

What Drives Learning in Startups? A Comparative Study Across Four National Contexts

Kongkiti Phusavat

Kasetsart University, Thailand
fengkkp@ku.ac.th

Dagmara Lewicka

AGH University of Krakow, Poland
dagal@poczta.fm

Anna Rakowska

UMCS, Poland
anna.rakowska@mail.umcs.pl

Agnieszka Sitko-Lutek

UMCS, Poland
agnieszka.sitko-lutek@mail.umcs.pl

Pawel Zajac

AGH University of Krakow, Poland
pzajac@agh.edu.pl

Kevin Rhoads

Utah Valley University, USA
KRhoads@uvu.edu

Helena Starowicz-Rajca

AGH University of Krakow, Poland
helenastarowiczrajca@gmail.com

Hafeez Ur Rehman

AGH University of Krakow, Poland
rehman@agh.edu.pl

Arkadiusz Wilczewski

AGH University of Krakow, Poland
arkadiuszwilczewski@gmail.com

Abstract

This study investigates the factors influencing employees' intention to learn in startups, with a particular focus on cross-country differences and necessary learning conditions. Startups, unlike established firms, operate in fast-changing, resource-constrained environments where continuous learning is essential for adaptability, innovation, and long-term survival. However, despite the importance of learning, maintaining employee engagement and knowledge retention remains challenging. Drawing on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), this study examines the role of attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (PBC) in shaping learning intentions among startup employees. Data were collected from 408 participants across four countries—Poland, the United States, Thailand, and Pakistan—allowing for comparative insights across diverse cultural and economic settings. Using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) and fuzzy set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA), the study identifies both universal and context-specific predictors of learning intention. While perceived behavioral control emerged as a consistent predictor across countries, differences were also observed: attitude played a particularly strong role in Thailand and Poland, whereas in Pakistan, the full TPB model (including social norms) appeared most relevant. In the U.S., high variability in results pointed to complex and individualized motivational structures, and no single sufficient configuration was identified. These findings demonstrate that while the TPB model is broadly applicable, the relative importance of its components varies by context. The study contributes to the literature on organizational learning in startups by uncovering how cultural and contextual factors shape learning intentions. It offers practical guidance for startup leaders seeking to foster effective learning environments adapted to their specific national and organizational cultures. Limitations and directions for future research are also discussed.

Keywords: Workplace learning, Theory of planned behaviour (TPB), Intention to learn, Startup.