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Educational Engagement in a Workplace Setting

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

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MA, Wayland Baptist University 2005

BS, Wayland Baptist University 2003

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

At a local setting in the Southwestern United States, 44% of adults elected not to participate in the organization's free nonmandatory educational programs. There was a lack of understanding of the reasons for why this phenomenon existed, which is inconsistent with the rising trends of adults returning to formal degree or certification programs. The discrepancy between educational engagement at the work organization and current educational trends among adults may signal a practice gap in the way the organization markets its educational curriculum. The purpose of this study was to explore why some adults at the local setting elected not to participate in the free educational offerings so that a substantial understanding of the phenomenon could emerge. The theoretical model framing this study was Knowles' theory of andragogy. A basic qualitative study design was used to answer the research questions. Purposeful sampling yielded a participant pool of 5 nonmanagerial workers for individual interviews and 3 nonmanagerial workers for a focus group interview who had elected not to participate in training opportunities at the local setting. Data from the interviews were coded with a coding program, initial, and axial coding. Participants reported that poor communication of existing programs and a lackluster curriculum marketing strategy failed to encourage participation. Findings support recommendations that may serve to positively improve participation in the organization's educational programs. The implications of social change resulting from the study are visualized as participation in education changes the perspectives and attitudes of individuals, empowering those individuals to protect their civil liberties and economic outcomes.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this study to my wife who encouraged me to pursue my dream of helping others be successful in life through the benefits gained from lifelong learning.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my chairperson Dr. Stacy Wahl and my second committee member Dr. Richard Hammett for their encouragement throughout this arduous endeavor. I would also like to thank my Mother, family, and friends for their support.

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Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

A principal concern in the field of adult education is how to engage adults in lifelong learning. Researchers and policy makers from organizations and institutions of higher learning increasingly embrace the tenets and need for lifelong learning (Knipprath & De Rick, 2015). Although the literature in the field is replete with barriers to participation in educational offerings (Porras-Hernandez & Salinas-Amescua, 2012; Saar, Kadri, & Roosalu, 2014), a focus on how to mitigate these barriers is lacking (Falasca, 2011). Expectations of adult education include meeting the social needs of equality, citizenship, employment, and providing social cohesion, but low rates of adult participation make these ideals difficult to pursue (Cincinnato, De Wever, Van Keer, & Valcke, 2016; Knipprath & De Rick, 2015; Porras-Hernandez & Salinas-Amescua, 2012). According to one survey conducted in a local setting in the Southwestern United States at BR University (pseudonym), 44% of adults elected not to participate in free workplace educational or certification opportunities, a phenomenon that is inconsistent with the rising trends of adults returning to formal degree or certification programs (Caruth, 2014; Holland, 2014) and the tenets of lifelong learning. There is a lack of understanding as to why this phenomenon at BR exists.

Background

The expectation of adult education is to encourage adults to become lifelong learners, and this purpose predominately requires eliminating organizational and institutional barriers to participating in education and certification programs (Falasca,

2011). Therefore, understanding how barriers affect decisions that adults make regarding

education and certification programs is warranted (Saar et al., 2014). Teodorczuk,

Mukaetova-Ladinska, Corbett, and Welfare (2013) maintained that effective adult

educational programs require ownership of the program, an understanding of the needs of

the audience, and effective communication of available programs. Given that almost half

of the adults at the local setting elected not to participate in free education or certification

programs, an educational practice gap becomes evident. Evaluating why adults choose

not to participate in the programs offered helped identify barriers that disfranchise the

participant population.

Definition of the Problem

Over the past 20 years, there has been a growing acknowledgement regarding the

many contributions to be made by educational interventions focused on adults in the

workplace. Not only are economic benefits apparent, but there is a widely agreed

assertion that accredited work-based learning contributes to decisions adults make about

engaging in higher education (Merrill-Glover, 2015). The kinetics of the occurring

culture, a blend of *digital natives* (i.e., those born in the age of computers) and *digital

immigrants*, (i.e., those born prior to the age of computers), and the constant changes

involved with an increasingly complex labor market, call for the rapid development of

educational and training programs that serve as enablers to participation guided by the

tenets of lifelong learning (Chisagiu, 2015; Khawaja, 2012; Knipprath & De Rick, 2015).

Without adult learners' participation, however, such initiatives go unfulfilled. What

remains is a gap in the research that effectively captures key indicators and levels of

satisfaction with work-based education interventions among this mixed group of digital natives and digital immigrants (Vander Ark, 2017; Khawaja, 2012).

Not all digital natives or digital immigrants are equally skilled with computer technology. Each group will have members who are more technically inclined than others. However, both groups are represented in a workplace setting (Zur & Walker, 2016). Because most education and certification courses offered at BR are online learning, it was unclear if the differences among these two groups was a contributing factor to participation rates at BR. Without understanding the barriers and incentives that motivate and deter adults in workplace education initiatives, BR would be forced to endure marginally successful education and certification programs.

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

Succession planning is a primary concern of organizational leaders at BR. There was no shortage of workers at BR, but there was a shortage of adequately prepared nonmanagerial employees who were qualified to fill complex positions and leadership roles, according to BR's senior human resource director. During quarterly strategy meetings, operations managers and administrators offered generalized comments regarding the deficiencies and readiness for promotion consideration of current and new employees who were hired within the past 5 years. The overarching theme of the comments was the lack of ability to perform information technology tasks as simple as email or creating basic data spreadsheets even though online learning resources were made available. The overall Director of Operations mentioned that the lack of personal

leadership qualities, such as emotional maturity and self-awareness, also surfaced as concerns.

The responses on BR's 2015 annual employee engagement survey provided additional evidence of an educational practice gap at the local level regarding lack of employee participation in the free workplace educational and certification programs offered by BR. Fifty percent of the population that responded to the survey disagreed that BR offered educational opportunities that effectively met their needs for learning and development. The results of the employee engagement survey, combined with general comments from operations managers and administrators, provided evidence of an educational practice gap at BR. To gain an understanding of this phenomenon, and to increase participation in educational or certification programs at BR, I conducted a basic qualitative study to explore the employees' perspectives that affected their decision to participate or not participate in free educational programs.

Evidence of the Problem From the Professional Literature

Studies on adult learner nonparticipation in education or training have undergone a strong revival as the amplification of education and training has become an essential topic of political argument and governmental importance (Porras-Hernandez & Salinas-Amescua, 2012). During the mid 2000's, studies on what motivated adults to participate in educational or certification programs were abundant (Chinnasamy, 2013; Harper & Ross, 2011). Researchers noted that digital natives and digital immigrants had polarizing views of educational programs, and many educators found the need to embrace new teaching platforms to enhance participation (Goldman & Martin, 2016). This shift

suggested that an analysis of nonparticipation should include a focus to identify the priorities and needs of participants from their perspectives that would serve to guide educators in the design of educational programs that would have a bearing on connections with, and relevance to, adult students (Pappas, 2013; Porras-Hernandez & Salinas-Amescua, 2012).

Definition of Terms

The following terms are applicable to the research problem and served to inform this qualitative study:

Barriers: A barrier is something that entirely prevents participation or minimizes participation in adult education. Barriers can be external, situational, internal, or dispositional (Falasca, 2011; Saar et al., 2014).

Culture: The attitudes, preparedness, abilities, and weaknesses of a specific generation. For example, the cultural differences that are identified between baby boomer and millennial students (Mazer & Hess, 2016).

Digital immigrants: Adult students typically born before the year 1964 in what is considered the pre-computer age (Zur & Walker, 2016).

Digital natives: Adult students born after the year 1964 in what is known as the digital era (Zur & Walker, 2016).

Educational interventions: A function that improves the instructional climate and is focused on the best interest of the learner (Pameijer, 2017).

Institutional barriers: Barriers that serve to inhibit or prevent participation in educational opportunities such as flexibility or timing or qualifications required to participate (Saar et al., 2014).

Nontraditional adult learners: Those who have completed mandatory schooling, are typically 25 years of age or older, and have experienced a prolonged gap in their educational timeline (Gorges & Kandler, 2012; Saar et al., 2014).

Organizational barriers: Sometimes referred to as dispositional barriers and are associated with how an individual organizes past learning experiences such as a lack of learning success in previous educational attempts and attitude towards learning in general (Falasca, 2011; Saar et al., 2014).

Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of nonmanagerial BR employees concerning what impacted their decisions to elect not to participate in the free educational programs offered by BR. Workplace educational opportunity was viewed as an enabler to learning and may instill a sense of purpose or commitment to the tenets of lifelong learning (Khawaja, 2012); otherwise, there may be an enduring negative effect on the life choices of adults who do not have adequate skills to meet the competencies of their peer group (Tett, 2016). The value of this study was to provide key stakeholders at the local setting with information about the organization's educational practices that affected participation in the learning and development programs. Education serves as a catalyst and as an enabler of positive social change. When educational systems fail to meet the needs of adults, in essence, those systems create barriers to social change (Patil,

2012) and inhibit an individual's ability to defend and enhance his or her civil liberties such as economic achievement, and the sense of well-being (Hout, 2012; Pezone & Singer, 2013).

The results from this study served to inform methods of delivery of educational content that appeals to all adults. The results also provided meaningful insight to guide future curriculum development that satisfies the learning needs of adults and served to promote participation in learning at the local setting. Additionally, most research aimed at understanding the developmental needs of individuals in a workplace setting primarily focused on the experiences of managers or leaders versus those of lower-skilled workers (Aryee & Chu, 2012; Guiney, 2015).

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of nonmanagerial BR employees concerning what impacted their decision to elect not to participate in the free educational programs offered by BR. Research questions narrow the purpose statement to specific questions that the researcher seeks to answer (Creswell, 2012). Additionally, qualitative research questions generally focus on the practice of education versus the outcomes of those practices (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). The guiding questions for this study are:

RQ 1: How do the nonmanagerial employees of BR perceive the free educational and certification programs offered at BR?

RQ 2: What are the nonmanagerial employees of BR experiences with barriers to the free educational and certification programs offered at BR?

RQ 3: What do nonmanagerial employees of BR identify as bridges to barriers that would increase participation in free educational and certification programs offered at BR?

Review of the Literature

Literature Search Strategy

Information for the literature review was obtained from several scholarly online databases including Academic Search Complete, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), EBSCO Host, Google Scholar, and the Walden University Library. Keyword search terms included *social engagement, social capital, adults as learners, barriers to adult learning, institutional barriers, job satisfaction, employee development, adult education, millennials, nontraditional learners, pedagogy, work-based learning, lifelong learning, intervention, Malcom Knowles,* and *grounded theory*. Peer-reviewed articles were selected from the timeframe of 2010 to the present.

Conceptual Framework

The guiding conceptual framework for this study is the adult learning theory of andragogy as proposed by Malcom Knowles (1980). A challenge for educators in any discipline is to become creators of learning activities that invite adult students to participate in an active lifelong learning orientation (Pierce & Fox, 2012). The theory of andragogy provided perhaps the most recognized explanation of how and why adults learn (Harper & Ross, 2011), and as maintained by Chinnasamy (2013), clearly stands above other theories that inform on the characteristics of adult learning. The theory of andragogy was appropriate to guide this study because the theory provides a template that

can guide educators in creating educational experiences that will serve to encourage participation in learning endeavors and support the tenets of lifelong learning.

Knowles was an American educator best known for applying the term andragogy to define adult education. Pappas (2013) posited that there are five assumptions characteristic of the adult learner. Finn (2011) provided evidence of a sixth assumption added at a later date. Chinnasamy (2013) suggested that Knowles developed the concept of andragogy based on his own experiences and described the five assumptions or characteristics of the adult learner as (a) being self-directed, (b) possessing knowledge or skills gained from observing how others perform tasks or participation in educational programs, (c) being predisposed to learn, (d) being problem-centered oriented, and (e) being internally motivated to learn. Finn maintained that the sixth assumption was closely related to the need for adults to know why they need to acquire knowledge from what they learn. Chinnasamy concluded all the assumptions are foundationally aligned and consistent with constructivism, which asserted that learners develop or construct knowledge from their experiences (Doolittle, 2014). Relevant to participating in educational or developmental programs, experiences in a student's lifetime have proved to be a determining factor in decisions related to participation (Tett, 2016). Johnson, Wisniewski, Kuhlemeyer, Isaacs, and Krzykowski (2012), maintained that there are critics of the principles or assumptions presented by Knowles; however, the assumptions put forth by Knowles are relevant for this discussion as they provide insight into why adults may choose to participate or decline to participate in learning endeavors.

Lifelong Learning

The topic of lifelong learning can be described as one of a structured interdependent nature and has been theoretically conceptualized by many practitioners. These practitioners include philosophers, sociologists, pedagogues, psychologists, and member representatives of other sciences (Ukraintseva, Romanov, Neskoromnykh, & Khovyakova, 2016).

In academic discourse, the term *lifelong learning* may be represented in different ways, for example, ongoing education, further education, or continuing education. Aside from these descriptions, Ukraintseva et al., maintained that regardless of the term used, lifelong learning is specifically related to an adult person's educational endeavors and the way adult education is delivered. In this aspect, lifelong learning for adults may be described as moving along a pathway of learning in which the adult continues to grow progressively as he or she engages in the various stages of learning (Ukraintseva et al., 2016).

The tenets of lifelong learning are abundant; however, perhaps the most significant tenet involves the implications for social change (Hout, 2012; Merrill-Glover, 2015; Patil, 2012; Pezone & Singer, 2013). Hout maintained that education has a strong correlation to the social and economic outcomes of success, health, family stability, and social connections. Education serves as an agent of social change (Patil, 2012) and empowers individuals to defend their civil liberties (Pezone & Singer, 2013). Hout further maintained that lifelong learning serves to insulate people from prejudice and intolerance and has a positive impact on communities and the nation as a whole by

preparing them to serve as engaged participants in a democratic society (Pezone &

Singer, 2013). A principle concern in the field of adult education is how to engage

students to participate in lifelong learning (Knipprath & De Rick, 2015).

Participation in Lifelong Learning

The psychology of education seldom applies a focus on adult learning as

maintained by Gorges and Kandler, (2012). However, due to societal changes, a focus on

how to encourage adult participation in educational opportunities has gained momentum

(Porras-Hernandez & Salinas-Amescua, 2012). As noted by Finn (2011), Knowles' sixth

assumption of andragogy (motivation) was viewed as a critical component to facilitate

adult participation in lifelong learning. As a result, Gorges and Kandler, as well as

McLean (2015), maintained that to promote participation in lifelong learning among

adults, it is important to know more about the factors of motivation that influence

decisions to accept or decline learning opportunities. A survey conducted by the National

Center for Education Statistics (2016) determined that participation in educational

programs increased by 37% over the years of 2000 to 2010; however, participation

decreased by 4% from the years of 2010 to 2014. The survey did not include reasons for

the decrease, which invites a cause for further investigation.

Secrist (2016) suggested that the process of teaching adults invites research into

what motivates them to participate or elect not to participate in educational opportunities.

She further suggested that there are certain basic needs that guide the motivation to learn

throughout the course of people's lifespan and that these needs can be visualized in

Maslow's Need Hierarchy. Merrill-Glover (2015) suggested that, in a workplace setting,

educators should target the needs of the adult and maintained that in workplace

educational settings, learning must provide a by-product to the student such as

transferable skills that enhance employability or promotional opportunities. Assessing a

student's level of satisfaction with a learning opportunity allows educators to create

educational interventions that serve to improve the instructional climate, targets

instruction to the learning outcome goals of the learner, and enhances the probability that

a student may engage in a learning program and adhere to the tenets of lifelong learning

(Pameijer, 2017; Secrist, 2016).

Barriers

A fundamental characteristic of adult education is engaging people to become

lifelong learners. Frequently, this necessitates removing barriers to learning (Falasca,

2011). A barrier in adult education is something that prevents participation entirely or

minimizes participation in adult education. Barriers can be external or situational or

internal and dispositional (Falasca, 2011; Saar et al., 2014). Falasca maintained that there

are two primary barriers that affect decisions to participate in learning programs, such as

developmental education or certification programs that serve to promote employability.

Institutional barriers are those barriers that serve to inhibit or prevent participation in

educational opportunities such as flexibility, timing, or qualifications required to

participate (Saar et al., 2014). Organizational barriers, sometimes referred to as

dispositional barriers, are associated with how an individual organizes past learning

experiences such as a lack of learning success in previous educational attempts and

attitude towards learning in general (Saar et al., 2014).

Institutional barriers can be further explained as those that are external to an individual. These may include cost, available time, or even the ability to arrange transportation to or from the educational location (Porras-Hernandez & Salinas-Amescua, 2012). Organizational or dispositional barriers may be further described as those that deal with one's level of self-esteem or the sense that one is not capable of learning (Porras-Hernandez & Salinas-Amescua, 2012).

Ross-Gordon (2011) explained other characteristics of adults that surface as barriers to participation in educational endeavors. Adults are likely to be juggling multiple life roles that may serve to influence decisions to participate, such as not only being a worker but also a spouse or partner, and often a parent, or caregiver. Work can be viewed as a barrier to participation as many adults relate to being workers first and students second. From this perspective, the time allocated for work reduces the amount of time one may have to devote to educational functions (Rotundo, Sackett, Enns, & Mann, 2012). These multiple roles may be viewed as barriers to participation as allocating time to participate interferes with the above-mentioned roles.

Generational barriers also play a role that affects participation in learning or developmental programs, suggesting that younger adults are more likely to engage in learning programs that are technology rich, whereas older adults may elect not to participate because of a lack of technology skills (Metallo & Agrifoglio, 2015). They also maintained that programs that are not technology rich may discourage the younger generations from participating in an educational or development program. Falasca explained that in spite of barriers, adults can be encouraged to participate if they are

given the support, they need to be successful. Falasca implied that educators should recognize the need to view learning support for adults as an entitlement versus an optional benefit.

Recently, organizations that serve the learning needs of adults have changed their approach to engaging adult students with a goal of overcoming barriers that discourage participation in learning programs for adults (Tett, 2016). These institutions or organizations are designing curriculum that favors the learning needs of adults. Among this cadre of learning institutions, Empire State University, Fielding University, and the University of Phoenix are adapting curricula that favors and encourages adult participation in learning endeavors as maintained by Ross-Gordon. The innovative support strategies offered by these institutions are rarely apparent in other learning programs but may provide a model for others to follow to meet the needs of adult students in any environment. Although the strategies offered by these institutions are becoming common, they may be uncommon in workplace learning programs (Ross-Gordon, 2011).

Workplace Educational Programs

Adults travel through various spheres of life and these changing spheres, coupled with the driving growth of industry and complex technologies, have contributed to maximizing the significance of workplace learning and in general, a heightened emphasis on adult education (Masalimova, Usak, & Shaidullina, 2016). As such, most organizations, to a far greater extent, are investing in employee learning and development programs as these activities are recognized as an effective platform for learning and

development among adults (Aryee & Chu, 2012). However, as noted by Billington, Nissinen, and Gabrielsen (2017), these initiatives aimed at improving the level of education among adults have struggled to improve participation and further indicated that even when adults do participate in workplace educational programs, less than 50% complete a program.

Throughout the world, learning or training and developmental programs are considered imperative to an organization's success (Aryee & Chu, 2012; Khawaja, 2012; Masalimova, et al., 2016). The methods employed to facilitate these programs depend primarily on the needs of the organization often without consideration of the needs of the employee (Masalimova et al., 2016). Khawaja (2012), noted organizations regularly fail to communicate their objectives effectively to workers, and of more importance, to communicate how learning and development programs provide benefits to the employee.

With regards to curriculum, as maintained by Masalimova et al., the methods for delivering learning, developmental, or training programs, varies from one organization to another and even from country to country. For example, in the United States, learning and developmental programs are typically only available when the organization is large, and these organizations often do not have their own in-house developed programs. As a result, these organizations generally band together in partnership with other large organizations to create intercompany educational development centers. In France, learning programs are delivered through specific short-term courses and are tailored to meet the needs of various divisions of the workplace. In Great Britain, most learning and developmental programs are conducted in-house in an effort to control content and

reduce external expense (Masalimova et al., 2016). Additionally, in Great Britain, the most common teaching methods are know-how sharing, and mentoring (Masalimova et al., 2016). This lack of consistency in educational programs offered in a workplace setting implies that the educational goals of organizations may not be in concordance with the educational goals of workers (Billington et al., 2017). Therefore, participants' characteristics should be a consideration when organizations develop learning, developmental, or training programs targeting the adult population in a workplace setting (Pilati & Borges-Andrade, 2012).

The Digital Divide

The concept of *digital divide* is a weighted topic of discussion in both political and academic circles. Originally, it was defined by consideration of those who had a computer or access to a computer, and Internet availability. Even after a considerable length of time gaps still remain and need to be addressed in political or academic circles with regards to a definition or to what extent or impact the term implies (Cruz-Jesus, Vicente, Bacao, & Oliveira, 2016; Nwim, & Kritzinger, 2016; Wang, Myers, & Sundaram, 2012). Among the growing cadre of students either currently enrolled in colleges or universities, or who are participants in a workplace learning organization, are those who are increasingly technology-ready. Technology-ready members are either of an age to be considered technologically savvy or are those who have been, because of age classification, considered to be learning or adapting to the technology rich world that is prevalent in today's learning environment. Much literature has used age as the determining factor with regards to acceptance of technology and its usage in a learning

environment among younger and older students, with a focus on understanding the different ways these two groups process information as maintained by Metallo and Agrifoglio. In theory, younger students are increasingly likely to be sensitive to the traditional learning strategies of older students and may decline to participate in teaching methods that are not relevant to their age group. Some describe these diverse groups as either digital immigrants or digital natives (Chaves, Maia-Filho, & Melo, 2016; Zur & Walker, 2016).

What is important for educators to understand is that the divide between the two classifications should be recognized as one of a difference in generations. Digital natives are tech-savvy simply by virtue of being born in the age where computers (and later more sophisticated devices) were common devices for obtaining knowledge. In contrast, digital immigrants have different attitudes and capacities with regards to obtaining knowledge via technology (Zur & Walker, 2016). For example, Zur and Walker, maintained immigrants have been classified into three categories. One group is those that are considered to be avoiders. This group would see no value in learning activities that may be online oriented. Another group is considered to be reluctant adopters, or those that recognize that technology is a part of most educational programs in current educational programs but remain tentative with regards to using technology to obtain knowledge or achieve a greater competency of skills in a workplace setting. Finally, there are the enthusiastic adopters that immerse themselves in the internet culture to keep pace with the younger digital natives (Zur & Walker, 2016).

Zur and Walker maintained that there are differences among the digital natives as well. They explained that similar to immigrants, there are three groups that vary considerably with their use of technology to obtain knowledge. These groups are the avoiders that were born in the digital age but simply have no affinity for the use of technology to obtain knowledge or gain competency. There is also the minimalist group that only engages in the use of technology for learning purposes when they deem it necessary. The third group, much like immigrants, enthusiastically engage in the use of technology to grow knowledge or competency. Understanding the differences between digital immigrants and digital natives has a bearing on the research question because digital immigrants are most often, if not always, either parents, teachers, administrators, or educators in a workplace educational program (Zur & Walker, 2016).

Millennial Students

Few will challenge the position most educators in the field of adult education hold that the adult group, vastly referred to as Millennials, presents challenges for educators. This group varies from previous students in the way they prepare to participate in educational endeavors (Mazer & Hess, 2016). Important to educators, this group also makes choices regarding participation in educational functions based on expectations linked to a desired return on investment that meets their educational purposes (Hosek & Titsworth, 2016). Educators then, must rethink how students of the millennial generation interact with curriculum. For example, millennials are used to being immersed in an environment where information allows for flexibility in how that information may be repurposed to meet their needs (Hosek & Titsworth, 2016). As a result, experienced

faculty see a need to adopt teaching methods aligned with adult students of the millennial generation to facilitate the greatest possible educational outcomes for millennials (Mazer & Hess, 2016).

Hosek and Titsworth provided a metaphorical model to guide educators when teaching members of the millennial group using coding and scripting for their model. They suggested that millennial's live in a universe bound by codes and scripts. In coding, knowledge is built from scratch. Millennials however, rather than creating knowledge from scratch, are more likely to take existing information from others and recycle or repurpose (scripting) that information in a way that to a greater extent, is more suitable to meeting their educational purpose. Hosek and Titsworth further maintained that by tradition, teachers are taught to program or code and this contrasts with a millennial's learning preference of scripting knowledge. They also proposed that educators will need to adapt curriculum that allows this group of students to become co-consumers or owners of learning concepts in the classroom.

The majority of educators practicing today are of an earlier generation than millennials and therefore, are not as adept with using technology teaching concepts in the classroom. The gap, with regards to technology use in the classroom, in itself may present a difficult barrier for educators to overcome. This barrier is commonly referred to as technology anxiety and is prevalent most often with older, more experienced instructors. Further, very little is known regarding how technology anxiety may be overcome among this group of educators (Johnson et al., 2012; Morreale & Staley, 2016).

Traditional Methods of Instruction

The expectations of engagement for students of the baby boomer era are uncertain as the information society comes of age. In the baby boomer age, behavioral-cognitivist inspired teaching practices rigidly determined how curriculum was designed to evaluate performance in both the fields of academia and workplace education (Lee & Hannafin, 2016). Traditionally, before technology was prevalent, curriculum design and methods of curriculum delivery emphasized a compliant relationship where students passively received direction from instructors (Caruth, 2014; Lee & Hannafin, 2016).

The pre-technology era in education was described by Lee and Hannafin, as directed instruction where the theoretical framework for this teaching method was explained as objectivism. The nature of learning required students to process specified content and learning goals that were defined by the curriculum or the instructor. Further, in this learning environment, the student was the receiver of knowledge and the instructor was the knowledge transmitter (Lee & Hannafin, 2016).

This traditional method of instruction has been described by the term *pedagogy* or the art and science of teaching and is most often associated with childhood or compulsory education where the focus is on content delivery. This method is often criticized because it denies the concept of learning and an individual's capacity (Beetham & Sharpe, 2013). As per Beetham and Sharpe (2013), the term *pedagogy* is derived from the Greek *paidagogos* and its meaning is associated with the person who led children to school. They further explained that Knowles deemed this form of teaching as inappropriate for

the educational years beyond compulsory schooling because post-compulsory years occur in the timeframe where learners tend to become more self-directed.

Traditional teaching methods focused on content delivery may not appeal to adults for several reasons. Falasca maintained that to define an adult learner means to understand that adults choose to participate in learning endeavors based on certain criteria. She stipulated that adults need to be free to guide themselves, are relevancy oriented, are prone to being problem focused versus a subject centered orientation and are mainly motivated to participate in educational programs by internal factors unrelated to external factors. Traditional pedagogical approaches for teaching adults are at odds with factors that encourage adults to engage in learning activities as this approach lacks a sense of reciprocity or, the "what is in it for me" mindset attributed to adult students (Beetham & Sharpe, 2013; Caruth, 2014).

Meeting the Needs of Adult Students

Curricula design in workplace settings has had a focus on fulfilling the needs of the organization often with a lack of consideration of the needs of the employee (Masalimova et al., 2016). Caruth suggested that this approach fails to provide motivation to participate in a learning endeavor as reciprocity comes to bear. It is here that indeed the theory of andragogy suggested the purpose of educational design should encourage people to participate in lifelong learning by understanding and meeting the needs of adults (Caruth, 2014). To meet this goal, new and innovative student-centered learning methods that encourages adults to engage in learning programs, are on the horizon and emerging in workforce training programs (Zainuddin & Attaran, 2016).

Student Centered Learning

Technology development is fundamentally changing the process or delivery of teaching-learning activities with respect to students passively receiving knowledge via instructor led lecture then homework to a more active process where students adopt autonomy and responsibility for creating learning opportunities (Lee & Hannafin, 2016; Zainuddin & Attaran, 2016). This relatively new focus aimed at adult education is described as student centered teaching and learning (Lee & Hannafin, 2016; Obradovich, Canuel, & Duffy, 2015). This new teaching model changes the traditional lecture then homework design by reversing the process (Mavromihales & Holmes, 2016). This teaching model was identified as student-centered learning (SCL) and encourages students to create learning opportunities and rebuild knowledge in an open-ended environment where the students own the responsibility for their learning (Lee & Hannafin, 2016; Mavromihales & Holmes, 2016; Zainuddin & Attaran, 2016). Additionally, Zainuddin and Attaran (2016) maintained that others call SCL blended learning and a variant of blended learning is the flipped classroom.

The flipped classroom adjusts the make-up of the classroom and relies heavily on technology driven innovation (Obradovich et al., 2015). By design, the flipped classroom allows students to play an active role in learning situations as compared to the traditional classroom where the instructor is in control of how knowledge is transmitted (Zainuddin & Attaran, 2016). It is believed that the flipped classroom could allow for group learning inside the classroom and individual learning would take place outside the classroom

where multimedia technology would replace the in-class lecture (Zainuddin & Attaran, 2016).

The flipped classroom changes teacher-centered instruction into student-centered learning and provides enhanced student participation prior to class via multimedia homework that replaces in class lecture (Zainuddin & Attaran, 2016). To test the potential benefits of flipping the classroom, Obradovich et al. (2015) conducted a study where library students in one academic year were instructed in a traditional lecture driven format and students received the same class information using the flipped classroom model the following year using a pre-test post-test methodology. The results of the study yielded support to the effectiveness of the flipped classroom model as the students taught traditionally in the first academic year demonstrated only moderate increases in testing results. The test results for the students in the second academic year who were instructed via the flipped model demonstrated increases in test results that were two times higher than in the nonflipped group (Obradovich et al., 2015).

Similar studies conducted by Mavromihales and Holmes (2016) and Zainuddin and Attaran (2016), indicated that students preferred the flipped model versus the nonflipped model by as much as 80%. There are critics of the flipped classroom. These critics maintained that minimally guided methods of instruction are not as effective or efficient as teaching methods designed with a strict cognitive approach because minimally guided methods are not harmonious with human cognitive processes (Lee & Hannafin, 2016). Additionally, Morreale and Staley (2016) suggested there is a gap between instructors and their students when it comes to technology adoption, considered

a critical component of the flipped classroom (Obradovich et al., 2015). Morreale and

Staley maintained that students of the millennial generation may be much more

comfortable using technology than their instructors and this gap may be further

exacerbated by many factors, including instructional practices when adopting technology.

Anxiety related to using technology can be fueled by lack of compensation and training

to learn how to implement technology in the classroom, scarce technology resources, and

a lack of self confidence in the effective use of technology to promote learning in the

classroom (Morreale & Staley, 2016). Another study confirmed that senior instructors

demonstrate high levels of technology anxiety because they fail to understand why

technology is relevant to learning (Johnson et al., 2012).

Online Learning

Online learning is known by different labels. Some use the term technology-

enhanced learning while others describe online learning as informal learning (Garcia-

Penalvo, Colomo-Palacios, & Lytras, 2012; Thorpe & Gordon, 2012). Currently, online

learning has grown beyond being a new fad to facilitate learning to a status of importance

not only to facilitate learning, but to enhance the learning process and participation in

many different environments, which include, face to face traditional programs and

workplace environments (Garcia-Penalvo et al., 2012; Thorpe & Gordon, 2012; Tynjala,

Hakkinen, & Hamalainen, 2014). Given the growth of online learning (Boling, Hough,

Krinsky, Saleem, & Stevens, 2012), it has been suggested that because of the

preponderance of web-based learning programs and the ability to reach a broader

segment of students, online learning will become the fastest growing segment in adult

education (Boling et al., 2012; Lee, Choi, & Kim, 2013; Thorpe & Gordon, 2012). This growth is being fueled by new technologies that have the potential to enhance personalization, engagement, and expanded access to learning programs in a workplace environment (Vander Ark, 2017), mainly due to the constant availability of course content that allows students to access resources online at any time which is pointedly pertinent to individuals in a workplace setting especially, when faced with deadlines to complete certifications that may be in conflict with work schedules (Lawton et al., 2012). Deadlines to complete learning courses often are in conflict with the act of work or work schedules as explained by (Rotundo et al., 2012). Tynjala et al. explained that technology enhanced learning has the potential to relieve pressure to participate in learning programs that inevitably come into conflict with work schedules.

Because of the availability of web-based learning programs, Lawton et al. suggested that an increasing number of students will begin learning via the online course path. Tynjala et al. further explained that because technology enhanced learning, particularly in a workplace setting, has the potential to blanket a wide area of solutions, which has proven to be advantageous for supporting activities for learning in workplace environments. They further suggested that previous studies noted additional values as byproducts of technology enhanced learning. For example, access to learning courses online expand the boundaries of learning because mobile devices are common tools already available and in use by most if not all students (Tynjala et al., 2014). From the perspective of work organizations, Lawton et al. (2012), pointed out that online learning offers cost savings but of greater importance to the organization, online platforms allow

instructors rapid access to students when feedback to the learner is needed. They explained that quick feedback to the learner has importance as it serves to enhance and support learning outcomes particularly when the learning objective is task oriented.

The value of online educational programs was further explored by Thorpe and Gordon (2012). They conducted a study among students in a workplace setting to confirm the perceived relevance of ease of use and usefulness for online learning. Lee et al. (2013) maintained that the constant availability of web-based learning provided multiple opportunities for workers to access learning resources, contributing to ease of use and usefulness which are purported to be a main attraction of online learning as was suggested by Tynjala et al. (2014).

Online learning however, is not without detractors as maintained by Boling et al. (2012). They explained that past research indicated that faculty would need to embrace adaptation in teaching methods currently prevalent in traditional programs, and traditional curriculum designs would need to change from a teaching paradigm to a learning philosophy. They further explained that shifts of this nature would require instructors in the online environment to take on diverse roles such as mentors that facilitate learning versus conveyors of information. Tynjala et al. (2014), maintained that in formal education, content emphasis is on teaching current knowledge however, in a workplace setting the emphasis is on creating new knowledge. Boling et al. took this concept further suggesting that teaching in the online environment required a different pedagogy and skill compared to traditional classroom teaching. These challenges to developing online curriculum and delivering online content were identified by Johnson et

al. (2012) as creating what they term as technology anxiety in faculty due to a lack of understanding how online learning programs may affect positive learning outcomes. Further, defining online learning mostly remains unexplored territory inside and outside of institutional and organizational contexts (Garcia-Penalvo et al., 2012; Huang, 2016).

Implications

The literature review reinforces a need for the development of a local solution extending beyond the current practices. In the educational arena efforts to improve participation have not resolved a practice gap that effectively encourages participation at the local setting. A possible solution could involve a collaborative project in the form of a curriculum change involving educators and students or a position paper recommending ways to reduce barriers. Interview results garnered from students may reveal a collaborative project focused on improving adult participation in continuous lifelong learning among all adult students.

Summary

The reviewed literature supports the presence of a practice gap in the educational programs offered to adults in a workplace environment. This noteworthy effect is offered because a large percentage of adult students at the local setting elected not to participate in the free educational programs offered at the local setting. As the purpose of this study was to explore employee's perspectives that impact decisions to participate or not participate in free educational programs, a thorough vetting of the current literature on adult education provided possible solutions regarding adult pursuit of the tenets of lifelong learning. The dynamics of adult education are well defined by Knowles' theory

of andragogy which explains adults need to understand why they need to learn what they are learning, as well as how adult education should be delivered (Chinnasamy, 2013; Ukraintseva et al., 2016). Multiple programs in education conceptually presented potential barriers that may affect decisions to decline to participate in lifelong learning (Ukraintseva et al., 2016). Differences in generational age for example, digital natives and digital immigrant (Metallo & Agrifoglio, 2015; Zur & Walker, 2016), and generally speaking, challenges in teaching the millennial generation were shown to affect adult decisions to participate in learning endeavors (Mazer & Hess, 2016; Zur & Walker, 2016). Traditional teaching methods which emphasized a teacher focus versus a student focus were implicated to potentially alienate adult students of a certain generational age (Beetham & Sharpe, 2013). Additionally, workplace educational programs which depend primarily on the needs of the organization may fail to encourage participation (Masalimova et al., 2016).

This literature review included discussion of various methods of delivering adult educational programs, dynamics of generations among adult students, and barriers that affect or influence decisions to participate in educational endeavors. A gap remains because there is insufficient literature that addresses workplace learning programs to the degree that will satisfy or encourage adults in a workplace setting to pursue the tenets of lifelong learning. This fact supports the presence of a practice gap at the local setting that may be clarified by this study. Section 2 describes the methodology of the study to gather data on this phenomenon.

Section 2: The Methodology

Research Design and Approach

Research is a multistep process and is more than simply making a decision on whether one will observe or interview participants. Six steps form or compose the process of collecting qualitative data that progresses from a review of the literature related to the problem, identifying participants and sites, obtaining access, determining what kind of data should be collected, development of data collection forms, and administering the process in an ethical fashion (Creswell, 2012). Unlike quantitative research, where instruments collect data and analysis is conducted at the end of a study, in qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument and data analysis occurs throughout the study, as well as directs the ongoing process of data collection (Lodico et al., 2010).

Study Design

The purpose of this study was to understand the nature of experiences of adults at a local setting that influenced decisions not to participate in ongoing lifelong learning, especially when such learning is provided at no expense to the learner. To gain a rich understanding of this phenomenon, a basic qualitative study design was appropriate. A study of this nature is a form of qualitative research that seeks to gain understanding of an individual, group, or situation in a bounded; meaning a case is singled out to be researched in terms of time, place, or other physical boundaries (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010). Qualitative studies vary frequently in terms of length, design complexity, rationale, and purpose; however, qualitative studies may be described as being either

intrinsic, instrumental, or collective (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010). Because the purpose of this study was to gain a deep understanding of why adults at the local setting elected not to participate in free educational endeavors, a basic qualitative study was appropriate. An ethnographic study was considered; however, because ethnographic studies focus on culture and behaviors of individuals, and are conducted over a lengthy period of time (Creswell, 2012), the emphasis of this type of methodology would extend beyond the time I had access to each case. A quantitative study would not be appropriate for this study because in a quantitative study the literature is extensively covered at the beginning of the study. In a qualitative study, discussing the literature has less importance in justifying the research problem, which allows the views of the participants to emerge without the constraining views of others from the literature (Creswell, 2012).

Setting and Sample

The setting for this study was a consumer goods organization located in the southwestern region of the United States. BR is an organization that provides certification, training, and personal development educational programs for its employees through the educational division referred to as BR University (pseudonym). The organization consists of multiple business establishments scattered throughout the Southwest; however, all of the organization's business establishments participate in identical educational programs and educational processes. I selected a single business establishment operated by BR, and not under my influence, from which to recruit participants.

Sample

In qualitative research, it is common to study a few individuals or cases as the overall ability of a researcher to examine the phenomenon in-depth may diminish with the addition of multiple individuals or sites (Creswell, 2012). Therefore, for this study, I limited the targeted sample size to 10 nonmanagerial employees from the local setting to participate in individual interviews and 5 nonmanagerial employees from the same local setting to participate in a focus group interview. The sampling process was guided by purposeful sampling, which means that only information-rich individuals are selected and the process strategy is guided by homogeneous sampling in which the researcher selects individuals because they characterize similar traits (Creswell, 2012). Only nonmanagerial employees of the local setting who had elected not to participate in the free educational programs were included in the sample. The eventual study sample yielded 5 participants for individual interviews and 3 participants for the focus group interview.

Access to Participants

Even when a problem has clearly been identified, a researcher needs to decide whether the problem can or should be studied. A researcher can only proceed when granted access to participants and sites, including the time, resources, and skills to study the phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). For this study, I recruited participants via an invitation sent through electronic email addresses that I had access to. The invitations were sent from my private email account that did not reveal my work title in order to eliminate possible bias influenced by my position in the organization. A letter of

cooperation from the overall director (referred to as Unit Director) of the study location was returned to me verifying his/her authority to approve and grant permission to conduct the study at the selected business establishment.

Protection of Participants Rights and Data

To protect the identities and ensure confidentiality of participants, I assigned a numerical identifier to each participant. The numerical identifiers were stored in a secure password-protected digital file as well as a hard copy file that can only be accessed by me. Participant interviews were conducted over a 5-week period following an interview protocol that ensured identical questions were asked of each participant. After the one-on-one interviews were concluded, I selected one focus group, comprised of nonmanagerial employees of BR that did not participate in the individual interviews, using the same process as for the individual interview participants to determine if commonality of themes existed. During the process of collecting and analyzing data, to ensure findings and interpretations were accurate, I validated findings via the processes of triangulation and member checking. Triangulation focuses on corroborating evidence from different individuals and data collection sources to verify accuracy of themes and correctness of data collection methods, whereas member checking involves presenting the findings to participants to determine whether the descriptions are complete, the themes are accurate, and the researcher interpretations are aligned and fair (Creswell, 2012).

Interview Protocol

I used a standard form for the interview protocol containing the following data. A header provided a place to record the interviewer's name, location, and date of the interview, as well as pertinent background information of the interviewee (Lodico et al., 2010). Additional headers stated the purpose of the study and interview, rights to confidentiality, and finally the interview questions (Lodico et al., 2010). The interview protocol serves to enhance consistency, ensuring each interviewee is asked the same questions as previous participants. The interview protocol and interview questions were identical for both the individual and focus group interviews (see Appendix B).

Role of the Researcher

Qualitative measurement in qualitative research must be flexible, natural, and independent of standardized instruments. Researchers usually develop their own method for recording data either through visual means such as photos or words, or a combination of both. Such tools provide the researcher with the dense and robust descriptions of the phenomena to be studied, which is a characteristic of qualitative research. Because all data are synthesized through the senses of the researcher, in the end, the researcher is the primary measurement tool (Lodico et al., 2010). Therefore, I was solely responsible for the systematic collection and analysis of the data. To mitigate researcher bias, I selected participants from a business establishment operated by BR where I had no supervisory authority. Therefore, the interview process ensured that no future professional interactions with participants would have a bearing or influence on their career success or

failure. Additionally, because participants were identified by a numerical identity, participants will remain anonymous to all supervisors within the BR organization.

Data Collection

Instrumentation

Individual interviews combined with a single focus group interview were implemented to triangulate why a large percentage of employees at BR elected not to participate in the free educational programs offered by BR's educational department. Individual interviews are the preferred method to gain individual perspectives or experiences from participants as there are challenges presented with a focus group interview such as participants feeling uncomfortable in a group setting, and the difficulty in arranging a convenient location and time for the interview (Lodico et al., 2010). However, since the sample size for the one-to-one interviews was small, a focus group interview was selected to determine whether the focus group responses would mirror responses from the individual interviews or if new or opposing information relevant to the study surfaced. These semistructured interviews were the primary method of data collection. Interview questions aligned to the research questions are located in the second column of Table 1.

A search of the internet, including online databases, did not provide a structured interview protocol that was relevant to workplace learning. Therefore, I developed the interview protocol (see Appendix B) with the assistance of faculty advisors at Walden University to address the central phenomenon of the study: Why do a large percentage of

nonmanagerial employees at BR elect not to participate in the free educational programs

at their workplace? These interview questions align with the research questions.

Table 1

Alignment of Study Research Questions to Interview Questions and Focus Group

Questions

Research Questions	Interview Questions
RQ 1: How do the nonmanagerial employees perceive the free educational programs offered at BR?	1. Have you ever participated in company certification programs and if so, how many? Based on your experience with them, what is your impression?
	2. If you were to describe the learning or certification programs offered by your organization to someone, how would you describe them?
	4. If you have not participated in the training certification programs, please discuss reasons for not participating.
RQ 2: What are the nonmanagerial employee's experiences with barriers to the free educational and certification programs offered at BR?	5. How would you describe the problems that may make participation in the educational offerings in your organization difficult?
	8. What could the organization do or provide that would allow you to participate?
	10. In general, what are your overall thoughts about the educational offerings in your organization?
RQ 3: What do the nonmanagerial employees identify as bridges to barriers that would increase participation in free educational and certification programs offered at BR?	3. Describe your relationship between the organization and you regarding the educational offerings and your personal success in your current role.
	6. What are the areas in your opinion, that need improvement to encourage your participation in the organization's educational offerings?
	7. How do you perceive the value of the educational offerings in your organization with regards to meeting your educational needs?
	9. What educational priorities have you identified as most important to meeting your educational needs?

Interview Questions 1, 2, and 4 were posed to gain an understanding of the depth of participation in the educational programs from those participating in the interviews and to gain a general sense of the importance and perceived value associated with the educational offerings provided by BR. These questions align with RQ1. Interview questions 5, 8, and 10 align with RQ2 and were asked to discover what barriers existed that would prevent participation in the educational programs and in general, to gain an understanding of how the organization may unknowingly create barriers to participation, and to examine if those organizational barriers influence decisions the interviewees make with regards to participation in the educational programs. Interview Questions 3, 6, 7, and 9, align with RQ3 and were posed to gain a perspective from the employee's point of view, focused on what the organization should do to reduce or eliminate barriers that would increase participation decisions that would meet the needs of the learner, as well as to evaluate in general, what the employee's sense of value would be if participation was pursued. The same interview questions were administered to the individual participants and to the focus group participants. Each of the participants had experience with mandatory certification programs, and no participant had experience with the nonmandatory personal development programs offered by BR.

Interviews

This research study sought to explore why some adults at the local setting elected not to participate in the free educational offerings at BR so that a substantial understanding of the phenomenon could emerge. The previous review of the literature indicated that there were challenges associated with encouraging adults to participate in

educational offerings in a workplace setting. Throughout the world, learning or training and development programs are considered imperative to an organization's success and necessary for individuals to achieve greater levels of success in an organization (Aryee & Chu, 2012; Khawaja, 2012; Masalimova, et al., 2016).

The methods employed to facilitate these programs depend primarily on the need of the organization, often without consideration of the needs of the employee (Masalimova et al., 2016). Khawaja noted organizations regularly fail to communicate their objectives effectively to workers, and of more importance, to communicate how learning and development programs provide benefits to the employee. To explore and gain a substantial understanding of the central phenomenon concerning why a large percentage of the employees at BR elected not to participate in the organization's educational offerings, the research questions were designed to obtain rich descriptions from the viewpoint of participants in the study who elected not to participate in BR's educational offerings. The interviews were conducted in a manner that did not affect work schedules in a private setting removed from the work area. All interviews were conducted by me and were manually transcribed by me. Participants were given the opportunity to review the final transcriptions of their interview one week after completion to ensure their statements were accurately recorded. All participants were in agreement with the transcriptions and offered no changes to the transcriptions. The following research questions were explored:

RQ 1: How do the nonmanagerial employees of BR perceive the free educational and certification programs offered at BR?

RQ 2: What are nonmanagerial employees of BR experiences with barriers to the free educational and certification programs offered at BR?

RQ 3: What do the nonmanagerial employees identify as bridges to barriers that would increase participation in free educational and certification programs offered at BR?

A total of 5 nonmanagerial employees invited to participate in the study consented to the individual interview. Eleven nonmanagerial employees invited to participate in the individual interview did not respond to the invite. A total of 5 invites to participate in the focus group were offered. Of those 5 invites sent, one indicated interest but eventually declined to consent, and one did not respond to the invite. Three nonmanagerial employees did consent to participate in the focus group.

Each participant in both the individual interview and focus group interview received the IRB approved consent form (approval # 01-17-20-0445988). The consent form explained the risks and benefits of participation, and the confidentiality of the interviews. Each participant affirmed his or her consent by returning the emailed consent form to me. The interviews consisted of 10 questions. The interview questions are provided in Table 1, in the interview protocol in Appendix B, and in Appendix C with an example of transcribed interview responses.

Accuracy and Credibility of Findings

During the process of collecting and analyzing the data, to ensure coding and interpretations were accurate, findings were validated by the process of triangulation and member checking. Creswell (2012), explained that the processes of triangulation and member checking are appropriate methods to establish reliability in a qualitative study.

Triangulation was used to corroborate interview responses to verify accuracy of themes and correctness of data collection methods, while member checking involved presenting findings to participants to determine if the descriptions were complete, to confirm accuracy of themes, and to determine if the researcher interpretations were aligned and fair. In this research study, triangulation of the interview responses from both the one-to-one interviews and the focus group interview validated the interview questions and research questions using the constant comparison method (coding and keyword contextual analysis) in which the researcher develops concepts from coding and analyzing data simultaneously in order to gain a congruent understanding of the data (Mayer, 2016). Additionally, all participants participated in member checking of their transcript and were asked to verify that the information as transcribed by the researcher accurately captured their reflections on the research topic.

Data Analysis Results

The analysis of qualitative data involves understanding how to make sense of the collected data. This analysis consists of acquiring a general sense of the data, coding descriptions and developing themes related to the central phenomenon, preparing a report of the findings, and validating the accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2012). Collection, and the subsequent analysis of data in a qualitative research study is an inductive process where small amounts of data are obtained, coded, and built into themes. In contrast, a deductive process begins by making a prediction about the study then searching for data that would substantiate or disprove the prediction (Lodico et al., 2010). The collected

data in this research study was analyzed using the inductive process of qualitative research.

The individual interviews were transcribed into a Word document containing each interview question and the responses from each participant. This process was duplicated for the focus group interview and each document was identified for both groups using only the random identifier assigned to the individual and focus group participants. Lodico et al. advised that prior to assigning codes, qualitative researchers should engage in multiple readings of the data to gain an overall sense of the data. After I read through the data initially, and after subsequent readings, I used an In Vivo coding process as the first step to identify key wording and phrases. The codes are labels for themes that are recorded in the exact words of the participants versus the words of the researcher or other educational terms (Creswell, 2012). I made one list of responses using the actual words of participants based on my interpretation of the data and aligned them with a short description of the interview question. These are represented in Table 2 in the second column. One of the interviews is listed in Appendix C.

To gain further alignment of my interpretations of the key wording or phrases, I added the process of initial coding. Initial coding is a coding pattern that can be characterized by frequency (they happen often or seldom) or, the codes are similar or perhaps different (Patel, 2014). The keywords from this coding process are located in the third column of Table 2.

Table 2

First Cycle Codes From Line-By-Line Analysis of Interview Response Transcripts

Interview question	Summarized question	Codes: In vivo coding	Codes: Initial coding
IQ 1	Participation in programs, Amount, Impression	More than 10, too much information, tough to understand, Course never re-visited, not certain if there is retention	Excessive information, Lack of retained knowledge, inconsistent message, experience with programs
IQ 2	Description of programs, Opinion shared with others	Efficient and quick, not enough time to ask questions, valuable but lacking as the classes are not presented with the same criteria because of different teachers	Short duration, crowded classroom, unanswered questions, subject matter taught differently
IQ 3	Relationship with the organization, success in current role	It has played a part in building my confidence to be successful, the problem is finding the time to do it, I need to understand the process so I can teach my team, On a day to day basis, there is a huge time constraint due to work load so may not participate	Confidence builder, Time constraints, Work priorities, No time for participation
IQ 4	Reasons for not participating	Have not participated in personal development courses, Lack of passion to grow, Some may not have home computer access, Not on my "to do" work list, Feel guilty for taking time away from work for personal development	Time constraints, Homework, Family time, Scheduled training
IQ 5	Barriers to participation	Different types of learning styles, Example, most programs are on the computer and may be difficult for some, Have workers that don't even know how to log into a computer, not being held accountable for learning, Does not include a description of what programs there are in the university, Prefer hands on learning, Sometimes I forget these programs are available	Learning styles, Computer based, Computer skills, Accountability, Motivation
IQ 6	What areas need improvement to encourage participation	More instructor led courses, A lot of individuals are intimidated by computer-based programs, takes 10 steps just to get to the university, More conversation about what programs are available, Set time aside	Face to face instruction, Computer skills, Intimidated, Availability, Information, Scheduled time
IQ 7	Perceived personal value of programs	Adequate, Knowing what there is to learn, didn't know there were development books to read, What I know now has come from hands on experience, Valuable, Time is the issue	Adequate, Valuable, Awareness, Hands-on Experience, Time
IQ 8	What would allow participation	Need better transparency, I really don't know about all that is available, Time is the issue, need the time to participate, Voucher the time	Transparency, Time, Vouchered training time
IQ 9	Personal education priorities	Not necessary to be degreed but would consider getting a degree to improve promotion chances, Keep pace with technology, Would like more education, Have to hold yourself accountable	Obtain a degree, Technology skills, Accountability
IQ 10	Perceptions of organizational offerings	Good but difficult to access, Some employees may not appreciate the programs, Some programs take too long to complete, some won't load	Access issues, Lack of appreciation, Technology issues

This first cycle of coding is representative of the initial stage of analysis of the data gained from the individual interviews. The focus group interview yielded almost identical responses for each interview question that was presented to the individual interviewees. However, interview questions 5, 6, and 8 surfaced responses that were unique to the focus group participants. The unique focus group responses are represented in Table 3 using the same format established in Table 2 for the individual responses.

Table 3

First Cycle Codes From Line-By-Line Analysis of Focus Group Response Transcripts

Interview question	Summarized question	Codes: In vivo coding	Codes: Initial coding
IQ 5	Barriers to participation	Classes seemed to be short notice, I had to constantly bug my admin to sign me up for a class, A waste of my time	Curriculum planning Value
IQ 6	What areas need improvement to encourage participation	Managers did not want me out of the work location	Manpower
IQ 8	What would allow participation	I never received feedback from department managers about attending these classes	Communication

For the second cycle of coding, I employed the use of axial coding to arrange the initial codes from Table 2 and Table 3 into similar groups. In axial coding, one selects an open coding category and relates other categories to it (Creswell, 2012). Analysis of similarities of codes produced four categories and are represented in Table 4.

Table 4

Category Development

Axial codes	Categories
Information	Transparency
Time constraints	Barriers
Family time	
Work priorities	
Scheduled time	
Accountability	
Capped classroom size	Access
Availability	
Enrollment process	
Learning styles	Technology
Computer based	

I reviewed the interview transcripts again but no additional codes surfaced.

Therefore, the point of saturation was satisfied. Saturation in qualitative research is the

point where the researcher determines that no new data analysis will provide additional

insight for the development of categories (Creswell, 2012). The four themes and

description of each are listed in Table 5.

Table 5

Description of Themes

Category	Theme	Description
Transparency	Difficulty identifying available programs	In the context of interviews, this theme points to a deficiency regarding how to access learning programs and includes a deficiency in identifying what programs are available for personal development
Barriers	Personal time challenges to include perceived organizational obstacles such as conflict with work priorities and scheduled training times.	This theme describes how employees feel about what impedes their engagement with learning programs offered by the organization
Access	Difficulty accessing the learning programs. Limited class size/availability of classes.	This theme speaks to a deficiency of simple or easy to use process directions to initialize or begin a learning program and capped class sizes.
Technology	A deficiency in employee computer skills	This theme addresses a lack of generational experience with using basic computer programs

The second cycle axial coding of the participants' responses to the interview questions produced four key themes including a deficiency of adequate communication regarding what learning programs are available, directions to engage in the learning programs, infringement on personal time and perceived organizational obstacles to participation, difficulty in navigating to the learning programs and available resources to participate in the learning programs, and insufficient computer skills of employees. The following four themes represent the summarization of responses (from the individual interviews and the focus group interview combined) with regards to what circumstances influenced their decisions to elect not to participate in the learning programs offered by BR. Individual interview participant quotations are distinguished preceded by the letter A and focus group participant quotations are preceded by the letter B to differentiate the two groups.

Theme 1

A deficiency of adequate communication regarding what learning programs are available to include directions to engage in the learning programs. This theme surfaced from review of the responses to interview questions 5, 6, and 7. Interview participant A1 exclaimed: "Onboarding doesn't include a full description of what programs there are, need more conversation about what programs are available and there are employees that don't even know how to log in to a computer." Participant A2 stated, "The programs are not on the main screen of our computers." Focus group participant B1 provided, "Honestly, knowing what programs that are available to help us get to the next level or management." Each of these responses supports a deficiency of readily available information with regards to the organization providing sufficient information relevant to program content and supplemental learning opportunities. Specifically, these responses describe how the organization failed to communicate class availability, including the availability of descriptions of how the content would benefit the worker.

Theme 2

Infringement on personal time and perceived organizational obstacles to participation. This theme describes the nonmanagerial employees' thoughts regarding obstacles that impede engagement with learning programs and points to what those employees perceive as organizational obstacles to participation in the offered learning programs. This theme is supported by interview responses to interview questions 2, 3, 4, 5, and 10. All participants in both interview groups indicated that having the time to participate was a barrier. Participant A4 responded, "You don't use the info all the time

so at some point you tend to forget the processes you were taught." This participant further added, "That I look at the programs but when I see how long it takes to complete a learning course, work gets in the way. I could do it at home but that would take away from my family." Participant A1 stated, "there is a huge time constraint due to work demand so I may not participate." Participant A3 responded that, "time management is a problem, as the focus is only on getting the work done and some don't think personal development training is important because there's no requirement or accountability to do it." Participant A2 responded that personal time would need to be used to explore the training programs due to work time constraints. Participants from the focus group interview shared that they had never sat and reserved time for training or development courses adding, "I had to constantly bother my Admin to sign me up for classes." Each of the responses indicate that the organization failed to support time away from the required work duties to participate in the learning programs, did not communicate the importance of supporting training and learning time for their direct reports, and did not credit the work location with funds to cover the expense associated with training or learning programs.

Theme 3

Difficulty in navigating to the learning programs including available resources to facilitate participation in the learning programs. This theme addressed a deficiency of simple or easy to use process directions to initialize or begin a learning program and a lack of resources needed to allow participation. This theme is supported by interview responses to interview questions 4, 5, 6, 9, and 10. Participant B3 explained "the training

center does not have enough classes available that meets our needs so our admin had a hard time even getting us scheduled to attend a class." Participant A1 stated "many of the programs are going to be accessed on mobile devices and those devices may not be available to some." Participant B1 shared that he/she did not have a computer at home "so, maybe there needs to be a computer at work for us to use." Participant A1 complained that "it's hard to get to the programs." Participant A2 stated, "the programs are not on the main screen of our computer and sometimes I forget these programs are available." These responses suggest the organization has not sufficiently provided adequate marketing and accessibility procedures for online learning courses or simple program instruction to navigate to online learning courses. Additionally, the wait time to be enrolled in a class is excessive, and computer availability at work for training at work is inadequate.

Theme 4

Insufficient computer skills of employees. This theme addresses a lack of generational experience with using basic computer skills. This theme surfaced from responses to interview questions 4, 6, 9, and 10. This theme addresses a lack of generational experience with using basic computer skills, and arose from interview responses to questions 4, 5, 6, 9, and 10. Participant A4 stated "There are different types of learning styles for individuals. For example, most programs are on the computer and this may be difficult for some." Participant A4 added they would prefer "more instructor led development courses because this gives you someone to ask questions of because computer learning may use language, I don't understand but with a live instructor, I can

raise my hand and ask for an explanation." Participant A1 pointed out that "some employees don't even know how to log on to a computer," which supports a generational gap with regards to the use of technology for learning purposes with regards to older employees. Combined with responses from theme 3, it becomes evident that the organization may be unintentionally blocking participation in the organization's learning programs by failing to account for the generational gap with regards to the use of technology for learning purposes, further indicating a practice gap associated with how the organization provides learning opportunities.

Summary

Chinnasamy (2013) concluded Knowles' assumptions of andragogy are foundationally aligned and consistent with constructivism, which asserts that learners develop or construct knowledge from their experiences (Doolittle, 2014). Relevant to participating in educational or developmental programs, experiences in a student's lifetime has proven to be a determining factor concerning decisions related to participation (Tett, 2016). Therefore, the themes taken as a whole can, best be described as aligning with the conceptual framework of andragogy. The results of this study have helped fill the knowledge gap according to the experiences encountered by employees specifically related to the educational offerings provided by the work organization.

The main theory gleaned from analysis of the participant responses was the nonmanagerial employees faced barriers to participation associated with how the educational offerings were administered and these were beyond their ability to control. The inability to influence how the programs were administered contributed to the low

participation engagement in the learning programs. The nonmanagerial employees were frustrated with a lack of transparency related to what programs were available, the impact participation would have on their family time when a personal home computer was available, challenges with balancing workloads versus granted or scheduled time to participate in the learning programs, the associated difficulty in navigating to and through the learning programs, lack of sufficient organizational resources (dedicated computers) to access learning programs, and the challenges presented by deficient basic computer skills.

The central focus of the interview responses narrowed to challenges with balancing work loads and family time unrestricted by work, and organizational barriers that exacerbated negative experiences when participants attempted to access learning programs. There were a few examples where employees did approve of the learning programs. However, those were certification courses that were mandatory. When asked about nonmandatory learning programs, which was the focus of this study, the interview responses are in agreement and aligned with the challenges and barrier experiences nonmanagerial employees faced which led them to choose not to participate in those nonmandatory courses. A solution to fill the practice gap is needed, otherwise the educational initiatives of the work organization (BR) which will increase participation, will be unfulfilled.

To positively address the practice gap, I will create a white paper that will present the findings of the study to the administrators and key stake holders of the organization which will provide evidence of a practice gap. The white paper developed from this

study is intended to encourage educational administrators to examine the study results,

prompt discussions on how the organization's educational practices can be enhanced to

encourage participation, and provide recommendations and strategies based on my expert

opinion of the data collected from participants in the study. Adopting the

recommendations provided in the white paper will be critical to developing a staff that

has the tools to support ongoing prosperity for the organization and ensure positive social

outcomes for the employees.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The goal of this doctoral study was to explore why 44% of the nonmanagerial employees of BR at the local setting chose not to participate in BR's nonmandatory free educational or certification programs that were available to all employees. To gain an understanding of this phenomenon, I conducted individual interviews with nonmanagerial employees (it was assumed that managerial employees had greater access to the educational programs by virtue of their position) to gain rich, descriptive responses from nonmanagerial employees who elected not to participate in those programs. Additionally, I conducted a focus group interview with nonmanagerial employees who did not participate in the individual interviews to determine if the overall sentiment of the focus group mirrored the responses documented in the individual interviews or if new information would surface. In this study, I did not examine factors of gender, age, or the educational background of participants; however, during the data collection process, some of the participants indicated that their experiences with the learning programs did meet some of their educational needs. The study intent was focused centrally on reasons nonmanagerial employees elected not to participate in the learning programs.

The findings presented in this study provided evidence that a practice gap exists in the organization that impacts decisions employees make with regards to participating in the free educational offerings made available by BR. As BR is focused on "going all in" to pursue excellence in the digital arena to compete with major digital organizations, research findings presented in Section 2 confirmed a need to continue examination of

factors that affect an employee's decision to elect not to participate in the organization's educational programs. Employees who are engaged in lifelong learning will be essential to developing a staff that has the educational tools to support continued growth in the digital arena and enhance positive social outcomes for employees.

The white paper developed from this study is intended to encourage educational administrators to examine the study results, prompt discussions on how the organization's educational practices can be enhanced to encourage participation, and provide recommendations and strategies based on the data collected from participants in the study. Recommendations from the study include a basic form of instruction on how to access training or certification programs that are computer based, scheduling work time to focus on personal development that is extraneous from required physical work duties, and transparency or a table of contents that identifies what courses are available. Additionally, the data suggested that study employees would encourage some form of tracking metric that would indicate positive progress or a lack of progress in comparison to their peer group.

Rationale

Reporting research involves consideration of the audience, posturing the report in a format that is appropriate for the audience, and writing the report in a style that is sensitive to all who might read the report (Creswell, 2012). A white paper is considered one of the best mediums to present a compelling point of view to resolve a particular problem and can quickly open doors, and generate solutions to solve a problem (Buday, Parker, & Leavitt, 2018). Additionally, a white paper places the entire argument in one

place for policy makers and influencers to read, demonstrates the veracity of the research

and analysis of data, and provides a complete examination of the problem and possible

solutions (Buday et al., 2018).

The problem addressed in this white paper (see Appendix A) is the lack of

participation by nonmanagerial employees in free educational programs offered by BR.

Results of this study regarding why the nonmanagerial employees at BR do not

participate in those offerings is an ideal topic to be discussed in a white paper format.

The expectation of adult education is to encourage adults to become lifelong learners and

this purpose predominately requires eliminating organizational barriers to participating in

education and certification programs (Falasca, 2011). The study results are suggestive

that the study employees encountered barriers to participating based on several factors.

Included in the factors are time constraints that impact personal time as well as work

time, limited availability of courses, a lack of alignment of course curriculum among

instructors, vague instructions on how to locate and register for courses, and a lack of

recognized incentives to engage in educational endeavors, particularly when this affects

the balance between work life and family time.

The central question posed in this study was this: Why do a significant percentage

of nonmanagerial employees at BR choose not to participate in the free educational

programs provided by the organization? The findings suggest that a practice gap exists at

BR that is related to the reasons some employees at BR choose not to participate in the

educational offerings provided by BR. The goal of this white paper is to provide a

complete examination of the problem, including strategies for solutions, and provide

recommendations for policy redirection that may maximize participation in BR's educational programs.

Review of the Literature

The literature review in this section presents a thorough summary of articles published on how to write a white paper and the strength of presenting research in the genre of a white paper. Databases examined for this literature review included Google Scholar, Academic Search Complete, and ERIC. Search keywords included *white paper, white paper impact, published white paper articles,* and *white paper format.* Published articles in a white paper were often repetitive and usually directed the reader to written white papers mainly from businesses seeking clients or product promotional white papers. Thus, while limited in nature, the literature review demonstrates the increasing demand for white papers as a method of communicating research findings and summarizing recommendations to those key stakeholders who are empowered to enact policy changes in an educational institution. However, some articles were located that described the white paper writing process, the strength of a white paper as an effective form of communication for those that create policy, and the persuasiveness of a well written white paper with regards to key stakeholders.

The White Paper Genre

Some researchers have suggested that it is time to abandon the white paper format, explaining white papers have outlived their usefulness when one considers the amount of time, energy, and effort required to produce a quality product, and the availability of numerous resources that are both more effective and economic (Kindel,

2017). Brown (2017) countered that the white paper genre is still popular on the Web and can be found circulating there in increasing numbers. Brown added that the white paper has become a leading tool for business, information technology and educational communication, and demonstrates the author's authority regarding a particular subject or need. Neuwirth (2014) explained that the white paper is not obsolete and has staying power because the white paper, when correctly written, provides the reader with rich, substantive content that promotes educational value, opens the door for generation of new ideas that serve to encourage innovative concepts, and clearly communicates a point of view that is relevant and timely. The primary goal of a white paper is to provide uncommon insights into a problem and suggest how to solve the problem (Cullen, 2018).

There are recommended guidelines for the composition of a white paper. Hyde (2018) explained that the white paper should include front matter elements, main elements, and back matter elements. The main elements include the introduction, the problem statement, proposed solutions, and a conclusion. My white paper aligns with the characteristics of the white paper main elements and is intended to demonstrate a thorough examination of the problem and recommend substantive solutions to solve the problem. If my white paper is supported by the overall director of the local setting, the white paper will be distributed to senior leaders who have authority to act on recommendations found in the white paper. The white paper will be submitted via scholarly and academic websites to ensure sharing of information with the greater body of academic professionals.

Conclusion

The literature results described in this study affirm the strength of presenting research findings to key stakeholders in an educational environment in the form of a white paper. White papers are often used to garner support for process change by effectively communicating recommendations aimed at solving an existing problem (Buday et al., 2018). The results of the data that was collected in Section 2 provide evidence that the organization's educational practices created barriers that discouraged or prevented nonmanagerial employees from participating in the organization's educational programs. Improving participation rates for those employees would have a positive impact on employees professionally and financially, and this improvement would have a positive impact on social change.

Project Description

The goals of my white paper project are to promote an understanding of the study results, offer strategies grounded in the literature and study results, and to raise awareness of the need to solve the participation problem. Solving the participation problem would afford the study employees the opportunity to achieve both personal and professional growth, and financial wealth generation. The benefit to BR would be a staff that has the educational tools to support the organization's growth in the digital marketplace arena. The white paper will distribute the results of the study and serve to elevate the awareness of the problem described in the study and the urgent need to solve the problem.

To that end, the white paper will introduce recommendations focused on solving the problem that will promote participation in BR's educational programs. One specific

recommendation is to address transparency (i.e., the lack of clear directions) of the educational programs by creating a visual training aid that demonstrates step-by-step instructions to gain access to online learning programs. In the interview responses, nonmanagerial employees voiced concerns regarding infringement on their personal time (a barrier to participation) to engage in a learning program. Therefore, another recommendation will be to designate specific time during the workday to participate in a learning program, allowing the nonmanagerial employees to be free from the physical duties of the workday. A third recommendation is to provide designated computers exclusively for educational purposes while at work, allowing improved access to a tool necessary for online learning. In the interview responses, nonmanagerial employees pointed to discomfort experienced when attempting to engage in a learning program that was presented solely online (a barrier to participation). To navigate this technology concern, a solution could be to increase the number of available online programs to be offered in a traditional classroom setting. These recommendations are directly linked to the themes that were developed from the interview responses established in Section 2. The recommendations provided in this white paper can easily be disseminated to key stakeholders in BR's educational department via email.

Anticipated Barriers and Solutions

The goals of the white paper project are in agreement with the organization's mission and vision statements summarized as a commitment to the premise that each and every employee matters. Further, the organization's intent is to professionally develop employees via their educational programs, to help all employees reach their full potential.

These concepts are visibly displayed throughout each individual business establishment operated by BR.

One potential barrier to consider deals with the rotations among the educational staff. Placement on the educational staff is often short-lived which affects sustainment of organizational educational goals and policy development. The second anticipated barrier concerns apathy to change management especially as it pertains to the recommendations documented in the white paper, which are soundly based on the study results described in Section 2. To augment both concerns, prior to delivering the white paper to the educational staff, I will schedule a meeting with current members to advise them of the goals and recommendations documented in the white paper, the significance of the study results, and solicit support for the recommended policy changes.

Roles and Responsibilities

My role as a scholar, practitioner, and a member of the work organization is to provide the findings and recommendations of the project to the unit director of the local setting for consideration and implementation of the recommendations. My role also consists of scheduling meetings with other key stakeholders. The purpose of the meetings is to ensure the findings of the study, including recommendations to improve educational participation rates, are presented to policy makers at the organizational level who would be responsible to act on the recommendations, or pursue additional research related to this project if more research is needed.

Project Evaluation Plan

Promoting an understanding of the study results, offering strategies grounded in the literature and study results, and raising awareness of the need to solve the participation problem, are the goals of the white paper. Evaluating research requires an assessment of the quality of a study based on standards established by individuals that are educational practitioners. However, there are no specific standards established by those who evaluate educational research in the community of those who engage in academic research evaluation (Creswell, 2012). Therefore, as white papers are written to inform an audience about a particular issue (Kolowich, 2018), evaluation of this project will come from the audience of administrators of the educational staff of BR.

Two weeks after the administrators received copies of the Executive Summary (see Appendix A) that summarizes the study process and results that led to specific recommendations aimed at enhancing participation rates in BR's educational programs, a request for a meeting with the administrators will be sent via email. The purpose of the meeting will be identified as a request for feedback regarding the project work. The feedback and fielded questions received from the administrators will determine the effectiveness of the project based on how well the administrators understand the findings and recommendations put forth in the white paper. The combination of feedback and questions will determine if the staff identifies a need to further explore research identified in the white paper, and whether or not the recommendations provided in the white paper would impact participation rates and provide a positive outcome. The formative evaluation of the white paper will be guided by the feedback, and the summative

evaluation will be guided by how well the recommendations affect positive participation engagement.

Project Implications

The project described in Section 3 validates the research findings documented in Section 2 which stresses the potency of the use of white papers. The study research findings and detailed project description provide evidence that the organization's educational practices undermine workers' decisions to participate in the organization's educational programs. These observations serve to ground the project and demonstrates the projects strength in bringing an understanding of how the organization's educational practices affect participation rates.

Workplace educational programs are vaguely addressed in the literature with regards to methods that serve to encourage workers to engage in any organization's educational programs that are not mandatory. Therefore, the gap in the literature will be narrowed based on the findings of this qualitative study. However, further investigative research may be necessary to effectively measure the effects of the recommendations on participation rates in the work organization.

The white paper is intended to raise awareness of the participation problem and stimulate dialogue with regards to the proposed recommendations potential to eliminate, or at a minimum, demonstrate positive improvement in participation rates among the organization's nonmanagerial workforce. Participation in educational programs in a workplace setting serves to improve productivity, quality of workmanship for the organization, adds a measure of confidence to employees, empowers them to perform

effectively, and lessens the need for close supervision of employees (Weobong, 2019).

Continued educational development allows employees to gain a broader understanding of

their jobs and how they can advance their careers for financial and personal gains in their

lives (Weobong, 2019).

Far reaching implications address an organization's social responsibility.

Education has an effect on the lives of students and in this case, the lives of employees in

a workplace setting. The white paper recommendations inform how any organization

may take measures to ensure positive participation in nonmandatory developmental

educational programs. Engagement in an organization's educational programs serves to

positively affect workers professionally and financially, which positions the organization

as an agent for positive social change.

Summary

In this section, the goals and principle for using a white paper genre was

presented. The section provided a review of current literature on white papers, an

analysis of potential barriers and included solutions to those barriers. Additionally, my

role in the project, the responsibilities of others, and the project evaluation plan were

presented. The section ended with implications of the project at the local level and

implications relevant to the broader educational field that serve to promote positive social

change. The reflections of my study and my personal development as an educator and

researcher will be presented in Section 4.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Project Strengths and Limitations

Strengths

Buday et al. (2018) explained that white papers can quickly open doors and generate solutions to solve a problem. A white paper is considered one of the best mediums to present a compelling point of view to resolve a particular problem and presents the entire argument in one place for policy makers and influencers to read, demonstrates the rigor of the research and analysis, and provides a complete examination of the problem and offers possible solutions (Buday et al., 2018). As the project deliverable, grounded by the study results, the white paper project represents an undeniable strength. Supporting attributes associated with the strength of the white paper include the ease of communicating findings to key stakeholders and decision makers as an email document to raise awareness of the problem to solve.

Limitations

The small number of participants who formally agreed to participate in the study is a limitation. Although the number of participants included in a study varies from one qualitative study to another (Creswell, 2012), it may be difficult to generalize the findings to the overall population of the organization. Another limitation of the study is only nonmanagerial employees were used as participants. An assumption of the study was that managers were granted greater access to learning opportunities in accordance to their rank in the organization. Another limitation was that participant educational background, gender, and age were not considered. The conceptual framework guiding the study

presents another limitation. The adult learning theory of andragogy as proposed by

Knowles clearly stands above other theories that inform on the characteristics of adult

learning (Chinnasamy, 2013). However, there are critics of the principles or assumptions

presented by Knowles (Johnson et al., 2012).

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

A large percentage of the nonmandatory learning programs offered at the work

location focus on leadership skills and self-development. For example, classes include

topics such as business math and the legal side of leadership, which might be considered

classes nonmanagers would find helpful for career pathways to management roles. An

alternative educational approach for consideration could be the development of classes

that focus solely on a particular role a nonmanager may be engaged in. Some individuals

may be happy and comfortable in their current position and, therefore, may not aspire to

become members of management or leadership in the organization, but may aspire to

become a department lead or simply want to learn more about their specific job.

Development of role-specific classes could serve to fill a gap in the current educational

offerings and further support the development of the nonmanager and in a general sense,

contribute to the tenets of lifelong learning.

Scholarship, Project Development, and Evaluation

I engaged in the Doctor of Education program with the intent of further

developing my teaching skills to enhance my knowledge of what motivates adults to

actively pursue the tenets of lifelong learning in a workplace educational environment.

My purpose was to apply what I have learned while enrolled in the doctoral program to

improve the educational experiences of students participating in the classes I teach, with the end goal of encouraging those students to continue to engage in lifelong learning. The discovery of Knowles' theory of andragogy resonated with me as I reflected on my own educational experiences.

As I reflected on my personal experiences and the situations I encountered in the classes I teach, I began to question the dynamics of the educational programs offered at my work location. Considering the learning programs were being offered at no cost, I expected enrollment to be very high. However, this was not evidenced. Curiosity, guided by the concepts of andragogy, led me towards the development of my project with the overarching ideal of discovering why participation was lower than I expected, and what I could do to improve participation. My immersion in the doctoral program and examination of scholarly works yielded examples regarding how adults approach learning. The literature I reviewed strengthened my teaching skills as a scholar practitioner and, ultimately, a contributor of new knowledge to the field of adult education in a workplace setting.

Leadership and Change

The topic of educational leadership has become a focus of many intensive scientific studies, which positions educational leaders as key members who guide the implementation of educational strategies that secure an institutions educational success (Ersozlu & Saklan, 2016). A general definition of leadership can be characterized as a social process involving the interpretation and development of ideas that serve to guide an organization with the focus on meeting the expectations of social change (Ersozlu &

Saklan, 2016). In this context, instructional leaders must raise the awareness of individuals or educational groups to the changes in society that influence the dynamics of education with sensitivity to the needs of students.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

As I reviewed the literature pertinent to the research topic, I found the literature discussed various methods of delivering adult educational programs, dynamics of generations among adult students, and barriers that affect or influence decisions to participate in educational endeavors. However, there is insufficient literature that addresses workplace learning programs. The results of this research study serve to narrow the gap in the literature and may serve to stimulate additional research investigations among similar workplace learning organizations.

Implications and Applications, and Directions for Future Research

The results of this study support the need for changes in the methods related to how the work organization markets curriculum and administers the educational programs. Effectively solving the participation problem may produce a positive improvement in participation and therefore strengthen the organization's position in the global marketplace. Participation in the organization's learning programs may serve to enhance the worker's professional, personal, and financial outcomes associated with gaining new skills, thereby serving to promote positive social change.

The results also implicate the need for additional research regarding this worthy topic. The sample size could be expanded to include managerial employees among multiple business establishments operated by BR. A greater sample size could generate

additional themes for exploration to further elaborate on concerns nonmanagerial employees encounter that have a negative impact on participation in the organization's educational programs.

Additionally, future research should consider the use of alternative research methods. For example, quantitative or mixed methods methodologies. Conducting research that includes the managerial leadership group and considers gender, age, and educational background, using a quantitative or mixed method methodology approach, may produce more applicable data to support the possibility for generalization of the findings.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate, from the perspectives of nonmanagerial interview participants, what experiences or barriers existed that influenced them to decide not to participate in nonmandatory learning programs as offered by the work organization. The findings of the study support the identification of a practice gap in the methods the organization utilizes to market curriculum and administer learning programs. Current literature suggests that most workplace learning programs focus on the needs of the organization without consideration of the needs of the employee (Masalimova et al., 2016). Knowles' theory of andragogy addresses the needs of the student and suggests that application of the assumptions of andragogy, when applied to the work organization's educational programs, may serve to close the practice gap and improve positive participation in the organization's learning programs. The social

change implications are evident as engaging in educational endeavors often transforms

individuals professionally, personally, and financially.

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Appendix A: The Project

Executive Summary

A principal concern in the field of adult education is how to engage adults in lifelong learning. Researchers and policy makers from organizational and institutions of higher learning increasingly embrace the tenets of lifelong learning (Knipprath & De Rick, 2015). While the literature in the field is replete with barriers to participation in educational offerings (Porras-Hernandez & Salinas-Amescua, 2012; Saar, et al., 2014), a focus on how to mitigate these barriers is lacking (Falasca, 2011). A nonpublished in-house survey conducted at the local setting revealed that 44% of workers elected not to participate in BR University's free educational programs (BR, 2015), a phenomenon that is inconsistent with the rising trends of adults returning to formal degree or certification programs (Caruth, 2014; Holland, 2014). There is a lack of understanding as to why this phenomenon at BR exists. No previous investigation has been documented to determine what issues contribute to the low participation rates at BR.

This study was undertaken using qualitative research methodology to explore this phenomenon and was guided by Knowles' theory of andragogy. The guiding research questions were:

RQ 1: How do the nonmanagerial employees of BR perceive the free educational and certification programs offered at BR?

RQ 2: What are the nonmanagerial employees of BR experiences with barriers to the free educational and certification programs offered at BR?

RQ 3: What do the nonmanagerial employees of BR identify as bridges to barriers that would increase participation in the free educational and certification programs offered at BR?

The outcomes of the study were examined, and a literature review was conducted that resulted in recommendations intended to positively affect the low participation rates. The goals of this white paper are (1) to promote an understanding of the study results, (2) offer strategies grounded in the literature and study results, and (3) to raise awareness of the need to solve the participation problem. The findings and recommendations of the study are specific to BR, however, the white paper may serve to guide similar organization's workplace educational programs to positively affect participation.

The Problem

At the local setting, 44% of nonmanagerial employees elected not to participate in BR's educational offerings. This is inconsistent with the trends of students returning to organizations of higher education to begin or complete degree or certification programs (Caruth, 2014; Holland, 2014). Low participation rates in BR's educational programs is a challenge for the organization. If academic policy and procedures are not implemented to improve participation, the organization's educational goals (to develop a workforce with the skills to successfully compete in digital marketplace) will be unfulfilled.

Theoretical Framework

The guiding framework for this study was the adult learning theory of andragogy as proposed by Malcolm Knowles. A challenge for educators in any discipline is to become creators of learning activities that invite participation in an active lifelong

learning orientation (Pierce & Fox, 2012). The theory of andragogy with its 6 assumptions provides a tenable template that can guide educators in creating educational programs that serve to encourage participation in learning endeavors and the tenets of lifelong learning as the theory provides insight into why individuals may choose to participate or decline to participate in educational programs.

This study moves beyond simple recognition of the problem as it uncovered and described the root causes associated with the low participation rates of nonmanagerial employees at the local setting and has implications organization wide. Improving participation in the organizations educational programs is possible when those involved in policy creation or change, have a heightened awareness of the issue, understand the implications of failing to act on the issue, and are provided with tenable solutions to resolve the problem grounded in research results.

Design and Approach

My study sought to investigate reasons nonmanagerial employees at the local setting elected not to participate in nonmandatory educational programs that were offered at BR. A basic qualitative case study research design was used in the investigation of the problem. The following research questions were developed with the assistance of staff educators at Walden University:

RQ 1: How do nonmanagerial employees of BR perceive the free educational and certification programs offered at BR?

RQ 2: What are the nonmanagerial employees' experiences with barriers to the free educational and certification programs offered at BR?

RQ 3: What do the nonmanagerial employees identify as bridges to barriers that would increase participation in the free educational and certification programs offered at BR?

These research questions were used to guide the development of the following participant interview question:

1. Have you ever participated in company certification programs and if so, how many? Based on your experience with them, what is your impression?

2. If you were to describe the learning or certification programs offered by your organization to someone, how would you describe them?

3. Describe your relationship between the organization and you regarding the educational offerings and your personal success in your current role.

4. If you have not participated in the training certification programs, please discuss reasons for not participating.

5. How would you describe the problems that may make participation in the educational offerings in your organization difficult?

6. What are the areas in your opinion, that need improvement to encourage your participation in the organization's educational offerings?

7. How do you perceive the value of the educational offerings in your organization with regards to meeting your educational needs?

8. What could the company do or provide that would allow you to participate?

9. What educational priorities have you identified as most important to meeting your educational needs?

10. In general, what are your overall thoughts about the educational offerings in

your organization?

Instrumentation and Materials

Research is a multistep process and is more than simply making a decision on

whether one will observe or interview participants. Six steps form or compose the

process of collecting qualitative data that progresses from a review of the literature

related to the problem, identifying participants and sites, obtaining access, determining

what kind of data should be collected, development of data collection forms, and

administering the process in an ethical fashion (Creswell, 2012). Unlike quantitative

research, where instruments collect data and analysis is conducted at the end of a study,

in qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument and data analysis occur

throughout the study, as well as directs the ongoing process of data collection (Lodico,

Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010).

Results

The analysis of qualitative data involves understanding how to make sense of the

collected data. This analysis consists of acquiring a general sense of the data, coding

descriptions and developing themes related to the central phenomenon, preparing a report

of the findings, and validating the accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2012). Collection,

and the subsequent analysis of data in a qualitative research study is an inductive process

where small amounts of data are obtained, coded, and built into themes. In contrast, a

deductive process begins by making a prediction about the study then searching for data

that would substantiate or disprove the prediction (Lodico et al., 2010). The collected

data in this research study was analyzed using the inductive process of qualitative research.

To begin the process of obtaining the results of the study, I began by aligning the research questions to the interview questions as shown in Table 1. The second step was to begin to assign codes to interview responses to gain an initial understanding of the data results. For this step I used In Vivo coding as the first step to identify key wording and phrases. Codes are labels for themes that are recorded in the exact words of the participants (Creswell, 2012). To gain further alignment of the key wording or phrases, I added the process of initial coding. Initial coding is a coding pattern that can be characterized by frequency (they happen often or seldom), or the codes are similar or perhaps different (Patel, 2014). The results of the coding are located in the second column of Table 2 and the initial coding is presented in column 3 of Table 2. The obtained results from this process concluded the first cycle of coding.

For the second cycle of coding, I employed the use of axial coding to arrange the software program codes and initial codes from Table 2 into similar groups. In axial coding, one selects an open coding category and relates other categories to it (Creswell, 2012). The results of the second cycle axial coding produced four categories and are represented in Table 4. The category results led to the development of four themes. These themes are represented in Table 5 in column 2 and the description of each theme is represented in column 3.

Table 1

Alignment of Study Research Questions to Interview Questions

Research Question	Interview Question
RQ 1 How do employees perceive the free educational programs offered at BR?	1. Have you ever participated in company certification programs and if so, how many? Based on your experience with them, what is your impression? 2. If you were to describe the learning or certification programs offered by your organization to someone, how would you describe them? 4. If you have not participated in the training certification programs, please discuss reasons for not participating.
RQ 2 What are employee experiences with barriers to the free educational and certification programs offered at BR?	5. How would you describe the problems that may make participation in the educational offerings in your organization difficult? 8. What could the organization do or provide that would allow you to participate? 10. In general, what are your overall thoughts about the educational offerings in your organization?
RQ 3 What do employees identify as bridges to barriers that would increase participation in free educational and certification programs offered at BR?	3. Describe your relationship between the organization and you regarding the educational offerings and your personal success in your current role. 6. What are the areas in your opinion, that need improvement to encourage your participation in the organization's educational offerings? 7. How do you perceive the value of the educational offerings in your organization with regards to meeting your educational needs? 9. What educational priorities have you identified as most important to meeting your educational needs?

Table 2

First Cycle Codes From Line-By-Line Analysis of Interview Response Transcripts

Interview question	Summarized question	Codes: In vivo coding	Codes: Initial coding
IQ 1	Participation in programs, Amount, Impression	More than 10, too much information, tough to understand, Course never re-visited, not certain if there is retention	Excessive information, Lack of retained knowledge, inconsistent message, experience with programs
IQ 2	Description of programs, Opinion shared with others	Efficient and quick, not enough time to ask questions, valuable but lacking as the classes are not presented with the same criteria because of different teachers	Short duration, crowded classroom, unanswered questions, subject matter taught differently
IQ 3	Relationship with the organization, success in current role	It has played a part in building my confidence to be successful, the problem is finding the time to do it, I need to understand the process so I can teach my team, On a day to day basis, there is a huge time constraint due to workload so may not participate	Confidence builder, Time constraints, Work priorities, No time for participation
IQ 4	Reasons for not participating	Have not participated in personal development courses, Lack of passion to grow, Some may not have home computer access, Not on my "to do" work list, Feel guilty for taking time away from work for personal development	Time constraints, Homework, Family time, Scheduled training
IQ 5	Barriers to participation	Different types of learning styles, Example, most programs are on the computer and may be difficult for some, Have workers that don't even know how to log into a computer, not being held accountable for learning, Does not include a description of what programs there are in the university, Prefer hands on learning, Sometimes I forget these programs are available	Learning styles Computer based Computer skills Accountability Motivation
IQ 6	What areas need improvement to encourage participation	More instructor led courses, A lot of individuals are intimidated by computer-based programs, takes 10 steps just to get to the university, More conversation about what programs are available, Set time aside	Face to face instruction Computer Skills Intimidated Availability Information Scheduled time
IQ 7	Perceived personal value of programs	Adequate, Knowing what there is to learn, didn't know there were development books to read, What I know now has come from hands on experience, Valuable, Time is the issue	Adequate Valuable Awareness Hands on Experience Time
IQ 8	What would allow participation	Need better transparency, I don't know about all that is available, need the time to participate, Voucher the time	Transparency Time Vouchered training time
IQ 9	Personal education priorities	Not necessary to be degreed but would consider getting a degree to improve promotion chances, Keep pace with technology, Would like more education, Have to hold yourself accountable	Obtain a degree Technology skills Accountability
IQ 10	Perceptions of organizational offerings	Good but difficult to access, Some employees may not appreciate the programs, Some programs take too long to complete, some won't load	Access issues Lack of appreciation Technology issues

Table 3

First Cycle Codes From Line-By-Line Analysis of Focus Group Response Transcripts

Interview question	Summarized question	Codes: In vivo coding	Codes: Initial coding
IQ 5	Barriers to participation	Classes seemed to be short notice, I had to constantly bug my admin to sign me up for a class, A waste of my time	Curriculum planning Value
IQ 6	What areas need improvement to encourage participation	Managers did not want me out of the work location	Manpower
IQ 8	What would allow participation	I never received feedback from department managers about attending these classes	Communication

Table 4

Category Development

Axial codes	Categories
Information	Transparency
Time constraints Time Family time Work priorities Scheduled time Accountability	Barriers
Capped classroom size Availability Enrollment process	Access
Learning styles Computer based	Technology

Table 5

Description of Themes

Category	Theme	Description
Transparency	Difficulty identifying available programs	In the context of interviews, this theme points to a deficiency regarding how to access learning programs and includes a deficiency in identifying what programs are available for personal development
Barriers	Personal time challenges to include perceived organizational obstacles such as conflict with work priorities and scheduled training times.	This theme describes how employees feel about what impedes their engagement with learning programs offered by the organization
Access	Difficulty accessing the learning programs Limited class size/availability of classes.	This theme speaks to a deficiency of simple or easy to use process directions to initialize or begin a learning program and capped class sizes.
Technology	A deficiency in employee computer skills	This theme addresses a lack of generational experience with using basic computer programs

Recommendations

The four categories and themes described in Table 5 resulted from the analysis and synthesis of responses to the interview questions obtained from the study participants through first and second cycle processes. These categories and themes form the structural background for recommendations to positively address the issues that are contributing factors to the low participation rates experienced at the local setting and may serve to improve participation rates organizationally wide. The recommendations are straightforward and simple. As such, they should not be discounted. They should be recognized as potent solutions to improve participation for two reasons. One, they represent findings pertaining to participation as described by employees, and two, the recommendation are fresh ideas to improve participation that have not been addressed at the local setting.

Recommendation #1

The first recommendation addresses the category of transparency. In the context of the interview responses, employees could not locate procedures relevant to gaining access to begin a learning program including informative suggestions that pertain to what learning programs would be of value to the employee. Teodorczuk, Mukaetova-Ladinska, Corbett, and Welfare (2013) maintained that effective adult educational programs require consideration of the needs of the audience and effective communication of available programs. Resolving this issue could be twofold, provide a visual training aid that demonstrates step-by-step instructions to gain access to learning programs, and provide a list of relevant training programs by employee job code.

Recommendation #2

This second recommendation addresses the category of barriers (to participation). In the context of the interview responses, employees voiced concerns regarding the use of their personal time to engage in the learning programs. Ross-Gordon (2011), explained that adults are likely to be juggling multiple life roles. Such as, not only being a worker, but also a spouse or partner, and often a parent or caregiver. In this context, work can be viewed as a barrier to participation in the sense that personal development courses or nonmandatory learning programs would need to be undertaken during the workers personal time away from work. A simple solution to resolve this barrier could be to designate learning time while at work to participate in a learning program based on the expected time it would take an enrolled worker to complete a course. This learning time could be scheduled by the employee's department manager to avoid conflicts with scheduling that would interfere with the work that needed to be accomplished.

Recommendation #3

The third recommendation addresses the category of access. In the context of the interview responses, employees shared their frustration with understanding how to find a learning program or start a learning program which is a recurring theme. However, the focus of this recommendation addresses the availability of computers specifically designated for access of training programs. Institutional barriers are those barriers that are external to or not under the control of an individual (Porras-Hernandez & Salinas-Amescua, 2012). In this context, only the leadership of the local setting would have the authority to supply dedicated computers for training use only. At the local setting, each

department has a computer for work related purposes and each department manager is provided with a computer for work purposes. Improving access to a computer could be as simple as designating one or more of the Unit's computers for educational purposes at designated times during operation hours. Exacerbating the access concern has a focus aimed at the limited availability of classes and capped class sizes. Workers reported that some classes are only presented twice per year, and as such, often the classes are filled creating an extended wait time prior to the next availability. Conducting these classes on a quarterly basis (4 times per year) would increase opportunities for workers to participate in a class and reduce the likelihood the class would be unavailable due to over enrollment. Inhouse administrative assistants could manage teaching these classes as part of their job duties.

Recommendation #4

This recommendation addresses the category of technology. In the context of the interview responses from the study participants, the theme pointed to using technology to administer many learning programs online. The organization employs a diverse workforce from all generational ages. Adult education literature has used age as the determining factor with regards to acceptance of technology and its usage in a learning environment among younger and older students (Metallo & Agrifoglio, 2015). Younger students are increasingly likely to accept technology as a means of gaining knowledge while older students often decline usage of technology to gain knowledge (Zur & Walker, 2016). To navigate the technology concern, a solution could be to offer many of the organization's learning programs in a format that allows the organization's workers to

either opt in for online classes or opt out for a traditional classroom learning

environment. While this process may be challenging to implement, the effort to do so

could provide a positive return on the investment with regards to improving participation

and meets the learning preferences of younger and older students.

Conclusion

This qualitative research study explored the central problems that affected

nonmanagerial employees' decisions to participate in the organization's learning

programs. The study research findings and detailed project description provide evidence

that the organization's educational practices undermine nonmanagerial employees'

decisions to participate in the organization's educational programs. These observations

serve to ground the project and demonstrates the projects strength in bringing an

understanding of how the organization's educational practices affect participation rates

and details specific recommendations that could result in positive improvement of

participation rates that subsequently empowers the workers to grow in their careers, and

strengthens the organization's position in the global marketplace.

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Appendix B: Interview Protocol for Individual and Focus Group Participants

Interviewee's Code:

Date and Time of Interview:

Interview Location:

State Purpose of Study and Interview: This study will examine the perceptions of adults with regards to free educational or certification programs in a workplace setting. Specifically, the study will attempt to understand what barriers exist that influence decisions to participate or elect not to participate in workplace educational endeavors.

Rights to confidentiality: Please examine the consent form which further explains the purpose of the study and your rights to confidentiality. Please sign the consent form if you agree to the terms. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes. Will I have your consent to record the session? (Recording will commence with your agreement to record).

Interview Questions:

1. Have you ever participated in company certification programs and if so, how many? Based on your experience with them, what is your impression?

2. If you were to describe the learning or certification programs offered by your organization to someone, how would you describe them?

3. Describe your relationship between the organization and you regarding the educational offerings and your personal success in your current role.

4. If you have not participated in the training certification programs, please discuss reasons for not participating.

5. How would you describe the problems that may make participation in the educational offerings in your organization difficult?

6. What are the areas in your opinion, that need improvement to encourage your participation in the organization's educational offerings?

7. How do you perceive the value of the educational offerings in your organization with regards to meeting your educational needs?

8. What could the company do or provide that would allow you to participate?

9. What educational priorities have you identified as most important to meeting your educational needs?

10. In general, what are your overall thoughts about the educational offerings in your organization?

Appendix C: Sample Coded Interview

Interviewee's Code: A1

Date and Time of Interview:

Interview Location:

State Purpose of Study and Interview: This research study will examine employee's perspectives that influence their decisions to participate or not participate in the free educational programs offered by your work organization (BR). You returned the consent form to me that stated the purpose of the study and your rights to confidentiality and signed the electronic consent form with the words "I consent."

Interview Questions:

1. Have you ever participated in company certification programs and if so, how many? Based on your experience with them, what is your impression? "More than 10, basic, good info but not sure there is retention. Some classes taught differently, and some may not get the same understanding." (Initial coding: Lack of retained Knowledge, inconsistent message)

2. If you were to describe the learning or certification programs offered by your organization to someone, how would you describe them? "Value added but lacking as the classes are not presented with the same criteria because of different teachers." (Initial coding: subject matter taught differently.)

3. Describe your relationship between the organization and you regarding the educational offerings and your personal success in your current role. "Helped me be successful, however there is a huge time constraint due to work demand

so I may not participate. The other thing is a lot of the learning can be done on your own time, so it's there if you want to grow but most people don't participate." (Initial coding: Work priorities, no time for participation).

4. If you have not participated in the training or certification programs, please discuss reasons for not participating. "A lack of passion to grow, don't have a home computer." (Initial coding: Homework, Family time).

5. How would you describe the problems that may make participation in the educational offerings in your organization difficult? "Time, lack of motivation to sit at a computer to do classes." (Initial coding: Motivation).

6. What are the areas in your opinion, that need improvement to encourage your participation in the organization's educational offerings? "More fluid, hard to get to the programs, 10 steps to get to the university, need more conversation about what programs are available." (Initial coding: Availability, Information).

7. How do you perceive the value of the educational offerings in your organization with regards to meeting your educational needs? "Adequate, better than some other companies, but still mostly knowing what there is to learn. I didn't even know there were development books I could read." (Initial coding: Awareness, Time).

8. What could the company do or provide that would allow you to participate? "Shout it out or make everyone aware of what is available, we're sort of kept in the dark. Needs better transparency." (Initial coding: Transparency).

9. What educational priorities have you identified as most important to meeting your educational needs? "Programs are good and provides a path for career success. You just have to take advantage of the programs." (Initial coding: Accountability).

10. In general, what are your overall thoughts about the educational offerings in your organization? "Good but difficult to access. Some may not appreciate the programs that are available. Also, many of the programs are going to be accessed on mobile devices and these may not be available for some." (Initial coding: Access issues, Technology issues).