

Providing a Model of Informal Education to Improve Lifestyle

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The present research aimed to propose a model for informal training to improve lifestyle.

Methods: The methodology was applied and mixed-method (qualitative-quantitative) in nature, following a sequential exploratory approach. The qualitative component involved academic and organizational experts. Theoretical snowball sampling was used to determine the sample, with saturation principle leading to 20 participants. The quantitative component's population consisted of approximately 310 employees of the Road, Housing, and Urban Development Research Center. For the quantitative sample size, Cochran's formula was used, resulting in 203 participants selected through stratified random sampling. The research's measurement tools included both qualitative and quantitative sections. To ensure the validity of the tool in the qualitative part, opinions from professors familiar with the field and academic experts were utilized. Reliability of the interviews was assessed using test-retest and intra-subject consensus methods. The validity of the questionnaire was established using face and content validity, and reliability was calculated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which was confirmed. Data analysis in the qualitative part employed theoretical coding as per Grounded Theory Systematic. The qualitative data analysis utilized MAXQDA software 2020. Quantitative data analysis was conducted using SPSS-V22 and Lisrel-V8.8 software.

Findings: The results indicated that the indices, components, and dimensions of the informal training to improve the lifestyle of employees at the research center included nature and methods. Causal conditions included organizational culture and individual factors; outcomes included competence enhancement and empowerment; strategies included organizational support and organizational knowledge; contexts included educational facilities and managerial support; barriers included legal and infrastructural barriers.

Conclusion: Ultimately, a conceptual model of the research was presented, which was deemed to have appropriate validity.

Keywords: *Informal training, lifestyle improvement, Road, Housing, and Urban Development Research Center.*

1 Introduction

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ifestyle is considered an indicator of physical health, which impacts both physical and mental well-being. The most

important dimensions of a healthy lifestyle include nutrition, physical activity, stress management, interpersonal relationships, responsibility towards health, and spiritual elevation. The food pyramid determines the type of food and the amount to be consumed, guiding individuals towards a healthy diet. According to recent research, individuals should engage in moderate-intensity physical activities five times a week, each session lasting 30 minutes, to maintain their health. Stress, caused by the secretion of various hormones in the body, is one of the major challenges in maintaining mental health (Afshani & Abooei, 2022). Therefore, employing various stress management techniques directly contributes to maintaining mental health and reducing stress. Healthy relationships, founded on love for humanity and mutual respect, are crucial for social health (Bahri & Khodadad, 2022).

Indicators for improving workplace lifestyle include job satisfaction, involvement in work, the right to express opinions, reduction of workplace accidents and incidents, the right to choose one's profession, destiny, influence, and more. Ignoring the improvement of workplace lifestyle means that employees regard their jobs merely as a means to satisfy economic needs, and such employees generally show low loyalty to the organization and often need to engage in other activities to compensate for deficiencies (Banner et al., 2021; Susomrith & Coetzer, 2019).

Improving the lifestyle of employees in an organization is crucial due to the positive consequences it brings to both their professional and personal lives. Thus, it should receive greater attention. One of the strategies that can effect this improvement is education. Formal education, such as on-the-job training or orientation for new employees, might not fully meet the needs of employees (Alessandro et al., 2023). Therefore, integrating informal educational methods into organizational training cycles can enhance existing competencies in human resources, leading to development and growth. Such training also leads to the acquisition of new knowledge, skills, and abilities, facilitating job performance improvement and personal growth (Jones & Brady, 2022; Moss, 2008; Oliaie, 2021).

Experts consider lifestyle improvement not merely a physical health phenomenon but as a condition encompassing biological, psychological, and social aspects. Enhancing health and quality of life requires a multidimensional approach that includes educational activities and promoting certain behavioral changes. Therefore, education is a significant factor influencing all

the above aspects, pivotal in achieving an ideal lifestyle and its enhancement (Mohammadi Mehr et al., 2019).

The present research pays special attention to the Road, Housing, and Urban Development Research Center. According to Article 2 of the center's charter, one of its primary functions is to conduct training courses, specialized workshops, conferences, and scientific seminars in collaboration with relevant organizations and centers. Since 1989, the center's training management, in collaboration with research departments, has been organizing specialized educational programs. The aim of these programs is to promote scientific findings, technical regulations, and guidelines, and to present the results of studies and research to facilitate the exchange of specialized information and acquaint specialists, engineers, designers, and stakeholders with the latest scientific and technical achievements in fields related to road, housing, and urban development, as well as to update and enhance the technical knowledge of the engineering community, and ultimately establish links between scientific research communities and executive organizations in the country.

Therefore, there is a research gap in the literature concerning the subject matter. Considering that the present research is conducted at the Road, Housing, and Urban Development Research Center and that no previous research has been conducted at this center, it is essential to address this topic here. Accordingly, the current study aims to propose a model by examining this issue comprehensively, identifying all dimensions, components, and indicators of informal education for improving the lifestyle of employees, and answering the question of what model can be proposed for informal education to improve the lifestyle of employees at the Research Center of Road, Housing, and Urban Development.

2 Methods and Materials

2.1 Study Design and Sampling

The current research is applied in purpose, aimed at problem-solving and ultimately obtaining information for decision-making and addressing administrative and even personal needs. Regarding data, it employs a mixed exploratory (qualitative-quantitative) approach, and in terms of study nature and type, it is systematic grounded in the qualitative aspect and cross-sectional survey-based in the quantitative aspect. In terms of implementation, the researcher aimed to gather data and information through semi-structured interviews with experts using systematic

grounded theory in the qualitative section and, using the results from the qualitative part, to develop appropriate tools for collecting quantitative data. Systematic grounded theory employs a systematic set of procedures inductively to develop a theory regarding a phenomenon. Key elements of grounded theory methodology include theoretical sampling, constant comparison, open, axial, and selective coding, memoing, and theoretical saturation. Then, quantitative approaches are used to validate the qualitative results.

In this study, the researcher initially explores the research topic qualitatively with limited participants and then, based on qualitative findings, proceeds to construct the desired tool. Given the above and considering that the main objective of this research is to design a model for informal training to improve the lifestyle of employees, to thoroughly examine and better understand the topic in the field of informal training to improve the lifestyle of employees, as well as to identify its dimensions, components, and indices, besides theoretical foundations, interviews were used for deeper understanding, followed by quantitative approaches to validate the qualitative results. Mixed methods research requires the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data, which are collected either simultaneously or sequentially. Given the need to conduct qualitative research before quantitative methods, in this study, a sequential design and category development model was used as one of the research strategies in mixed methods.

Participants in the qualitative part of the study included academic experts (faculty members with a PhD in educational sciences, university faculty with ranks from assistant professor and above, lived experience, and publications in this field) and organizational experts (directors and deputies of the Road, Housing, and Urban Development Research Center with a PhD in educational sciences, lived experience, and publications in this field). In the quantitative section, the research population consisted of all employees of the Road, Housing, and Urban Development Research Center, totaling about 310 individuals. In this study, theoretical snowball sampling was used to determine the samples, with 20 individuals considered based on the principle of saturation. The interviewee demographics included 7 directors and deputies of the research center, 8 university faculty members, and 5

educational planners from the research center. For the quantitative sample size, Cochran's formula was used, and 203 individuals were selected as the sample. To assess the reliability of the interviews conducted in the qualitative section, test-retest and intra-subject agreement methods were used. To determine the validity of the questionnaire, face and content validity were utilized, and reliability was calculated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which was confirmed. The data analysis method in the qualitative section involved theoretical coding (open, axial, and selective) derived from systematic grounded theory. The data analysis in the quantitative section included the following steps:

For the description of research variables, mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis were used. It should be noted that operations related to descriptive statistics were performed using SPSS software, version 22. Additionally, for the analysis of quantitative data, confirmatory factor analysis (in the LISREL software system) and independent T-tests and one-way analysis of variance for comparing different groups were used; it is noteworthy that the above-mentioned hypothesis tests were conducted using SPSS software, version 22, and LISREL software, version 8.8.

3 Findings and Results

For the qualitative section of the data collection, interviews were conducted with 20 informed experts who are knowledgeable about the research topic. Additionally, in the quantitative section, 8% of the participants were under 40 years old, 35% were between 40 to 45 years old, 36% were between 46 to 50 years old, and 21% were over 50 years old. Also, 12% of the participants had a work experience of less than 7 years, 29% between 7 to 13 years, 32% between 14 to 20 years, and 27% had work experience of over 20 years. Among the participants, 57% were male and 43% were female.

Among 136 existing indices, 12 main components can be identified. Ultimately, based on the literature, background, and existing theories, the dimensions, components, and number of items in the questionnaire are named in the [Table 1](#).

Table 1

Statistical Characteristics of Research Variables

Construct	Component	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
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Core Phenomenon	Nature	3.68	0.81	-0.26	-0.12
	Method	3.19	0.85	0.16	-0.35
Causal Conditions	Organizational Culture	3.27	0.74	-0.04	-0.13
	Individual Factors	3.24	0.73	-0.06	-0.17
Outcome	Competence Enhancement	3.21	0.84	-0.07	-0.22
	Empowerment	3.25	0.91	0.14	0.36
Strategy	Internal	3.32	0.75	-0.08	-0.52
	Organizational Knowledge	3.36	0.82	-0.13	-0.07
Context	Educational Facilities	3.12	0.67	-0.09	0.31
	Managerial Support	3.18	0.79	-0.17	0.41
Mediator	Legal Barriers	3.13	0.86	0.15	0.11
	Infrastructural Barriers	3.29	0.89	-0.05	0.08

Table 1 shows statistical characteristics such as mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis for the research variables. Moreover, considering the skewness and kurtosis values which are within the reasonable range (-2 to 2) for assuming the normality of data, the assumption of normal data distribution can be made and accepted. Based on the results, the highest mean within core phenomenon relates to the nature component, in causal conditions to organizational culture, in outcomes to empowerment, in strategy to organizational knowledge, in context to managerial support, and in mediators to infrastructural barriers.

Moreover, the significance levels of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test statistic for each variable were greater than

0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis (normality of data) is confirmed, and the alternative is rejected, indicating that the data are normally distributed.

Structural equation modeling was used to investigate the causal relationships between the identified influential factors and informal training to improve the lifestyle of employees at the Research Center for Road, Housing, and Urban Development. Also, prior to performing structural equation modeling, since the measurement scale was interval and the data distribution was normal, appropriate parametric tests such as Pearson correlation were used, the results of which are presented in the table below.

Table 2

Correlations Between Factors

Causal Conditions	Organizational Culture	Individual Factors
Informal training to improve employee lifestyle at the Research Center for Road, Housing, and Urban Development	0.534**	0.554**
Significance Level	0.000	0.000

As evident from Table 2, the ** symbol indicates the presence of a correlation between the research variables at the 0.01 level, meaning there is a direct relationship between the variables. The strength of these relationships is also visible in the table. To demonstrate and confirm the causal relationships among endogenous and exogenous variables and the explanatory power of these relationships, path

analysis was used. For this purpose, the capabilities of LISREL software were utilized.

Finally, based on the indices and components identified from the research documentation and interviews with experts, as well as based on the grounded theory paradigmatic model in the qualitative section and the results of the quantitative section, the conceptual model of the research is presented as follows:

Figure 1

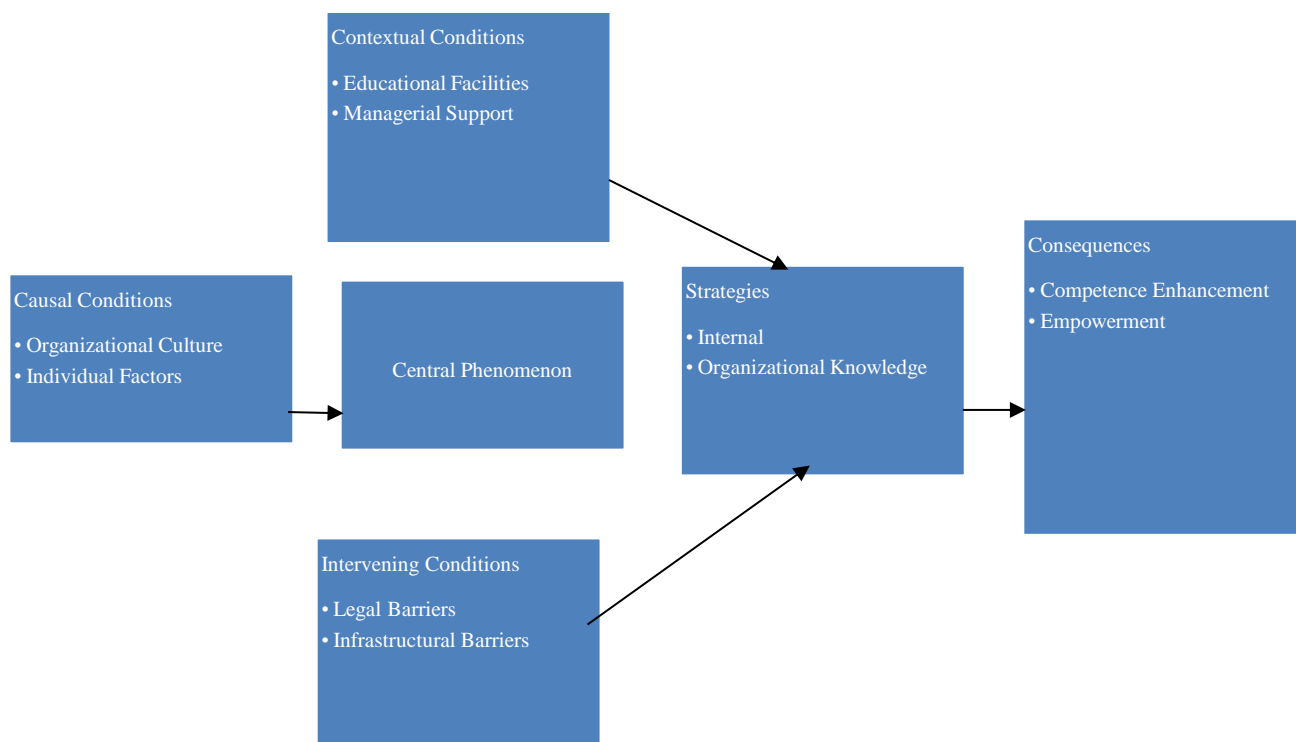


Table 3

Results of One-Sample T-test for Determining the Fit of the Proposed Model for Presenting the Final Model (Expected Mean = 3)

No.	Item	Questions	Mean	Standard Deviation	T-Statistic	Degrees of Freedom	Significance Level
1	Adaptation	Are the concepts generated from the reviewed data?	3.52	1.26	9.53	21	0.00
2	Comprehensibility	Are the concepts identifiable and systematically interrelated?	3.64	1.23	11.82	21	0.00
3	Generalizability	Are the categories well developed?	3.78	1.29	8.61	21	0.00
4		Is the theory explained in a way that considers changes in different conditions?	3.79	1.32	10.44	21	0.00
5		Are broader conditions that may affect the phenomenon described?	3.83	1.27	10.26	21	0.00
6	Control	Do the theoretical findings appear significant?	3.83	0.89			

The results from Table 3 indicate:

Adaptation:

The calculated T-statistic (9.53) is significant at the 0.01 level. Comparing the mean of this component of the model (3.52) with the expected mean demonstrates that the model's adaptation is deemed valid by experts and is confirmed with 99% confidence.

Comprehensibility:

The T-statistic for the comprehensibility of the model (11.82) is significant at the 0.01 level. Comparing the mean of this component (3.64) with the expected mean shows that the model's comprehensibility is recognized as valid by

experts and is confirmed with 99% confidence. The T-statistics calculated for both comprehensibility questions are significant at the 0.01 level and the observed means for these questions exceed the expected mean (3), thus considered comprehensible by the experts.

Generalizability:

The T-statistic for the generalizability of the model (10.44) is significant at the 0.01 level. Comparing the mean of this component (3.79) with the expected mean indicates that the model's generalizability is established as valid by experts and is confirmed with 99% confidence. The T-statistics for the generalizability questions are significant at

the 0.01 level, and the observed means for these questions exceed the expected mean (3), thereby recognized as generalizable by the experts.

Control:

The T-statistic for the control of the model (12.75) is significant at the 0.01 level. Comparing the mean of this component (3.83) with the expected mean indicates that the model's controllability is deemed valid by experts and is confirmed with 99% confidence. The T-statistics for the control questions are significant at the 0.01 level, and the observed means for these questions exceed the expected mean (3); thus, they are considered as part of the model's control by the experts.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the present study showed that the indices, components, and dimensions of non-formal education to improve the lifestyle of employees at the Road, Housing and Urban Development Research Center include nature and method. Additionally, the causal conditions include organizational culture and individual factors, outcomes include competency enhancement and empowerment, strategies include organizational support strategies and organizational knowledge, platforms include educational facilities and managerial support, and barriers include legal and infrastructural obstacles. Before inferring the results of the research, it is necessary to examine the lifestyle of employees and education as one of the strategies for improving it. The current research also stated that lifestyle can target various aspects of life. Improving lifestyle also means improving the personal and social life dimensions of employees, including "physical activity," "nutrition," "responsibility for health," "spiritual growth," "interpersonal relations," and "stress management." In addition to maintaining and strengthening the level of health and welfare, lifestyle improvement leads to a sense of satisfaction and self-actualization. Better put, according to Jedari et al. (2021), it can be stated that lifestyle improvement encompasses physical health and hygiene, self-esteem, goals and values, occupation, money, learning, creativity, helping others, love, friends, children, family and relatives, spouse and relationship with him, and generally life {Jedari, 2022 #16898}.

According to the findings of the research, the nature of non-formal education to improve the lifestyle of employees at the Road, Housing and Urban Development Research Center initially refers to the method of education to enhance

the quality of life. The method used in the Road, Housing and Urban Development Research Center is to allow education to occur informally and in various locations. Additionally, the learner evaluation method based on non-consumerism and lifestyle modification shows another aspect of the nature of non-formal education for lifestyle improvement. Training and evaluation of lifestyle modification and the use of correct facilities in the organization are very important because they will become a model for new organizational entrants and eventually transform into the dominant organizational culture. Another indicator of knowledge exchange in non-formal education is selecting appropriate content to change the lifestyle of employees at the Road, Housing and Urban Development Research Center. This content must be provided based on resources and facilities and the type of organizational climate so that behavioral change when observing individuals in consumerism is tangible. These are the issues that are indirectly corrected through the behaviors of managers by training learners. Another component that shows the nature of non-formal education to improve lifestyle at this center is the exchange of experiences among employees. This issue depends on the active interaction between educational stakeholders with each other and also with urban planning employees, focusing on current issues that impact lifestyle improvement and end in desirable behavioral patterns. In the exchange of experiences, the subject matter challenge is very impactful. Typically, employees use these challenges to design an educational program regarding management and employee issues, and learning occurs in this way. Social exchange, another nature of non-formal education towards improving lifestyle, refers to the social activities of employees, such as religious and political participation. How much social activities are created within the urban planning administration to promote the social and cultural capability of employees and how much managers value these activities and create effective activities in this regard. Employee participation in various meetings and their job training and collective research that employees conduct regarding issues related to their organizational life are also important for creating a balance between work and life. Brainstorming sessions or consultation meetings that are conducted in some organizations are intended for social exchange and knowledge enhancement. In the Road, Housing and Urban Development Research Center, brainstorming sessions are used in a limited manner and should receive more attention. In the current research, it was determined that several

methods can be used to provide non-formal education to improve the lifestyle of employees at the Road, Housing and Urban Development Research Center. One of these methods is the debate method. In this method, employees listen well to the statements of other colleagues to experience real life. In fact, formal education does not take shape. Learning only occurs through the exchange of experiences in conversation. In addition, employees learn during debates they have with management, colleagues, and other organization members, or they learn from using electronic systems to send educational messages. Another method used is collaboration. Employees learn in group projects they have with colleagues or by participating in group activities and enhance their mental personality. Another method is observation. In this method, employees imitate the good behaviors of other colleagues, analyze them, and learn from them. They are usually influenced by the commendable behaviors of other colleagues in terms of lifestyle improvement and even by the directive behaviors of management.

In the current research, causal factors were also mentioned, that is, factors affecting non-formal education in improving the lifestyle of employees, with organizational culture being identified as the primary factor. When discussing organizational culture, it can be noted that everything observable in employee behavior and clearly perceived by newcomers is organizational culture. How much employees are attached to their job and consider learning a part of it is a cultural type that encourages them to learn and improve their lifestyle. The current research also referred to the consequences of implementing the model of non-formal education to improve the lifestyle of employees at the Road, Housing and Urban Development Research Center, with professional competence and empowerment being mentioned as the main outcomes. Employees learn from various environments to gain acceptance and authority in their job and enhance their competence. The non-formal education model provides employees with a model for excellence and enables them to participate in in-service training for cognitive competence and, in this context, to achieve ethical and attitudinal competence through interaction with ethical colleagues. Finally, based on the

qualitative and quantitative results, the final research model was drawn. In this model, factors related to non-formal education to improve the lifestyle of employees at the Road, Housing and Urban Development Research Center were depicted and were found to be of suitable credibility.

Based on the research findings, several practical recommendations are proposed:

Training should be provided to employees to promote non-consumerism and lifestyle modification. To this end, training workshops can be organized.

Selecting teleworking as an effective method for improving lifestyle and enhancing digital literacy in employees is effective.

Selecting appropriate content for lifestyle change is a priority. For this purpose, managers should select content related to improving work-life based on the organizational climate.

Changing behavior when observing individuals in consumerism is effective. For this purpose, managers should use facilities or punishment for guilty employees.

Issues that are indirectly corrected through the behaviors of managers through training learners. To this end, managers should subtly provide effective behavior patterns.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Authors Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Ethics principles

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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