Training participation is crucial to workers to adapt continuously to changing work requirements and to remain attractive in the labor market. It is a human capital investment that is determined by both training costs and monetary or non-monetary returns and consequently, costs and benefits need to be better understood.

Gender difference in relationship between training and job satisfaction

The more enlightened organizations identify relevant training opportunities for their employees and require them to attend – in company time and with adequate expenses. Some employees have to cajole, persuade and convince their employer of the benefit of a course and fight for permission to get a place and the time off to attend. So, what of the differing attitudes of the person being trained? Are they indeed taking part in training because their employer has paid for them to go on the course and required them to attend? Or are they taking advantage of the training on offer in their own time and possibly, to some extent, at their own cost – travel expenses for example? Do they see the training program as a way to gaining promotion and/or a higher salary? Or do they expect the outcome to be more in terms of better job satisfaction, as they learn how to perform their role more efficiently and effectively? Does participation in training inevitably result in enhanced job satisfaction?

Furthermore, are the answers to these questions likely to differ if asked to a man or a woman? And if so why? Human resource managers might hope for more earthy

explanations than American author John Gray might posit in his best-selling book which explained most things with its title – “Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus.”

Diverging views of expectations and preferences

In a study using data from the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) (a dataset of adults in households across the country), Claudia Burgard, a data scientist in predictive analytics, and Dr Katja Görlitz of the Freie Universität, Berlin, do indeed reveal a gender difference in the relationship between training and job satisfaction. In contrast to women, attending training courses in Germany is significantly positively correlated with job satisfaction for men. There also appear to be gender differences with respect to certain course characteristics. In particular, it was shown that men participate more often in training with longer duration, in completely employer-supported and in career-oriented courses than their female counterparts.

However, while for men job satisfaction is correlated with particular training characteristics (e.g. financing and career orientation of courses), this cannot be observed for women. The conclusion, therefore, is that a gender-specific distribution of and a selection into training with different characteristics cannot explain why there is a positive correlation between training and job satisfaction only for males.

One explanation for the estimated gender difference could be that men and women might have different preferences. Another conceivable explanation could be differences in expectations. If, for example, promotional aspects are more important for men than for women and training is seen as having an impact on being promoted, then gender differences could be explained as well. Such differences could be an outcome of different labor market regimes. In such a context, German women tend to have lower labor market expectations due to the conservative institutional background. As training is primarily aimed at skill acquisition, it is probably not the most effective measure to enhance job satisfaction. However, other potential factors may be more important in determining job satisfaction. For human resource managers, it might still be interesting to know that training participation can have side effects on job satisfaction.

The reason why training fails to increase women's job satisfaction significantly (in contrast to men's satisfaction) is not clear. A potential explanation might be that training characteristics between men and women differ in terms of financing, the duration of training or other training attributes. If different types of training affect job satisfaction differently and are allocated differently to males and females, this may explain the gender difference in the relationship between satisfaction and training.

Effects of amount of employer support in training costs

There were no pronounced gender differences when the number of courses was looked at. Concerning training duration, women participate more often in courses of shorter duration (one day to one week) and less often in courses of medium duration (greater than one week to one month). Gender differences can also be observed with respect to the financing of

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training. Among those who did not receive any employer support in any of the courses they attended (i.e. they had to bear all of the direct training costs and, at the same time, had to spend their free time on participation), the share of females is significantly higher than that of males (28 per cent women vs 16 per cent men). Females participated more often in at least one course that was financed completely by the employer but held completely or partly during free time (11 per cent women vs 9 per cent men).

There were no gender differences when consideration was given to participants at courses that were held completely during working time but where some of the monetary costs had to be covered by employees. The share of males who received full support from their employer at least once was higher than the share of females: 62 per cent of males participated in at least one course that was completely financed by employers and completely held during working time. The corresponding share of female participants amounts to only 48 per cent. There were also no gender differences with regard to specific vs general human capital acquisition.

Comment

This review is based on “Continuous training, job satisfaction and gender” by Burgard and Görlitz (2014) who analyze the relationship between participants in further training courses and job satisfaction, focusing in particular on gender differences. They found that, in Germany – where the study was conducted – financial support and career orientation of training courses only seem to matter for the job satisfaction of men but not for the satisfaction of women.

Reference

Burgard, C. and Görlitz, K. (2014), “Continuous training, job satisfaction and gender”, *Evidence-Based HRM: A Global Forum for Empirical Scholarship*, Vol. 2 No. 2, pp. 126-144.

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