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Abstract

Experiential training and development (ETD) has been used as an intervention on personnel development in Finnish organizations to a growing extend from the beginning of the 1990s, abroad already earlier. The research concerning ETD mainly consists of material from American and British sources. There has hardly been any research on ETD in Finland.

The purpose of this research is to find out on the basis of the foreign material, how the scholars have defined ETD as an intervention of HRD in their empirical studies on ETD. The problem is approached with two research questions: 1)What learning goals do ETD-interventions have? and 2)How is the learning process in ETD?

Answers to the study questions are searched with the help of interpretive conceptual research where concepts and their definitions are interpreted from the chosen viewpoint. The core of the research material is formed of 29 empirical studies which describe not just the research process each time, but also how and for which purpose intervention has been conducted in an organization. An essential part of this hermeneutic research process is the search for meanings within the material. The research was conducted as a theory following research in which the interpretation is done inside the chosen theory framework. In this case, the theory framework consists, firstly, of four metaphors that describe the concerns of HRD in the level of individuals as well as the organization. The metaphors limit the interpretation. The interpretation of learning processes is grounded on the theory of experiential learning when individual learning is in concern. If organizational learning is in the focus, the interpretation is based on adaptive, transformative and cultural organizational learning.

The theory framework and the research material depicted ETD in two ways: as the realizer and enabler of learning. The view of ETD as the realizer of learning is linked to the idea of ETD and its use for delivering predetermined learning objectives evident, for example, in the processes of knowledge management. ETD appeared as a method to gather information regarding the prevailing ways to operate. In this way, ETD serves as a context where the organizational cognitive maps can be explored and transformed. In the individual level, ETD showed up as the realizer of learning especially in those studies which concentrated on the delivery of skills (e.g. team skills). Experiential learning was depicted as following the four-stage cycle of experiential learning in these studies and the source of learning, experience equaled to the arranged experiential activity.

The view of ETD as the enabler of learning was evident in the studies that described ETD as a forum for meaning making. Most clearly this was apparent in the study that was about an organization which used ETD for bringing about and communicating an organizational vision. The communicating of silent cultural knowledge with the help of kinesthetic as well as aesthetic knowledge characterized the process of vision development. In the individual level, experiential learning was not pictured only through following the experiential learning cycle, but the main attention was placed to the subjectivity and holistic nature of an experience.

Further studies are needed because of two reasons: 1)The Finnish map of concepts related to ETD and its use in companies needs clarification 2)The aspect of cultural knowledge seems to provide a rich foundation to explore ETD as an intervention in organization.

Key words	ETD, experiential learning, organizational learning, HRD , conceptual research
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