



# Construct for Workplace Learning: Experiences from the Third Sector

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**Purpose:** Effective workplace learning is evitable. The expectation of the workers today includes performing the tasks and learning while performing these tasks. Thus, the study attempts to develop a construct, based on the two cases from the Third Sector organizations. For this sector, due to the scope of work and limited resource, learning capability is essential for the success in its operations. This circumstance is essential for the construct development.

**Study design/methodology/approach:** The methodology is based on two cases in Thailand for social services. The case study is based on two complex problems which cannot be tackled by an organization or agency alone. Activities and work performed are examined. The commonality of these two cases is then identified with the support from literature reviews for the development of a construct.

**Findings:** Learning has become part of the work performed. The contributors to workplace learning, based on two cases, are identified for the development of a construct. They are: workplace engagement, stakeholder engagement, clarity of roles and expectation, informal learning, and limited resources to support operations. When faced with complex problems, an organization cannot rely entirely on training to prepare its workforce.

**Originality/value:** The construct can be a foundation for future study on workplace and human learning within an organization. Observing and retrieving key findings from the Third Sector for workplace learning should provide a credible basis for future studies. The reason is the need for the Third Sector to be creative in solving complex problems while meeting the expectation of the general public. The findings point to the importance of facilitating learning in a workplace which can be applicable to other organizations in the private and public sectors.

**Keywords:** workplace learning, Third Sector, complex and wicked problems, and service delivery

## Introduction

The primary role of the workers during the era of industrial economy in the early 1900s until the early 1950s was primarily to perform the required tasks (Morgan, 2014). To effectively perform these tasks, an organization adapted the concept of scientific management which involved the use of motion and time study. A stopwatch was applied along with a careful analysis of motion and movements. A standard, based on the best-way-to-perform procedure, was developed. Unnecessary movements were removed with the special attention on improving working conditions. Training on this standard was provided to the workers who were expected to follow.

In the early 1980s, a more-proactive practice to gather the ideas and suggestions from the workers was encouraged by many Japanese manufacturing firms, especially in the automotive and electronics industries. This practice was referred to as Kaizen. It was considered as one of the most tangible initiatives to systematically solicit the feedback from the employees (Gomes *et.al.*, 2015). This development also marked an important milestone which recognized the importance of employee engagement (Tikkanen *et.al.*, 2018). This milestone highlighted a new perspective on what to expect from an employee in a workplace.

The growing integration of digital technology in a workplace, from Industry 3.0 to Industry 4.0, has pointed to a new way to support learning within a workplace (Brix and Jakobsen, 2013). Simply asking the employees and immediately expecting their new ideas continuously would not be viable. These new ideas and suggestions are typically based on active interactions, hands-on learning, coaching, mentoring and others. Although training remains critical for a successful workplace, the prevalent feeling is that more encouragement on learning instead of relying on training would be more suitable for emerging business environment in Industry 4.0 (Moustaghfir *et.al.*, 2020). Because of an availability of digital platform, informal learning has become instrumental in facilitating workplace learning. Informal learning is essential for an organization to remain responsive and adaptive to rapidly- changing business environment and conditions. This development points to an inevitable shift for the workers' expectation in a workplace.

### **Problem Background**

There are three sectors in the economy today- private, public, and social/ voluntary/ Third. The term Third Sector (TS) is to be used and reflects the social and voluntary sector. Due to the expansion of the TS in the last two decades, many scholars have begun to examine how the entities in this sector are able to meet or exceed the expectation of the stakeholders while remaining creative and efficient in their work processes and operations (Bach-Mortensen and Montgomery, 2018).

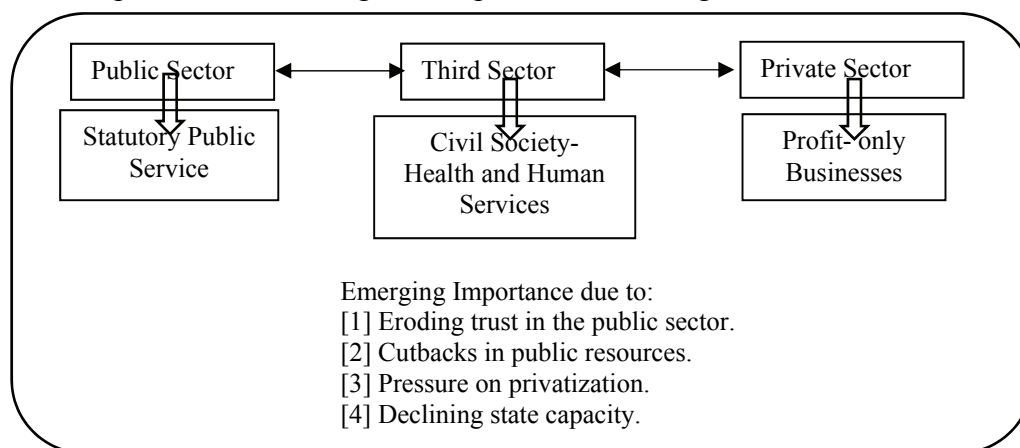
Like many countries around the world, Thailand is faced with many complex and wicked problems such as road accidents, and public health and well-being (Bontenbal and Lillie, 2019; and Deep *et.al.*, 2019). Generally, a problem can be categorized as: (1) simple- a problem is known and understood with an agreed solution, (2) complex- a problem is known and understood but can be addressed with many solutions, or (3) wicked- a problem is not fully understood so there is no clear solution. Social problems such as health and human-related issues often require the TS to play more active roles due to rigid bureaucratic structure and budgeting from the public sector. Since many social problems are driven by poverty and economic hardship, there is not financial incentive for the private sector to participate or to offer the needed services.

Use of volunteers has been instrumental for the TS. TS is often associated with the social, voluntary, civil service, and not-for-profit activities (Alcock, 2016). TS reflects the sector whose primary purpose is to create social impact and benefit rather than profit. TS does not operate as part of the public sector because it has no legal authority to provide public services. Its incomes can be from several sources such as corporate or individual donations, and governmental contracts (Corry, 2010). Due to this overall goal of TS entities, they are not considered as part of the private sector.

In general, TS organizations engage with various stakeholders on a range of critical issues, especially health and human services such as education, healthcare, quality of life, housing, legal protection, social integration of underprivileged workforce, etc. (Bontenbal and Lillie, 2019). Learning and adapting to constant changes in a socially- complex problem and ever-

increasing expectation of the society are needed. The reason is that these organizations provide specialized or individualized services which can include fact-finding and research, coordination, public mobilization, and problem-solving such as running children's shelter, proving legal advice to woman with domestic violence, raising road safety awareness, skill development and training for an underprivileged group, etc. (Corry, 2010; and Kane *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, an idea for the service uniformity is not possible. This circumstance compels workplace learning to be one of the critical success factors for TS entities.

TS consists of the entities or associations that explicitly exist to benefit a wider community rather than private owners (or shareholders). In many countries, a charity group and a not-for-profit foundation constitute the largest category within TS (Kane *et al.*, 2014). Others can include community co-operatives, not-for-profit community business units, and religious-related groups. Lack of adaptability from the public sector's workforce has affected the effectiveness of service delivery. For instance, because of the severity of road accidents and the impacts from COVID19, there has been a need to reach the grassroot level. Since the one-size-fit-all approach cannot be effective, the individualization of the targeted segments is essential. As previously discussed, individualizing the service delivery to the general public indicates the importance of learning in TS operations. See Figure 1.



**Figure 1: TS within the Context of the Public and Private Sectors**

(Adapted from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-society-strategy-building-a-future-that-works-for-everyone/about-the-strategy>)

## Objective

It is to develop a construct, based on the two cases from the TS, on workplace learning. The construct represents essential issues that need to be incorporated for future study on learning in an organization.

## Methodology

The study is considered as a case study. Two TS cases are to be illustrated as the foundation to develop a construct for workplace learning. Given the necessity of learning, how the two socially- complex problems are tackled is to be analyzed and described. Commonality between these two cases is to be summarized to help establish the construct. Then, some of the previous work to relating to this construct development will be provided. It is important to point out that the two cases that are based on the success that have lasted over the decade. It is essential to observe the entities with repeated success so that the findings can be credible and sound.

## Results

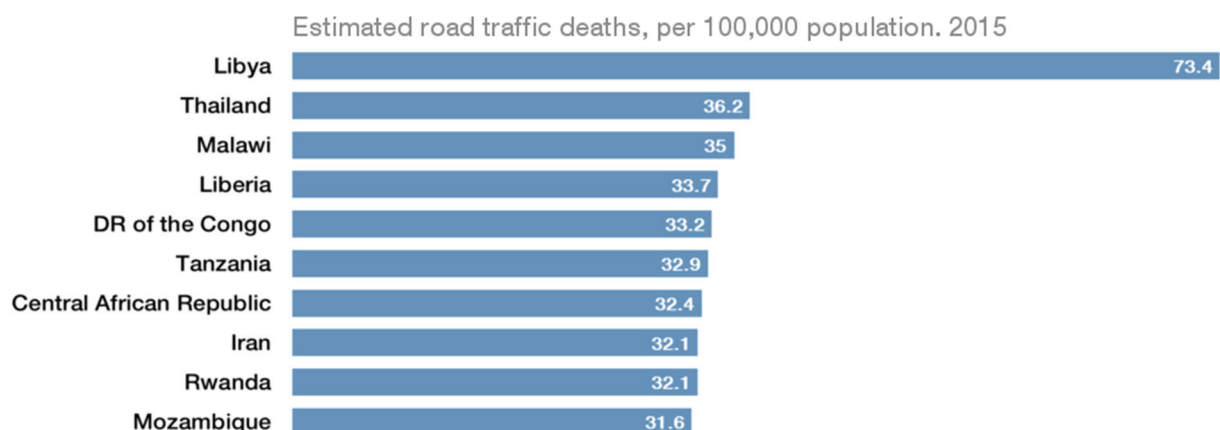
For the findings, the two cases are illustrated with the specific attention on prevention efforts. The first case is about road accident which is regarded as a complex problem affecting the country's economic and social development. The second case deals with COVID-19 prevention during the first wave of 2020. The prevention efforts focus on reaching out to the grassroots level which needs active learning by the workers to understand and adapt to local needs. For the two situations, the best solution has not been found so continuous learning is considered as a critical success factor. The evolving nature of road accident is a challenge. While the COVID-19 situation is new; therefore, there is no protocol to handle massive prevention and outreach efforts. For road accident, what has worked in the past may no longer be effective today.

### *Case 1: Road Accident Prevention by Thai Health Promotion Foundation (THPF) with Accident Prevention Network (APN)*

The THPF was established under the 2001 Health Promotion Foundation Act.<sup>1</sup> It is entitled to receive 2% of the excise taxes collected on tobacco and alcohol annually and has been able to galvanize public support and donation- from corporate and individual categories. One of its main tasks is to tackle the road accident which is regarded as a national crisis. Although this problem is clear and understood, how to address it becomes a challenge for many public agencies. The reason is that the road accident problem deals with many issues that one agency is not capable to handle. Public participation, enforcement, and education need to be taken into consideration.

The THPF operates outside the governmental bureaucracy with approximately 80 full-time staffs. Thailand's roads are the deadliest in Southeast Asia and among the worst in the world, according to the World Health Organisation<sup>2</sup>. About 20,000 people die each year which translates to 56 fatalities daily. Despite many initiatives and budget allocations by the government to help reduce road casualties, this problem has persistently continued. And the economic, social-related, and psychological costs are tremendously high. See Figure 2.

## These are the countries with the most road traffic deaths



Source: World Health Organisation

1 See Source: <http://www.thaihealth.or.th/index.php> (as of April 2021)

2 See <https://www.bangkokpost.com/opinion/opinion/2017727/road-accidents-biggest-health-crisis> (as of April 2021)

**Figure 2: Road Accidents in Thailand**

(Source: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/10/countries-with-the-most-and-least-road-traffic-deaths/>)

One of the reasons for the need of TS stems from a lack of cohesive efforts to tackle road accidents. For years, public agencies separately and independently working on road accident. They include the Royal Thai Police, the Office of Insurance Commission, the Public Health Ministry, the Ministry of Transport, State Railway of Thailand, and Ministry of Interior along with local municipalities (Phusavat *et al.*, 2013). Resource sharing has been a common challenge for these agencies due to the bureaucratic structure and budgeting procedures. Lack of coordination and collaboration have resulted in a confusion on data collection and planning.

For instance, the police records on road accidents are based on legal charges instead of hospital admissions collected by Ministry of Public Health. In addition, the data on the accidental period indicated that injuries and fatalities occur at the highest frequency during 6-10 PM— according to hospital staffs. However, a road checkpoint set up by the police takes place after the midnight. In addition, the alcohol detector, needed by the police, could not be purchased by hospitals due to a budget restriction— the instrument had no relationship with hospital operations (Phusavat *et al.*, 2011). Enforcement is emphasized by the police while prevention is urged by the hospital administrators and medical personnel.

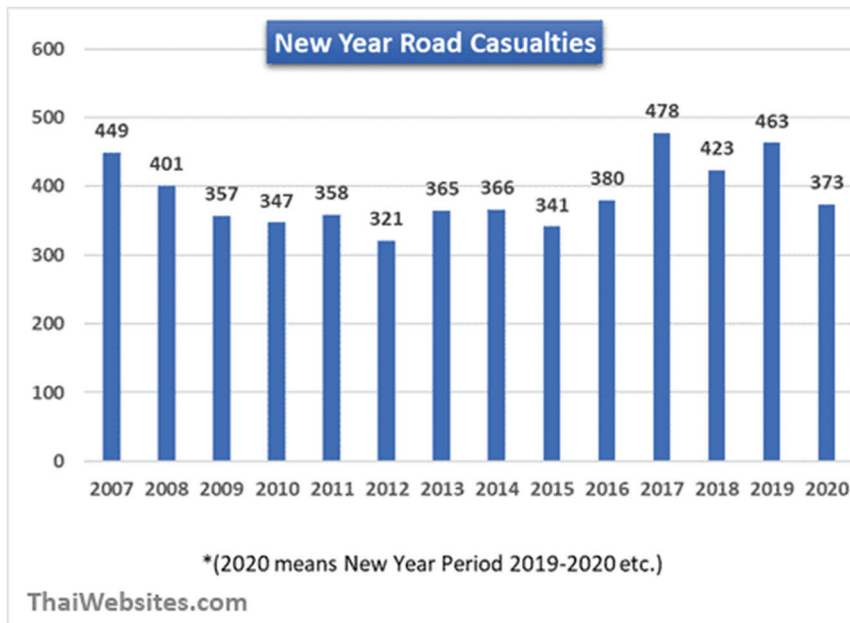
In the early 2000s, THPF has taken an initiative on road accident prevention and established a partnership with APN. APN is a TS entity which aims to raise awareness and promote road accident prevention. APN has worked with local communities and public agencies which have local branches such as Office of Vocational Education Commission, Department of Corrections (under Ministry of Justice), the Royal Thai Police, and local hospitals through Ministry of Public Health. APN focuses on fact-finding in different local areas so that specific issues on the causes of a road accident could emerge. This is essential for a development of individualized plans and initiatives to strengthen the prevention efforts. The road accidents could not be solved mainly through more regulations and enforcement (Phusavat *et al.*, 2013).

APN's workforce constantly learn by having worked with the key partners such as policemen, hospital staffs and administrators, inmates from Department of Corrections (under Ministry of Justice), government officers from Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation (under Ministry of Interior), instructors and students from vocational colleges (under Ministry of Education), students from local schools (under Ministry of Education), engineers from Department of Highways (under Ministry of Transport), factory owners (members of Federation of Thai Industries, gas station operators (license holders from Petroleum Authority of Thailand). For instance, after policy evaluation, a decision was made to work with gas station operators so that fatigue drivers could make a stop and rest. Inmates, teachers, and students also took part of an evaluation was made to strengthen the engineering element through automotive inspection.

Face with the resource restrictions, both THPF and APN have the small full-time staffs (about 80 and 20 persons respectively) but are responsible at the national and local levels. A request for more manpower is not possible. Therefore, learning and creativity are essential. For instance, to support prevention efforts, new slogans, new networks, new approaches to gather data on road accidents, new ways to mobilize support from local communities have been the tangible outcomes of learning.

THPF and APN have focused their prevention campaign during the 7-day period prior to and after the new year. Although there is no clear sign of a decline when focusing on the fatality alone, the numbers should be viewed in the context of increasing numbers of drivers and lengths of highways. In addition, the data has included the deaths occurred on rural and local roads

since 2013 (when the previous data collection was primarily on national highways). See Figure 3.



**Figure 3: Road Fatality during the 7-day New Year Period**

Note that, relative to the expansion of roadways, the accident rate has declined.

(Source: <https://www.thaiwebsites.com/caraccidents.asp>)

### ***Example 2: COVID-19 Prevention and Health Volunteers in Thailand***

The following headline summarizes how Thailand dealt with COVID-19 in early 2020- “Thailand’s 1 million village health volunteers - “unsung heroes” - are helping guard communities nationwide from COVID-19”. This headline is based on the review conducted by Thailand’s Ministry of Public Health and World Health Organization (WHO) which is called Joint Intra-Action Review (see <https://www.who.int/thailand/news/detail/14-10-2020-Thailand-IAR-COVID19>). It is important to note that Thailand was the first country outside China with an infected case. This review stresses the significance of a capacity to trace and quarantine contacts by using Rapid Response Teams and Village Health Volunteers<sup>3</sup>.

There are a few other key highlights from the findings reflecting learning to help delivery specialized services to the local level which are: (1) cultural norms including non-contact greeting and mask wearing, supported by constant communication on public safety, (2) early adoption of a ‘whole of society’ approach which included active engagement with academia and the private sector, and (3) an establishment of Public Health Emergency Operations Centres (EOC) which led to local operating procedures.

Currently, Department of Health Service Support, under Ministry of Public Health, oversees 1,040,000 village health volunteers nationwide and an additional 15,000 public health volunteers in Bangkok through Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (under Ministry of Interior)<sup>4</sup>. Note that the concept of health volunteers was initiated in 1977 as the foundation to improve healthcare at remote and isolated locations. These volunteers receive fundamental health knowledge to help provide basic care and initial diagnoses in remote areas which are

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/searo/thailand/iar-covid19-en.pdf> (as of April 2021)

<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/special-reports/1903330/volunteers-on-the-frontline> (as of April 2021)

from a clinic or hospital. The effectiveness of health volunteers was apparent during the H5N1 bird flu in the mid-2000s.<sup>5</sup>

For COVID-19, each volunteer is asked to look after 10-15 households. Engaging with each household on COVID-19 is about educating the individuals and creating an awareness on the pandemic. House-to-house visits are made on a regular basis with each volunteer needs to learn and become flexible in determining how to approach each household. Moreover, health volunteers have worked closely with the restaurants to ensure public safety. In addition, they have targeted a place where there are frequent visitors such as the temples, the flea markets, and government offices for disinfection. It is believed that more than 13 million houses have been approached for COVID-10 prevention and protection by health volunteers. See Figure 4.



**Figure 4: Demonstration of Health Volunteers during COVID-19 in Thailand**  
(Source: THPF News at <https://en.thaihealth.or.th/NEWS/297/>)

## Discussion

Based on the two examples, it clearly shows learning has been essential for service delivery. Engaging with the stakeholders is part of work performed by the volunteers. More importantly, learning during these interactions has been instrumental for meeting the service and public expectation. They constantly learn about their work so that they can adapt how they work with the emerging situation (as driving behavior for road accident varies from year to year or educating local communities differs from one area to the next).

To build a construct for further studying the issues of workplace learning, it is important to identify the key contributors from the two cases. Apparently, the volunteers are highly motivated which has influenced the creativity and willingness to engage with the stakeholders. To become motivated, the volunteers clearly understand the goals of tackling these complex problems. They are aware of what is expected of their work. Stakeholder engagement is an important contributor to learning by the volunteers. They perceive this engagement not only as part of their work but also an opportunity to learn. Each interaction with a stakeholder(s) represents this opportunity. Informal learning is another contributor. Informal learning reflects sharing of hands-on experience among individual volunteers. Working environment with limited financial and non-financial resources necessitate the importance of learning inevitably. Showing positive impacts is needed to garner public interests and donations which are essential for TS's operations.

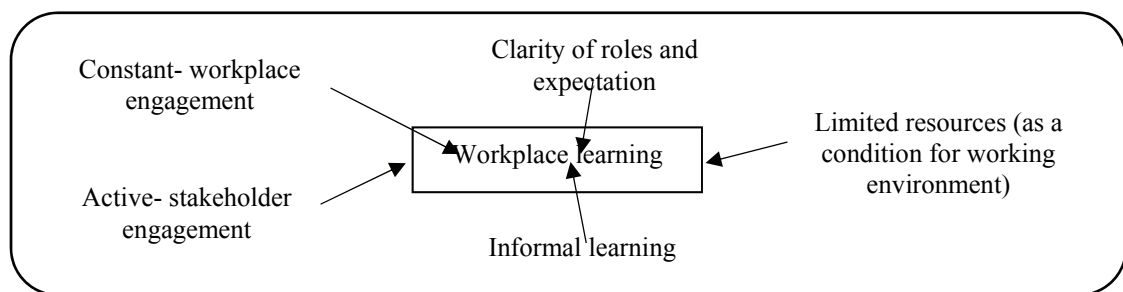
The findings from the two cases also provide an important insight into workplace learning. The workers feel that they are engaged constantly by an organization. For instance, both THPF and APN engage with the volunteers through public recognition. Further, the volunteers are

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<sup>5</sup> See <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-thailand-volunteer-idUSKBN23B044> (as of April 2021)

regularly asked for their feedback and opinions on future activities and work, especially public campaigns (e.g., campaign contents and delivery of these contents) and potential network partners. Health volunteers are continuously engaged by Department of Health Service Support. They are expected to provide the updated status of how local population views the COVID-19 situation as well as people's behavior. It appears that the ideas, opinions, and suggestions are highly valued.

Focusing on workplace learning has become important for probably all organizations regardless of the sector. For private firms, learning is critical for new product or service development, process improvement, and customer satisfaction. For public agencies, learning is important when the expectation of public services is constantly changing. The need to improve public service delivery while increasing the level of operational efficiency has compelling learning to the forefront. In addition, more frequent occurrences of natural disasters have forced the public sector to be proactive and responsive to the crises. For TS entities, due to the financial constraints and the complexity of a problem, learning is the key enable for their success. See Figure 5.



**Figure 5: Proposed Construct for Workplace Learning from the Two Cases**

It is important to recognize the limitation of the proposed construct. Other related issues such as culture and leadership style within the TS should be the focus in a future study. Although it is likely different from the private sector, there are many lessons that can be captured and learned further. Many emerging challenges in a future workplace have been associated with the workforce. They include the adaptation of digital technology in a workplace, performance and work-from-home. By focusing on TS, a construct for workplace learning within an organization is developed as a basis for further investigations.

The proposed construct appears to be supported by the previous studies. For instance, according to the theory of feedback, clarity of the roles and expectation (for the workers) as well as constant workplace engagement with two-way communication through feedback are important as the enables for learning (Kluger and DeNisi, 1996; and Bach-Mortensen and Montgomery, 2018). Informal learning, as part of peer-learning community, becomes more meaningful in supporting learning and development of the workers. Many concepts such as the 70-20-10 learning, have recognized informal learning as a new way of workplace learning (Clardy, 2018). Effective workplace learning requires the ample opportunities to interact and learn from customers and stakeholders. External knowledge is an important enable for constant learning and development as well as gaining public trust ((Public Enquiry Unit, 2002; Cordery and Sinclair, 2013; and Moustaghfir *et.al.*, 2020).

To build a construct for future research on workplace learning, it is important to recognize the diversity of the workers. This diversity does not relate to traditional aspects such as age, gender, and religion. Learning diversity is an important issue since not all the workers have the same level of motivation. They often view their roles in a workplace differently- following an instruction, performing the tasks, performing and learning, etc. In general, there are three categories of the workers from the engagement viewpoint- engaged, non-engaged, and



disengaged. Apparently, the volunteers are considered as engaged which has contributed to better outcomes in the two demonstrations.

## Conclusion

The two TS cases in Thailand show the importance of workplace learning. Workplace learning can contribute to more efficient, more responsive to the expectation of stakeholders, and creative in dealing with the requirements of customers. Adapting TS cases is helpful in developing a construct for workplace learning as a starting point to create learning in a workplace for an organization. From both cases, there are five components that impacts the effectiveness of workplace learning. They include workplace engagement, stakeholder engagement, clarity of roles and expectation, informal learning, and limited resources to support operations. These five components are supported by the previous studies. Finally, the proposed construct can be a basis for future research on workplace and human learning.

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The Contribution of the Third Sector to Europe's Socio-economic (see as <https://cordis.europa.eu/docs/results/613/613034/final1-tsi-613034-final-report-vs-finale.pdf> of December 2020)