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Paid educational leave and self-directed learning

Implications for legislation on the learning leave scheme in South Korea

Learning
leave scheme
in South
Korea

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Abstract

Purpose – The purposes of this study are to explore paid educational leave (PEL), self-directed learning (SDL) and the relationship between them; and to identify the implications for legislation on the learning leave scheme in South Korea.

Design/methodology/approach – The research method of the study is a literature review. Articles were identified through a keyword search from major academic databases. The literature search covers the time period of 1960-2012.

Findings – This paper shows that enacting PEL is a social policy that benefits to both employers and workers because it reduces training costs, eliminates educational barriers for employees and enhances opportunities to develop skills and competencies.

Research limitations/implications – This study contributes to research by exploring the crucial role of PEL based on the Person-Process-Context model for SDL. It also examines the relationship between SDL and PEL in the workplace learning.

Practical implications – This study provides a rationale to legislate PEL as a right of workers. Through an appropriate revision of the Lifelong Education Act, the right of workers to receive the PEL benefit should be legally adopted to promote workers' SDL in South Korea.

Originality/value – This paper provides theoretical and practical evidence for institutionalizing PEL in South Korea. It suggests the passage of PEL legislation because it is beneficial to all stakeholders.

Keywords Self-directed learning, Learning leave scheme, National human resource development, Paid educational leave, Policy borrowing, PPC model

Paper type Literature review

Introduction

The global environment in the twenty-first century requires organizations to develop and maintain workers' voluntary learning systems, as workers must quickly adapt their skills and capabilities (Lee, 2001). Many firms provide employer-sponsored training programs so that their employees can obtain new skill sets to adapt to the changing environment. However, these employer-sponsored training programs are limited because they fail to meet the diverse demands for skill and career development of



individual workers. As an alternative, paid educational leave (PEL) has been supported by the International Labor Organization (ILO) and adopted in advanced economies such as the UK and Japan (Cox *et al.*, 2009). PEL requires employers to give employees time off to temporarily pursue both learning related to the workplace and learning for general interest when employees request it (Antonelli, 2005).

One of the key advantages of PEL is self-directedness, as PEL is chosen by workers not by employers or the government. It plays a key role in promoting self-directed learning (SDL), as PEL can improve workers' participation in their own development (Chung and Lee, 2002). The relationship between SDL and PEL is inseparable and reciprocal, as SDL can be regarded as both the aim and the means of PEL.

In South Korea, learning leave schemes like PEL have received increasing attention. As an attempt to institutionalize PEL, the Korean National Assembly submitted a Draft of the Lifelong Education Act (2007) mandating that employers allow their workers to take up to 10 days of PEL per year. However, since the 2007 Act was the first attempt to enact the nominal learning leave scheme in the real-world workplace in Korea, there have been continued conflicts among the government, employers and workers concerning the right of workers to use the PEL benefit in the workplace. Employers have opposed institutionalization of PEL because they fear it will increase labor costs, but employees have supported its implementation.

Many studies have suggested that workers' voluntary learning scheme be promoted by adopting the successful models and initiatives of advanced countries (Lee, 2001). The process of borrowing successful policies related to the learning leave scheme began in the 1990s and is still being implemented in Korea.

Problem statement

Although PEL could provide systematic support from the government to promote SDL in the workplace, there is a lack of intensive research on PEL and how it relates to SDL. Although PEL is the critical means for workers to engage in SDL in the workplace (Kim and Lee, 2001), few studies have focused on the legal rights of workers to utilize PEL. In addition, while numerous studies examining PEL have focused on the Person-Process-Context (PPC) model, few studies have paid attention to contextual elements of PEL as a national policy.

Despite the importance of institutionalizing the learning leave scheme, PEL has yet to be completely legislated in South Korea (Kim and Lee, 2001). Although the Korean government has partially adopted learning leave scheme legislation in the learning leave policy, there are still critical shortcomings; thus, it does not fully meet the original purpose of PEL. This is a serious concern for the national policy, as legislation on PEL is closely related to the status of human resource development (HRD), adult education and lifelong learning at the national level (Kim *et al.* 2002). Therefore, it is necessary to discuss the implications of legislating the learning leave scheme in Korea by examining the theoretical framework of PEL, SDL and the relationship between them to promote workers' voluntary learning.

Purpose of the study

The purposes of this study are to explore PEL, SDL and the relationship between them and to discuss the implications of the legislation on the learning leave scheme for

national human resource development (NHRD) in South Korea. Ultimately, this exploratory study on PEL in the context of SDL focuses on the legal ramifications in Korea and provides a useful conceptual framework and significant implications for researchers and policymakers.

Research method

The primary research method of the current study is a literature review. The following search terms were selected to conduct a comprehensive literature review: (paid) educational leave; (paid) study leave; (paid) training leave; (paid) learning leave; SDL; and the Lifelong Education Act. Articles for this review were identified through searches of Business Source Premier, PsychArticles, Interscience and Science Direct databases. Specifically, Korean articles were searched through the RISS database, and South Korean legal codes and documents (e.g. Statutes from the Republic of Korea) were chosen from the National Statutes Information Center database managed by the Korean Ministry of Government Legislation. The literature search covered the time periods from 1960 to 2012 because the primary topic of this study, PEL, was introduced to research and practice in the early 1960s.

Paid educational leave

Research and practice related to PEL have a long history. Previous studies can be divided into four categories:

- (1) the origin and definition of PEL;
- (2) International Labor Office's (ILO) Convention 140 on PEL;
- (3) PEL in foreign countries; and
- (4) the roles of PEL.

The origin and definition of paid educational leave

In the 1960s, international organizations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) began to pay increasing attention to adult education and lifelong learning (Papadopoulos, 1994; Sutton, 1996; UNESCO, 1972). ILO started to recognize the importance of PEL and imported the international standard regarding PEL (ILO, 1974). In the 1970s, promoting the right of education and self-development was the primary concern of those organizations (Jakobi, 2011). Influenced by the effort of international organizations, the governments of many countries have attempted to adopt and implement PEL in their domestic education systems (Papadopoulos, 2002). ILO (1974) defined PEL as "leave granted to a worker for educational purposes for a specified period during working hours, with adequate financial entitlements" (Article 1). Similarly, Antonelli (2005) defined PEL as "the time given to employees to temporarily pursue both learning related to the workplace and learning for general interest" (p. 4).

International labor office's convention 140 on paid educational leave

In the early 1970s, the ILO began to pay attention to PEL as an HRD practice to facilitate lifelong learning for adult learners in the workplace (Jakobi, 2007). ILO's Convention 140 was based on a consensus at conferences for UNESCO International in 1962 and OECD in 1970. Originally, ILO's Convention 140 was directly affected by social movements for

workers' rights in European countries which began in the 1960s. In particular, ILO Convention 140 on PEL addressed workers' need for lifelong learning to catch up with the required skills in a changing society. Since then, ILO's Convention 140 has been viewed as an international standard regarding PEL, which recommends that the ILO member countries establish their own PEL schemes for the purposes of "training at any level; general, social and civic education; and trade union education" (Article 2) (Güven, 2010). The primary on-going role of ILO's Convention 140 on PEL is to provide ILO member countries with a legal framework for time off and pay for continued learning opportunities (Olsen, 2009). The goal is to provide equal learning opportunities for all workers and, ultimately, to promote job skills with support from employers and/or the government (Antonelli, 2005).

The primary articles of ILO's Convention 140 on PEL in 1974 can be summarized as follows: Articles 1 and 2 emphasize the importance of PEL for workers wanting to upgrade their training by declaring its definition and purpose of training/education for PEL (Antonelli, 2005). Article 3 describes the goal of PEL and Articles 4 through 7 detail the enforcement method of PEL. Although Article 5 of the Convention does not require governments to establish legislation on PEL or to include other methods of enforcement such as collective agreements, the Convention clearly emphasizes the role of governments in setting up effective PEL schemes (Jarvis, 2009). ILO and UNESCO's (2001) *The Revised Recommendations about Technical and Vocational Education* emphasizes that PEL is an important form of the appropriate conditions for adult education in the twenty-first century (Mehrotra and Sacheti, 2009).

Paid educational leave in foreign countries

Many European countries started to adopt PEL after ILO's Convention 140 in 1974 (Luttringer and Pasquier, 1980). PEL schemes were enacted in these countries earlier than other countries because European political and social movements for labor rights beginning in the 1960s paid great attention to the workers' right of education (Luttringer and Pasquier, 1980). To date, Convention 140 has been ratified by 34 countries (Jarvis, 2009) including 14 OECD member countries. Traditionally, PEL policies in foreign countries have been legislated at the national level based on two fundamental models:

- (1) provisions in collective bargaining agreements between employers and employee representatives at the sectoral level; and
- (2) provisions for the right of workers in general or in specific groups to request time off (Cox *et al.*, 2009; Schutze, 1983).

The clear framework of entitlements to PEL has motivated workers to learn (Schuller and Watson, 2009). The legal right to engage in PEL has been adopted by over 10 countries including the UK and Japan (Cox *et al.*, 2009). However, PEL has been one of the less widely accepted recommendations from the ILO Convention, as it has not been easy for countries with different labor systems and cultures to implement PEL policies (Gasskov, 2001).

Examining the European countries that have already adopted PEL can provide a useful framework and practical implications for South Korea. PEL schemes in developed countries such as Germany, Sweden and the UK have several common characteristics (Chung and Lee, 2002). First, developed countries that have adopted

PEL are committed to developing workers' vocational skills. Second, workers in these countries are provided with the right to choose the content of the training programs and to obtain adequate financial support from their employers and/or government. Finally, developed countries' independent support systems for PEL are based on a stable legal foundation. In other words, PEL has strong legal foundations in advanced countries.

Roles of paid educational leave: equal opportunity for workplace learning

According to ILO's Convention 140 and Recommendation 148, the roles of PEL include the following guidelines:

- to remove every structural barrier, such as time and cost, without prejudice to their job security and/or promotion;
- to address the needs of a rapidly changing society;
- to create the most creative culture in the workplace; and
- to provide all workers with equal access to many types of training and education opportunities based on social justice ideologies.

In addition, one of the critical roles of PEL is to provide workers with "the opportunity to resume employment at the same salary, in the same role and with the same company when their leave is completed" (Antonelli, 2005, p. 4), because it is not easy for workers to secure extra time and cost (money) for their own training opportunities outside the workplace.

Given that removing structural barriers is the most important role of the PEL guidelines, establishing appropriate legislation for PEL may be imperative to eliminate these structural barriers to lifelong education (Boshier, 2006). According to Gvaramadze (2010), determinants of a vocational skills-upgrading strategy can be categorized into time, cost, and access, all of which are structural barriers to lifelong learning.

With respect to PEL, there are numerous structural barriers to training and education for workers. First, time as a worker-oriented determinant can be effectively supported by various schemes including PEL which allows workers to participate in training programs. Securing extra time to learn is repeatedly emphasized in the literature as a barrier to workers' development and training and PEL can be an effective solution (Cox *et al.*, 2009).

Second, cost as an employer-oriented determinant relates to how and who will financially support workers' training and education and PEL is an important resource to cover workers' training costs (Gvaramadze, 2010). In this context, workers' participation in training programs can be greatly influenced by the employers' willingness to cover the cost of the training programs (van Loo *et al.*, 2001). It is motivating for workers when they receive financial support from their employers regardless of the training program costs because proper funding is a key to training opportunities (WALL, 2004). If there is a cost for training programs or any wages lost during the training period, workers are likely to be reluctant to take advantage of PEL. Therefore, having both time off and financial support provided by the employer promotes workers' educational opportunities (Antonelli, 2005), so PEL can be an effective instrument to eliminate or mitigate the barriers of both time (worker oriented) and cost (employer oriented). PEL

also enables workers to initiate their own development by providing them with time and cost (OECD, 2006). Specifically, the benefits of PEL can enhance access to opportunities to develop individual skills and competencies.

Self-directed learning as a theoretical framework

According to Mocker and Spear (1982), lifelong learning concepts are classified according to three questions:

- Q1. Who controls the learning objectives?
- Q2. What is to be learned? and
- Q3. How is it to be learned?

By answering these questions, they identified four types of lifelong learning: formal learning, non-formal learning, informal learning and SDL.

According to Knowles (1975), SDL is defined as:

[...] a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes (p. 18).

Brookfield (1986) identified the most ideal form of adult learners' SDL as:

[...] one in which critical reflection on the contingent aspects of reality, the exploration of alternative perspectives and meaning systems, and the alteration of personal and social circumstances are all present (pp. 58-59).

Merriam (2001) contended that self-direction is the core component of *andragogy*, the principle of adult learning, in that *andragogy* assumes that adult learners tend to direct their own learning by intrinsic motivation based on their own experience-based learning resources.

SDL aims at improving adult learners' self-directedness in their learning, promoting transformative learning and stimulating emancipatory learning (Merriam *et al.*, 2007). According to Candy (1991), SDL can be characterized by four dimensions:

- (1) personal autonomy;
- (2) self-management in learning;
- (3) independent pursuit of learning; and
- (4) learning-control of instruction.

In this sense, PEL can be considered as a type of SDL because the key role of PEL is to assist learners in controlling both the objectives and means of their learning.

SDL has been increasingly emphasized in today's complex business environment. As global competition increases, structured HRD and strict, formal continuing education are less effective in keeping pace with the demand for learning the types of complex skills required in the workplace (Guglielmino and Guglielmino, 2008). Learning needs for improving performance and solving problems vary across individuals and teams who face unique challenges from their tasks. Promoting and implementing SDL of workers expands our understanding of the best way to build true learning organizations through the process of tackling employees' unique

issues (Guglielmino and Guglielmino, 2008). There is also evidence of a positive relationship between SDL and performance in the workplace (Guglielmino and Guglielmino, 2008, 2011).

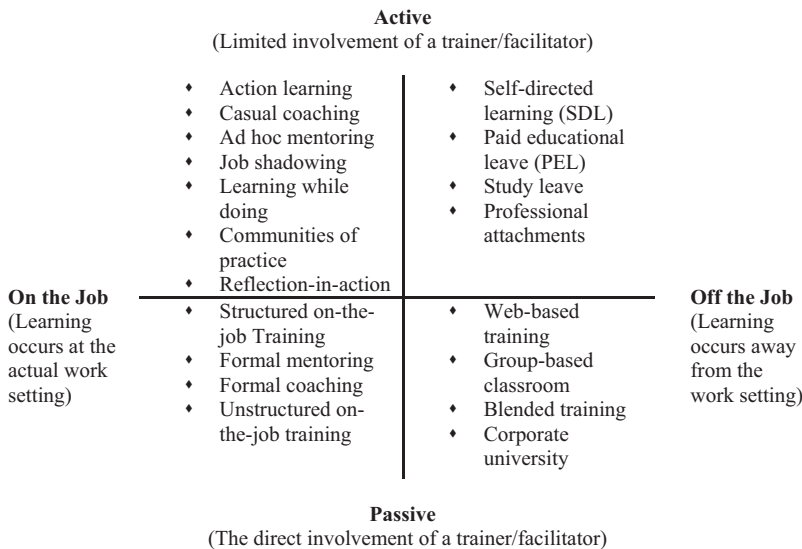
The relationship between self-directed learning and paid educational leave

Jacobs and Park (2009) proposed a comprehensive conceptual framework of workplace learning by using three variables of workplace learning:

- (1) location of the learning (off the job vs on the job);
- (2) role of the trainer/facilitator (passive vs active); and
- (3) degree of planning (unstructured vs structured).

Using the first two variables of Jacobs and Park's (2009) framework, the location of the learning and the role of the trainer/facilitator, a two-by-two matrix can be created as shown in Figure 1. Each quadrant is described as follows: in the upper-right quadrant (off the job/active), learning occurs away from the work setting and with limited involvement of a trainer/facilitator. In the upper-left quadrant (on the job/active), learning occurs at the actual work setting and with limited involvement of a trainer/facilitator. In the lower-left quadrant (on the job/passive), learning occurs at the actual work setting and with the direct involvement of a trainer/facilitator. In the lower-right quadrant (off the job/passive), learning occurs away from the work setting and with direct involvement of a trainer/facilitator. Jacobs and Park (2009) also provided useful examples of these four combinations.

As shown in Figure 1, PEL and SDL are located in the same place, the upper-right quadrant, because they both occur away from the work setting and with limited



Source: Own preparation based on Jacobs and Park (2009)

Figure 1.
Quadrants of workplace learning and its examples

involvement of a trainer/facilitator. Therefore, PEL and SDL share core characteristics in common. According to [Jacobs and Park \(2009\)](#), the only difference between SDL and PEL is the degree of planning, whether they are unstructured (PEL) or structured (SDL). However, if PEL is based on systemic planning and support at the organizational or national level and a systems approach is applied to PEL, it also can be viewed as a type of structured learning. PEL also can be an effective tool for improving SDL, especially for countries like South Korea whose culture is characterized as low individualism and high power distance ([Guglielmino and Guglielmino, 2011](#)).

Person-process-context model

To examine the relationship between PEL and SDL, this study adopts [Hiemstra and Brockett's \(2012\)](#) PPC model. The origin of the PPC model is their personal responsibility orientation (PRO) model ([Brockett and Hiemstra, 1991](#)). In the PRO model, they emphasized two distinct dimensions of self-direction in learning: SDL and learner self-direction. They define SDL as "a process in which a learner assumes primary responsibility for planning, implementing, and evaluating the learning process" (p. 24). In contrast, learner self-direction is defined as "characteristics of an individual that predispose one toward taking primary responsibility for personal learning endeavors" (p. 29). They assert that these two dimensions are connected through personal responsibility, which means that individuals assume ownership of their thoughts and actions within the social context in which the learning occurs. The PRO model implies that both external factors and internal factors are important for self-direction in learning.

[Hiemstra and Brockett \(2012\)](#) later updated their PRO model, renaming it the PPC model, by adding another factor: context. Hence, the new PPC model is composed of three factors: person, process and context. In the PPC model, the influence of the context such as the learning environment, organizational policies or the political milieu is equivalent to the other two elements, person and process, while the PRO model only emphasizes the distinction between the person and process dimensions. [Hiemstra and Brockett \(2012\)](#) stressed that the optimal condition for the most effective SDL is when the three elements are balanced.

In a similar theoretical approach, [Brookfield \(1993\)](#) asserted that SDL is intrinsically a political issue that emphasizes the distribution of proper resources, such as time and money (cost), and is crucial for self-directed learners' successful control of their own learning. [Caffarella and Merriam \(2000\)](#) also emphasized the influence of the contextual factors on SDL. They identified two dimensions of the contextual factors that affect SDL: the interactive and structural dimensions. Although the structural dimension refers to social or cultural factors such as race, ethnicity and gender, the interactive dimension is related to the relationship between a learner and social environments or physical settings. They claim that these contexts play a critical role in successful SDL and therefore the learning context as well as the learner's self-direction and self-directedness in the learning process should be taken into account as critical factors for more effective SDL. As all of these factors are important, the current study adopts [Hiemstra and Brockett's \(2012\)](#) PPC model as the theoretical framework because the PPC model emphasizes not only the person and process factors but also the contextual factor for effective SDL.

Legislation on paid educational leave for self-directed learning in South Korea

PEL policies from other countries and international organizations were first introduced to South Korea in the 1970s. The growing interest in the learning leave scheme in South Korea was a result of ILO's Convention 140 on PEL in 1974. Since then, the learning leave scheme has been used as an umbrella term to embrace several schemes regarding PEL based on different pieces of legislation in Korea.

Policy borrowing process of the learning leave scheme in South Korea

Since the early 1990s, the learning leave scheme has been institutionalized in various ways in Korea. Policy borrowing from other countries to form the learning leave scheme in Korea can be categorized into two aspects based on Lewis' (2007) theoretical framework of four modes of policy borrowing:

- (1) partial borrowing; and
- (2) customization.

First, the cases of partial borrowing including "paid leaves for the vocational skills development for the insured" were enacted in 1993 (Step 1); "paid leaves for the development of occupational abilities" in 1997 (Step 2); and "paid leaves for the development" in 2004 (Step 4). Second, the Korean government customized the institutionalized PEL to include both "study leaves" in 1999 (Step 3) and "paid study leaves or non-paid study leaves" in 2007 (Step 5).

The learning leave scheme in South Korea was legalized under three main pieces of existing legislation:

- (1) Lifelong Education Act of 2009;
- (2) Development of Occupational Abilities of Workers Act of 2008; and
- (3) Employment Insurance Act of 2008 and its enforcement decree.

Among these pieces of legislation, the concept of study leaves in the Lifelong Education Act (2009) is the most similar to the original purpose of ILO's Convention 140 and is also the primary subject of the Amendment Draft of Lifelong Education Act (2007) which is stated as follows:

The State, the heads of local governments, the heads of public institutions or the chief executive managers of various corporations may grant their employees paid study leaves or non-paid study leaves to expand opportunities for them to gain access to the lifelong education or pay them study expenses required for books, education and research, etc. [Article 8 (Study Leaves and Support for Study Expenses)]

Defects of the learning leave scheme in South Korea

Despite the legal advances in the learning leave scheme, Chung and Lee (2002) indicated that the learning leave scheme adopted in South Korea has several problems including the following:

- employers' lack of understanding of the learning leave scheme;
- inequality of opportunities;
- absence of a basic learning culture;

- learning leave scheme controlled by the providers of learning leave;
- lack of time to apply what has been learned to actual practice;
- absence of a budget clause for learning leave scheme programs;
- insufficiency of professional-vocational education and training programs; and
- significant discrepancies in the benefits of the learning leave scheme among firms of various sizes and classes.

It seems that the existing learning leave scheme is not sufficient to achieve the original purpose of PEL. For example, the [Employment Insurance Act of 1993 and 2008](#) incorporated an employer-centered model of paid leave training leading to unequal benefits among employees. In addition, the study leave scheme of the Lifelong Education Act of 1999 and 2009 was a provisional item but it has rarely been practiced in the real world. Although the current [Lifelong Education Act \(2009\)](#) shows a willingness to establish a learning leave scheme for PEL, it does not require employers to allow their employees to have PEL opportunities ([Kwon, 2011](#)).

Although the Amendment Draft of the [Lifelong Education Act \(2007\)](#) has been discussed among workers (labor unions), employers and the government, the 2007 draft was not reflected in the final amendments in December 2007. As a result, it is still difficult to systemically institutionalize and implement PEL based on a stable legal system because employers are still not required to provide PEL to their employees ([Kwon, 2011](#)). Therefore, it is very difficult for workers to take advantage of PEL ([Kim, 2007](#)) because the employers are reluctant to provide financial and administrative support to their workers because of the direct or indirect cost of PEL ([Choi, 2006](#)).

Discussion

PEL has been institutionalized in many other countries since the 1970s, and it is now appropriate to institute effective legislation on PEL in South Korea. In developed countries in the field of HRD and adult education, various types of learning and education for workers have been conducted based on legislation and/or collective agreements. Institutionalization of PEL has contributed to increasing opportunities for lifelong learning in the workplace ([Lifelong Education Act, 2007](#)). Therefore, there is a clear need for employers and workers to understand the role of PEL.

This paper discusses the case of legislation on PEL to promote SDL in workplaces in South Korea. Therefore, the case discussed in this paper might not directly apply to unique contexts of other countries. Nevertheless, this study provides implications for policymakers whose primary concern is to legislate PEL.

Implications for research

This study contributes to research in terms of PEL, SDL and workplace learning by providing significant implications for researchers and policymakers. First, the current study contributes to PEL research by exploring the crucial role of PEL based on [Gvaramadze's \(2010\)](#) theoretical framework of the determinants of a vocational skill-upgrading strategy: time, cost and access. Although there is growing interest in the importance of SDL in South Korea, several critical factors have prohibited lifelong learning based on SDL from being realized in society. According to recent

statistics on participation rates in lifelong vocational education in OECD countries, South Korea is ranked in the lowest group (Korean Educational Development Institute (KEDI) and Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MEST), 2010). In addition, investments in training and development in companies are at a standstill with the greatest obstacles for adult workers' SDL being time and financial burden (Chung and Lee, 2002). Therefore, the PEL scheme could be one of the most effective solutions to help workers pursue SDL for lifelong learning in that it provides workers with both time and financial support. In particular, financial support for SDL can play a critical role in realizing social equality for low-income classes and minority groups (Chung and Lee, 2002). In this context, PEL promotes SDL because its main purpose is to eliminate structural barriers to SDL such as time and money. In many countries, the advanced learning leave scheme encourages employers to invest in training, as the cost of PEL is usually shared among employers, workers and the government.

This study also contributes to SDL research by adding PEL to the pool of contextual factors of SDL based on Hiemstra and Brockett's (2012) PPC model composed of three factors: person, process and context. Hiemstra and Brockett's (2012) PPC model also emphasizes the influence of the context including the learning environment, organizational policies and the political milieu, making the learning leave scheme for PEL an important sociopolitical infrastructure to promote SDL. The learning leave scheme for PEL is one of the most effective methods to institutionalize SDL in South Korea. According to Lee (2001), the more workers leave their jobs, change careers and shift employers, the less employers tend to invest in training because of the fear of losing their training investment. With a high turnover labor market, the responsibility of learning to sustain and increase competitiveness tends to be transferred from the employers to individual workers. Therefore, it is necessary to recognize the learning leave scheme as a social system to revitalize workers' SDL. In other words, in South Korea, the learning leave scheme can be regarded as a type of national HRD initiative for SDL.

Finally, the current study contributes to workplace learning research by examining the relationship between SDL and PEL to better understand the quadrants of workplace learning proposed by Jacobs and Park (2009). According to Jacobs and Park's (2009) theoretical framework of workplace learning, PEL and SDL share core characteristics of workplace learning in that they both occur away from the work setting and with limited involvement of a trainer/facilitator. In addition, when a systems approach is applied to PEL based on systemic planning and support at the organizational or national level, PEL and SDL can also share another crucial characteristic of structured learning.

Implications for HRD practice: paid educational leave as the legal right for workers

This paper also contributes to practice by providing policymakers with a rationale to legislate for PEL as a worker's right. Advanced countries in HRD and continuing education guarantee the legal right for workers to learn by institutionalizing PEL schemes. From the perspective of workers, this implies that a worker's right to pursue lifelong learning can be realized by legislating for PEL (Kim *et al.*, 2002). In addition, there is a clear need for workers who are excluded from employer-initiated HRD to

obtain equal training and educational opportunities. The PEL scheme can help workers pursue their career goals in a rapidly changing society (Chung and Lee, 2002).

Antonelli (2005) noted:

It is important for workers to have the legal right to improve themselves in their career and not have to rely upon the goodwill of their employer to grant them the necessary leave to complete training or basic education courses (p. 59).

Although there are differences in cultural issues associated with PEL between Sweden and South Korea, the following statement emphasizing the importance of legislation on PEL as a right for workers in Sweden also provides significant implications for South Korean policymakers:

The law has a very important symbolic value. It must always be possible for individuals on their own initiative to change the circumstances of their lives. If you are dependent upon your employer's goodwill, if you are a client of a job centre, you are dependent upon the decisions of others. "I want to improve myself for the future". It is with this perspective that the law on study leave was established. Even if not many people take advantage of it, it is important as a principle (Gould, 2003, p. 82).

The reason PEL should be legislated lies not only in the benefit to workers who can take advantage of PEL but also in the benefit to employers who can develop a well-trained national workforce. It would also be beneficial to the government to build competent human resources for the prosperity of the national economy (Antonelli, 2005).

Empirical studies show that it would benefit both employers and the government to allow workers to have paid leave for learning. For example, Lee (2010) found that employees showed higher job satisfaction, organizational commitment, skill level, job performance and cooperation skills after completing paid training leave programs. Employers also benefited from PEL by saving internal training costs and promoting tailor-made programs that satisfy workers' individual needs (Lee, 2010).

Among modern forms of legislation on training, the concept of the right to training has been further developed as a right for workers in developed countries such as France, the UK, Austria and Japan (Jarvis, 2009). Recent legislation on time to train rights in the UK in 2010 reflects the increasing importance of this issue in practice (Rodgers, 2010). Thus, it is highly recommended that legislating for PEL at the national level be seriously considered (Kwon, 2011).

Conclusion

Self-directedness is an imperative element for learning to promote performance in today's workplaces. Providing formal training programs is not sufficient to satisfy all individuals' needs to handle complex issues and develop professional careers. Nevertheless, employers have been reluctant to support workers' SDL for fear of losing training investment if the worker leaves the current employer after training.

Although PEL has been recognized as part of worker's rights, this paper shows that enacting PEL might be beneficial to employers and to workers. It reduces an employer's risk by splitting the training cost with the employee. PEL can be an effective instrument to eliminate or mitigate the barriers to employees' SDL. The benefits of PEL can also enhance access to opportunities to develop individual skills and competencies in South Korea by expanding workers' autonomy.

South Korean legislators and the government have initiated various stages of legislation related to the paid learning leave scheme since the early 1990s. However, the next stage, the proposed learning leave scheme in the Amendment Draft of the *Lifelong Education Act* (2007), needs to be adopted in the near future. Based on a comprehensive analysis of PEL and SDL, we recommend that specific and detailed developmental direction for PEL of the Lifelong Education Act be examined through future research. Through appropriate revision of the Lifelong Education Act, the right to pursue lifelong learning would be realized as a basic legal right to promote workers' SDL in South Korea. In addition, promoting SDL through PEL would be a driver not only for individual development but also for improved organizational performance and economic prosperity of the country. Therefore, there is no reason to procrastinate passage of legislation for PEL in Congress.

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