

60-Second SoTL

Episode 42 – Lifelong Learners’ Successful Work Adjustment

(Piano Music)

0:03

Jessie L. Moore:

How do characteristics of lifelong learning inform work-integrated learning students’ work adjustment at co-op sites? That’s the focus of this week’s 60-second SoTL from Elon University’s Center for Engaged Learning. I’m Jessie Moore.

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(Piano Music)

0:18

In “How approaches to learning explain lifelong learners’ successful work adjustment,” published in the open access journal, *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning*, David Drewery and Judene Pretti explore students’ approaches to learning and work adjustment in co-op work terms. Work adjustment refers to the ability to master tasks and connect with others when transitioning to a new work environment. Previous research has suggested that students’ lifelong learning characteristics are linked to work adjustment, so this study sought to explore that link and the potential role of students’ approaches to learning.

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Drewery and Pretti focused on Kirby et al.’s 2003 examination of approaches to learning at work, with a *deep approach* involving intrinsic motivation and self-directed learning, a *rational approach* involving methodical and detail-oriented strategies, and a *disorganized approach* characterized by a reactionary response to challenges. Drewery and Pretti hypothesized that students’ approaches to learning at work would explain the relationship between their lifelong learning characteristics and their work adjustment.

1:23

The study focused on undergraduate co-op students who were completing a co-op term at a research-intensive university in Canada. Students were asked to complete two surveys – one during the first two weeks of the co-op term and one 12 weeks later, during the final two weeks of the term. 261 students completed the first survey and 137 completed the second. Many of the students were enrolled in STEM – science, technology, engineering, or math – programs, and 61.4% of the participants were female.

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Approximately a third of participants completed their co-ops in small organizations, a third in medium-sized organizations, and a third in large organizations.

2:04

Drewery and Pretti combined several existing questionnaires for this study. They used Kirby et al's 2010 Lifelong Learning Questionnaire, an abbreviated version of Kirby et al's 2013 Approaches to Work Questionnaire, an abbreviated version of Chao et al's 1994 organizational socialization questionnaire, and the short form version of Watkins and Marsick's 2003 Dimensions of the Learning Organization Questionnaire. Collectively, these measures allowed them to examine lifelong learning characteristics, approaches to learning at work, work adjustment, and students' perceptions of organizational learning culture at their co-op sites.

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The researchers used multiple linear regression analyses and conditional process analyses to examine the associations among lifelong learning characteristics, approaches to learning, and work adjustment. Their analyses suggest that the more work-integrated learning students embody characteristics of lifelong learners, the more likely they are to use deep approaches to learning – involving intrinsic motivation and self-directed learning – and the less likely they are to use a disorganized approach with reactionary responses to challenges. This greater use of a deep approach to learning – and less use of a disorganized approach – also was associated with greater work adjustment.

3:19

Given these results, Drewery and Pretti offer two recommendations for supporting work-integrated learning students' work adjustment. First, educators can create opportunities for students to develop lifelong learning characteristics by providing opportunities for authentic work-based tasks and for critical self-reflection about those tasks. Second, educators can partner with employers to foster conditions for work adjustment, including promoting a deep approach to learning, which might include asking questions and exploring ideas that initially seem tangential to the student's role but that may actually help students adjust to those roles.

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To learn more about this study, visit our show notes for a link to the open access article and related resources.

4:02

(Piano Music)

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