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## The Barriers to Workplace Learning Implementation

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### ABSTRACT

Inquiry into barriers to workplace learning implementation is ongoing. This paper uses qualitative content analysis to investigate possible barriers hindering workplace learning in higher education. The study involved a semi-structured interview with 12 faculty members from a Laotian university as key informants. By using qualitative content analysis, two aspects/components of an individual (lack of team learning, low motivation, limited self-learning, etc.) and organization (unqualified leadership, lack of learning culture, etc.) appear to be significant barriers to workplace learning. Future research may benefit from investigating this area quantitatively.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Workplace learning is defined as learning within the workplace in which the members engage in learning for their professional development through self-directed learning, formal and informal learning modes, as well as sharing knowledge with others. Several authors (Mills & Whittaker, 2001; Rowley, 1998, etc.) have posited the importance of workplace learning in higher education institutions. However, it is claimed that universities have challenges in committing to workplace learning (Bauman, 2005; Bratianu, 2018, etc.). These days, many workplaces, as well as educational institutions, are expected to establish favorable conditions to promote learning opportunities for their employees and this effort is closely linked to identifying barriers impeding the occurrence of workplace learning activities. Knowing these barriers can be helpful and useful for the leader of an organization in determining the direction of human resources' capacity reinforcement, especially a provision of learning potential for the members (Matin & Alavi, 2007). If a workplace invests more in upskilling its employees, the result of this new knowledge and ideas is that the staff will be more productive at work (Fiza et al., 2015). Identifying barriers to workplace learning has widely appeared in literature reviews, however, there has been little evidence on this topic from a qualitative perspective. According to Schilling and Kluge (2009), more empirical data is required to understand the reality of the issue.

Lao PDR has recognized education as a key to the nation's socio-economic development (MoES, 2020), at the same time, the government needs a standardized higher education system to have adequate faculty members who are knowledgeable and updated on a changing world. Moreover, Article 4 of the national law on human resources has also emphasized that Laotian officials have to keep learning and acquiring morals, policy and the developmental directions of the country (National Assembly, 2015). From the personal observations of the present authors, learning for personal growth and workplace learning engagement by the faculty members is skeptical and characterized as more individualistic and this may serve as a major block for their institution in becoming a learning organization. This paper, therefore, investigates the barriers to implementing workplace learning in a Laotian higher education institution. The study is also to further contribute to the existing body of knowledge on workplace learning. The research question guiding this paper is "What could be the barriers impeding the implementation of workplace learning, as taken into account by Laotian faculty members?".

The structure of this paper is presented thusly: Section 1 introduces the review of literature, in which readers are presented with some key concepts of workplace learning, as well as the existing barriers to workplace learning implementation. Section 2 relates to the methodological aspect, in which readers are introduced to the sampling, the data collection, and the analysis strategy used in the present study. Section 3 introduces the findings as planned to answer the research question and the section that follows presents the discussion of the findings; the last section will introduce some limitations before offering the conclusion.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Theoretical Perspectives on Workplace Learning

The integration of workplace learning into human resource development is vital for various organizations, especially for higher education. Čepić & Krstović (2011) posited that workplace learning is a necessity for every workplace to become a learning organization. In universities, the concept of workplace learning is a means for self-preparation and a response to the world's rapid changes (Aminbeidokhti et al., 2016; Čepić & Krstović, 2011; Habtoor et

al., 2019; Ponnuswamy & Manohar, 2016; Rowley, 1998). Universities engaging in workplace learning can improve the quality of teaching performance (Hartono et al., 2017), and upskill their professional practices (McEwen & Trede, 2014). Moreover, Mills and Whittaker (2001) also acknowledge the significance of workplace learning in higher education in that it breaks down obstacles often faced in higher education institutions, enabling the institutions to build their capacity for competitiveness and allowing them to be able to closely connect with industry sectors. Similarly, the goal of workplace learning is to increase the capabilities of employees (Basit et al., 2015; Costley, 2007; Guta, 2018; Mills & Whittaker, 2001), and their increased motivation for job performance (Basit et al., 2015).

However, there appear to be some challenges for universities in implementing workplace learning (Bauman, 2005; Bratianu, 2018; Cebrián et al., 2013; Rowley, 1998; Schmidt & Gibbs, 2009). According to Rowley (1998), encouraging members to participate in individual learning is a real obstacle for institutions. The problem also concerns shared learning and having a collective vision to transform the institution into a learning environment (Bratianu, 2018; Rowley, 1998): for instance, not every member is ambitious about learning (Rowley, 1998). More consistently, it is also claimed that universities are poor at changing themselves (Bauman, 2005; Cebrián et al., 2013). These problems can be explained by how the system and structure of universities are very complicated (Cebrián et al., 2013; Garnett et al., 2008, in Garnett, 2016; Johnson, 2001), and that there is a lack of acceptance or integration of a new change in teaching and learning culture (Johnson, 2001; Schmidt & Gibbs, 2009), poor knowledge management (Rowley, 1998), and staff finding it difficult to adapt themselves to the external environment (Voolaid & Ehrlich, 2017).

Inquiry into workplace learning has been undertaken for decades. Unsurprisingly, the definitions of workplace learning have been presented differently. For instance, workplace learning is the characteristics of learning of individuals (Arygris, 1964, cited in Jones & Hendry, 1994); or, it is a process of updating knowledge and understanding to improve actions (Fiol & Lyles, 1985). (Marsick and Watkins, 1994) wrote that "Organizational learning is a metaphor for adaptive responses to triggers in the environment". According to these authors, workplace learning is vital. For (Jones and Hendry, 1994), this type of learning refers to training that focuses on sharing knowledge and discussing current conditions of work. Accordingly, Fenwick (2010), Schilling and Kluge (2009) posited a similar view: workplace learning is a process of learning together by employees, aimed at transforming a workplace, creating innovations and knowledge, as well as integrating the learning into routines of the workplace.

(Levitt and March, 1988) viewed workplace learning as "routine-based, history-dependent, and target-oriented" (p. 319). Levitt and March explained that through this learning, a workplace respects the legitimacy of its actions reflects upon its past actions and targets the expected outcomes. (Shaffer, 1992) seems to agree with this perspective by noting that the essence of the workplace learning concept covers expectational and experiential learning. The concept of workplace learning is about individuals' learning of different aspects of their work lives and this learning appears to be connected to the concept of adult learning, where the learning should be more autonomy-oriented (Costley, 2011; Jones & Hendry, 1994; Knowles, 1980) because developing learning at the workplace requires considerable understanding of both teaching and learning of adults, especially their existing knowledge and experience (Costley, 2011). (Ponnuswamy and Manohar, 2016 cite Simon's, 1991) words - a workplace learns in two ways: learning from its employees and recruiting new members who are knowledgeable in a field that the workplace has never had before. According to Huang

and Shih (2011), workplace learning occurs on three levels where learning starts with an individual and then is shared with a group before spreading to a workplace as a whole.

The concept of workplace learning has different characteristics from the traditional nature of knowledge acquisition which uses a classroom-based learning method (Schmidt & Gibbs, 2009). According to Haruna and colleagues (2019), workplace learning relates to a learning activity, combining learning on the job and classroom-based learning. Consistently, workplace learning can also be seen as any patterns of learning in a form of either informal or formal learning (Basit et al., 2015; Lester & Costley, 2010), meaning that workplace learning does not necessarily take place within the university but it can be conducted outside the university; and this learning type can be shaped by multi-levels of academic knowledge where learners can learn at both a low-level and a high-level (Lester & Costley, 2010). To conclude, workplace learning is the learning of individuals who learn new things necessary for the empowerment of their workplace, through self-directed learning and sharing knowledge with others. And this definition is used to represent workplace learning in the present study.

### 2.3 The Overview of Key Predictors of Workplace Learning

Several authors have proposed some key elements needed for implementing workplace learning. For instance, Popper and Lipshitz (2000) noted that leadership serves as a key predictor of organizational learning through developing both the structure and culture of the organization (cited in Khalifa & Ayoubi, 2014). This could be true, as leadership and leaders are perceived as key to facilitating workplace learning (Bui & Baruch, 2012; Voolaid & Ehrlich, 2017). (Shaffer, 1992) stressed that "the opportunity for learning by the units" is greatly facilitated/fomented by the strong leadership of the organization. In this respect, an organization needs to create values, practices and methods in which learning and working are parallel across the organization (Rowley, 1998). Furthermore, Čierna et al. (2016) noted that to engage in workplace learning, a workplace needs an effective system in which the management of knowledge is determined. The lack of a well-organized learning management system causes problems and that makes sharing knowledge among faculty members barely take place. It is a good idea to integrate workplace learning into a routine within the workplace; this pursuit may inform human resources development and the transfer of knowledge (Basit et al., 2015). Consistently, (Salaman and Butler, 1994) also proposed some key guides for workplaces to engage in workplace learning, stating urgent consideration must be given to the analyses of themselves, their processes, and their environments and the identification of the preference, appropriate responses and implementation methods to take actions (Rowley, 1998).

Furthermore, promoting individual learning is key. A review study by Vannasy and Sengsouliya (2022) found individual-related elements as a frequently cited predictor of workplace learning. Similarly, Čepić & Krstović (2011) posited that the core concept of a learning organization is the transformation of individual learning into workplace learning. A well-known researcher, Argyris (1995), contends that individual capacity to learn is key as it determines the possibility to learn things. Argyris also noted that true learning takes place if people reflect, design, create and evaluate their initiatives. Seemingly, several past authors (Basit et al., 2015, Huang & Shih, 2011; Keeling et al., 1998; Kerka, 1997; Maxwell, 2014; Prasanwan, 2005; Rowley, 1998; Shaffer, 1992) have confirmed the influence of individual knowledge and individual actions on enhancing workplace learning. For instance, success in workplace learning implementation may depend on how actively the learners participate and how much learners have learned. Moreover, workplace learning is claimed to be related to

the theory of adult learning, so it is all about individuals' acceptance, attitudes and perceived values for change (Huang & Shih, 2011). However, individual learning will become more useful for the occurrence of workplace learning if individual learning and/or individual knowledge, skills and experiences can be shared with others (Khasawneh, 2011; Maxwell, 2014; Toma, 2012). According to (Khasawneh, 2011), team learning is a key predictor serving as a fundamental learning spot within an organization in which all members can develop an open space for dialogue and discussion among colleagues. Workplace learning is facilitated by the learning engagement of individuals in different given opportunities, such as observing, listening to, and working together with more experienced peers (Maxwell, 2014). Fenwick (2010) agreed with this perspective, that learning arises through the interaction of individuals.

Yet another key component is environmental related factors. According to the literature reviewed (Mills & Whittaker, 2001; Schmidt & Gibbs, 2009; Shaffer, 1992; etc.), collaboration can make workplace learning realistic. For instance, learning from partners serves as a good source of obtaining new knowledge (Garnett, 2016). Moreover, through partnership, a workplace can absorb constructive feedback from partners as a guide for one's development (Dernova & Perevozniuk, 2017; Shaffer, 1992). In addition to this, the integration of state policy and/or governmental directions seems to be very important to the conduct of workplace learning. Practices in line with the given state policy and the system can bring about acknowledgement and relevant support from the government (Čepić & Krstović, 2011; Costley, 2007). More specifically, in the context of higher education, any conduct of activities needs to be in line with the central regulations (Souza & Takahashi, 2019).

#### **2.4 Defining the Barriers to Workplace Learning**

This section presents the categorization of barriers to workplace learning in higher education. The overwhelming array of research papers has outlined the barriers, however, inquiry into barriers to workplace learning in higher education seems to be limited. The authors of the present paper have an interest in redefining a conceptual framework on barriers as the purpose of this study. Having collated and synthesized related previous works, 13 barriers have been identified. These barriers have been then categorized into 2 major groups: individual barriers, relating to personal factors, comprising individual members' qualities, attitudes and behaviors that act as barriers to workplace learning; and organizational barriers which refer to organizational factors, including practices, values and support to workplace learning. The detailed discussion is reported below:

1. *Lack of interpersonal communication*: this aspect refers to a problem of communication among colleagues within the workplace. Lack of good communication has been confirmed as a barrier to workplace learning implementation (Fiza et al., 2015; Makambe, 2014; Matin & Alavi, 2007; McLaughlin et al., 2008). Maxwell (2014) noted that an individual's engagement in learning activities is connected with the opportunities of observing, listening to, and working together with more experienced peers, adding that the relationship with the peers is very useful for constructive feedback and support. According to Fenwick (2010), the learning that happens in the workplace includes any interaction between the members. This interaction leads to an opportunity for the members to discuss and share ideas. A lack of good communication within the workplace could undermine learning (Fiza et al., 2015). It is significant to encourage the members to open discussion and dialogue (Fiza et al., 2015; Matin & Alavi, 2007). Sharing ideas, giving feedback and listening to each other among colleagues strongly contribute to the development of workplace learning (Matin & Alavi, 2007). Furthermore, it is useful if a workplace considers encouraging different forms of interaction among its members due to personal convenience. For instance, Juceviciene and



Edintaite (2012) found that some faculty members in higher education institutions tend to interact informally within their departments when discussing things.

2. *Lack of self-efficacy*: this is a problem of an individual's lack of perceived competence and self-confidence in participating in learning activities. Several authors (Billet, 1995; Fiza et al., 2015; Matin & Alavi, 2007; McLaughlin et al., 2008) have confirmed it as a barrier to implementing workplace learning. (McLaughlin et al. (2008) raised two barriers: "lack of retentive capacity" relating to an individual lacking the ability to apply a piece of new knowledge into his/her daily work; "lack of absorptive capacity" discussing the identification of value in new knowledge. These issues impede individuals' learning within the workplace and hinder development in the workplace. This kind of issue is usually found in a workplace where the employees are not very creative and have low competence in learning (Matin & Alavi, 2007). A study by (Fiza et al., 2015) has pointed out an issue that challenges the development of learning within the workplace, finding that women lack learning ability. This problem could reflect a negative attitude toward women members and this may make other capable women workers discouraged from workplace learning and development (Fiza et al., 2015). This could be a gender bias that calls on the workplace to consider improving the self-efficacy of both male and female staff. Learning in the workplace can be realistic if the workplace supports individual learning capacity (Rowley, 1998).

3. *Lack of self-learning*: this aspect refers to the unwillingness of individuals to engage in learning and/or seeking new knowledge. This is another barrier to the conduct of workplace learning (Billet, 1995; Guggssa & Kabeta, 2021; Matin & Alavi, 2007; McLaughlin et al., 2008; Silverman, 2003). This barrier includes an individual's lack of self-commitment to learning. According to (Billet, 1995), learning for the individual is important but the learning has to be appropriate and meet the needs of the workplace. Billet further noted that the individuals' access to learning activities is supposed to be authentic where the learners are challenged by critical thinking. Similarly, the barrier is characterized by an individual who is afraid of risk-taking in learning. It is required for the members to take a risk, experiencing difficulties learning from failures and evaluating one's performance to learn at work (Matin & Alavi, 2007), taking a risk, such as facing a penalty and losing profit also matters (McLaughlin et al., 2008). Accordingly, (Schilling and Kluge, 2009) identified one of the barriers as related to a lack of skills and knowledge of innovation. Moreover, (Gugssa and Kabeta, 2021) found that a limitation of individuals' workplace learning involves a lack of learning behavior and seeking self-development opportunities. The members' self-learning is very influential. (Saffer, 1992) additionally affirms this: individuals who learn in the workplace can also learn.

4. *Lack of team learning*: this barrier relates to limited shared learning among colleagues. This issue is claimed to undermine the development of workplace learning (Faladillah et al., 2020; Fiza et al., 2015; Guggssa & Kabeta, 2021; Makambe, 2014; McLaughlin et al., 2008; Yuliana et al., 2020). Faladillah (2020) explained that the members' lack of self-motivation for sharing knowledge with others could be due to the personal perception that this task is not included in one's regular duties. According to McLaughlin and colleagues (2008), this barrier may be linked to the "fear of exploitation" that the members are less likely to learn and/or share with colleagues due to the perceived lack of profits in return for their efforts, and the "fear of contamination" relating to the members being unwilling to work with others due to the perceived differences in specializations of colleagues. Moreover, the lack of shared learning and understanding may be influenced by a given opportunity provided by the workplace where they can be exposed to group discussions and sharing sessions (Juceviciene & Edintaite, 2012).

5. *Lack of self-motivation*: this is a barrier relating to an individual's lack of interest and to their resistance to learning. Several past authors (Faladillah et al., 2020; Gugssa & Kabeta, 2021; McLaughlin et al., 2008) have confirmed it. (McLaughlin et al. 2008) tested the impact of the 25 barriers identified in the existing literature. The findings indicated that personal resistance is one of the barriers affecting knowledge management within the workplace. This is an internal characteristic that relates to an individual's attitude. According to (Keeling et al., 1998), what is considered to be the biggest barrier to promoting workplace learning is the overcoming of employees' negative attitudes toward the perception of values and their benefits. The attitudinal barriers are from those employees who are near retirement, employees with little preference for personal growth and who do not perceive the usefulness of workplace learning (Keeling et al., 1998). Another reason for not wanting to change is that the members feel secure with their existing knowledge and therefore they see it as unnecessary to gain new knowledge. This is particularly the case for officially employed members (Matin & Alavi, 2007). Voolaid and Ehrlich (2017) pointed out that it is very challenging to promote individuals' active participation due to personal attitudes and aspirations for learning, especially in the context of higher education. Voolaid and Ehrlich further explained that the faculty members see themselves as knowledge creators, but are not open to further learning. (Keeling and colleagues, 1998) seem to confirm this tendency, that low motivation is an attitudinal barrier and people who do not perceive the significance of workplace learning will tend to reject participating in any personal development activities.

6. *Leadership*: this aspect relates to the workplace's action of leading, the ability to influence the members for learning and transformation within the workplace. This is a critical element of the development of workplace learning and different authors (Faladillah et al., 2020; Matin & Alavi, 2007; McLaughlin et al., 2008) have confirmed it as a major barrier to implementing learning activities at work. This barrier focuses on an issue in the leader's practices of leading the members. (Matin and Alavi, 2007) pointed out that one problem is that the leader tends to emphasize managing rather than leading and often lacks effective planning. A recent study (McLaughlin et al., 2008) has indicated that the leader's lack of motivating employees hinders the conduct of knowledge transfer in the sampled organization. More problems in leadership include assessing the employee's potential knowledge and that leads to not knowing their learning needs (Faladillah et al., 2020). According to the literature reviewed, strong leadership is necessary for strengthening and supporting the members' learning culture. Leadership serves as a key attribute in workplaces (Bui & Baruch, 2012; Matin & Alavi, 2007). Some of the key characteristics include regular reflection on members' work practices (Čierna et al., 2016; Salaman & Butler, 1994, cited in Rowley, 1998), promoting workplace learning and team learning (Basit et al., 2015; Francis, 2014; Jones & Hendry, 1994; Khalifa & Ayoubi, 2014), the acceptance of changes, adaptations in structures as well as the strategic planning (Jones & Hendry, 1994; Schmidt & Gibbs, 2009).

7. *Lack of learning culture*: this barrier relates to the absence of a good culture of learning in the workplace. The barriers may include a problem of lacking vision and/or possessing an unclear method for achieving a goal (Faladillah et al., 2020), the lack of a professional development approach and the integration of pedagogy (Maxwell, 2014). In more instances, the barrier is also linked to a problem, the so-called "unprovenness" about whether new knowledge is rated as useful or not (McLaughlin et al., 2008); the less perceived value of innovation (Schilling & Kluge, 2009), that is the little appreciation by the workplace for utilizing innovations; lack of evaluations of the members' work practices (Cebrián et al., 2013; Matin & Alavi, 2007; McLaughlin et al., 2008) and the unwillingness of sharing and

learning with partners (Matin & Alavi, 2007; McLaughlin et al., 2008). According to McLaughlin et al. (2008), a workplace should establish a knowledge transfer mechanism as it can represent a learning culture within the workplace. Similarly, (Fenwick (2010) put that having a clear goal for learning, including what should be learned and what the learning is for, is extremely important. The culture of learning influences the members' efforts to learn which makes them engage in interactions (Maxwell, 2014). However, developing a learning culture needs strong leadership (Khalifa & Ayoubi, 2014).

8. *Administrative system*: this barrier refers to a workplace's internal structure that informs the direction of certain activities, such as coordination, task allocation and supervision, to achieve the goals. According to Matin and Alavi (2007), many workplaces often have a barrier regarding the structure, and lacking a well-organized structure (e.g., "a machine-like structure", "a top-down approach", "Lack of recompensing system", etc.) may contribute to ambiguity in work definitions. (McLaughlin et al. (2008), Schilling and Kluge (2009) have proposed weak management skills as one of the barriers to workplace learning management: this barrier involves the workplace's inability to utilize its existing knowledge effectively. More recent studies (Faladillah et al., 2020; Makambe, 2014) have also found that the possibility of workplace learning is hampered due to the heavy workload of the members. This reflects the workplace's poor management systems, and this problem causes incompatibility in members' work practices. Workplace learning is linked to a condition, so-called organizational norms (Shaffer, 1992). Consistently, Čierna and colleagues (2016) stress the importance of the quality management system, and good system guides for arranging human resources and job descriptions. (Voolaid and Ehrlich, 2017) also support this: the creation and sharing of knowledge among the members are likely to arise if the workplace has an effective system.

9. *Lack of expertise*: this barrier relates to an absence of authentic knowledge and skills, and lack of experience, as well as to a shortage of experts in the workplace. Many workplaces seem to rely on their experts when implementing workplace learning. It might be true to say that a lack of experts or the presence of experts who are unwilling to share their knowledge may impede the outcomes of workplace learning. According to (Billett, 1995), the unwillingness of experts to share knowledge and skills with colleagues is a major barrier that may harm workplace learning implementation and Billett assumed that this problem happens due to the fear of losing their position. (McLaughlin et al., 2008) have confirmed a barrier to the depth of knowledge. This refers to possessing authentic knowledge and skills among the members within the workplace and to what extent they can apply the knowledge. A recent study (Nakpodia, 2009) has also proposed that retaining a senior employee who is knowledgeable and contributive is a challenge. More consistently, Bratianu (2018) seems to agree with the barrier and further notes a workplace must act and prevent knowledge loss, for instance, universities can develop "intergenerational learning" to retain the knowledge and keep the expertise when senior professors enter retirement.

10. *Limited facilities*: this barrier covers a workplace's availability of infrastructure, technology, learning sources and materials needed for workplace learning. A limit of facilities has been confirmed as a major challenge in past works (Billett, 1995; Faladillah et al., 2020; Makambe, 2014; Matin & Alavi, 2007; McLaughlin et al., 2008). Such a challenge appears, for instance, in the capacity for use and the availability of technologies in support of learning within the workplace (Faladillah et al., 2020; McLaughlin et al., 2008): lack of internet connection bandwidth, and lack of "instructional media" (Billett, 1995). Billett views the use of teaching media as a limitation in different workplaces. A workplace needs to consider and



manage to arrange a computer-based learning option when conducting workplace learning (Billett, 1995). Together with this, the barrier also includes learning materials and limited access to learning resources (Faladillah et al., 2020), as well as an absence of good infrastructure (Faladillah et al., 2020; Makambe, 2014). Makambe explained that having insufficient meeting rooms may reduce interaction opportunities among colleagues.

11. *Budgeting*: this barrier is related to the problem of money, that is, the inability of funding to support learning activities within the workplace. It seems money is a necessary condition for the conduct of workplace learning (Faladillah et al., 2020; Matin & Alavi, 2007; McLaughlin et al., 2008). According to Matin and Alavi (2007), workplaces often face a challenge with money used in promoting workplace learning, especially for paying financial rewards, including model staff, overtime hours of work, promotions, and other academic activities. The challenge relating to money is the power in management where the workplace has no autonomy to carry out the reward system independently (Matin & Alavi, 2007). Similarly, McLaughlin et al. (2008) assumed that a barrier to a workplace's knowledge transfer is relative to the cost of managing collaboration. A recent study by Faladillah et al. (2020) has confirmed this, saying that lacking a budget for research is an obstacle impeding workplace learning implementation.

12. *Lack of reward*: this barrier relates to a lack of a system for motivating and encouraging employees to engage in workplace learning. (Silverman, 2003) has proposed that there is a relationship between rewarding and attending a learning activity, however, it may be a barrier that some workplaces do not consider the importance of rewarding. Silverman cited (Benett et al. (1992) who noted that an absence of offering a reward causes the employees not to attend a training program. More authors (Faladillah et al., 2020; Gugssa & Kabeta, 2021; McLaughlin et al., 2008) have also confirmed that a lack of recognition and reward mechanisms creates difficulty in conducting workplace learning. Gugssa & Kabeta (2021) stress the significance of recognizing and praising productive employees and senior ones who may be helpful in knowledge sharing at work. Offering a competitive reward can stimulate the members to do work practice. If they are well-recognized, motivated and rewarded they become more reactive and attentive to sharing ideas with colleagues (Hartono et al., 2017).

13. *Lack of trust*: this barrier relates to a lack of acceptance, tolerance, and respect among the members within a workplace. This problem seems to be often mentioned in the context of promoting workplace learning. Some authors (Matin & Alavi, 2007; McLaughlin et al., 2008; Yuliana et al., 2020) have confirmed that a lack of trust is an inhibiting factor. An absence of trust may harm a good relationship, which then causes a mismatch within a workplace. According to (Keeling et al., 1998), mismatches matter. For instance, a mismatch in needs between the leader and the members leads to negative feelings towards the resources, skills and knowledge development. On the other hand, developing trust reduces the possibility of a mismatch or incompatibility within a workplace because trust is the solid base of dialogue and collaboration (Matin & Alavi, 2007). Moreover, an issue of trust would also relate to some counteractive behaviors within the workplace, that is acting against the actions and thoughts of the other members (Schilling & Kluge, 2009).

### 3. METHODS

The current study was of a qualitative research design in nature. The recruited participants were determined in order to describe possible barriers to the implementation of workplace learning at their institution. With such a research design, the participants were

involved in a semi-structured interview in which the interviewer could probe into further detail. According to Boyce and Neale (2006), and Dawson (2002), conducting a qualitative research approach is suitable for investigating the sample's point of view regarding a specific issue as well as the related behaviors. In this paper, the sample consisted of 12 faculty members working at a Laotian university, using a purposive sampling technique. The participants were purposely selected, by the authors, based on different characteristics, such as age, gender, position and work experience (Laerd Dissertation, 2012). The essence of using this sampling method is to hear perspectives from different groups of informants. Each of the participants was scheduled for an interview. The interview protocol contained both open-ended and closed questions and the validity of the interview questions were run through an expert check. Furthermore, the research instrument also underwent a pilot study with one participant and this confirmed that the questions were well-understood by that individual. All the participants were interviewed by the same author and Lao was the language of conversation during the interviews. Each interview was recorded and notes were taken. This was to ensure the loss of key information. The length of time for the interviews ranged from 24-29 minutes.

The data obtained from the interviews was transcribed before conducting an analysis. The current paper employed a qualitative content analysis, through a deductive category assignment (Mayring, 2014), in which the category system was initially developed based on theoretical concepts, of which, there were 12 sub-categories: "Lack of interpersonal communication", "Lack of self-efficacy", "Lack of self-learning", "Lack of team learning" and "Lack of self-motivation" - these aspects are considered as individual barriers; and organizational barriers include: "Leadership", "Lack of learning culture", "Administrative system", "Lack of expertise", "Limited facilities", "Budgeting", "Lack of rewarding" and "Lack of trust". One additional category "gender" was also deductively included. Based on the method, a coding framework was established beforehand in which category definitions, anchor examples and coding rules were prepared. There were two main categories, including individual and organizational barriers. According to (Schreier (2014), a coding framework acts as a key part of the qualitative content analysis because this part explains the body of the interpretation of the study. To ensure the validity of the coding framework, including all the categories, formative and summative checks were conducted in which the categories were revised accordingly, along with the coding (Mayring, 2000). In the coding process, data transcriptions were coded line by line, even including the interviewer's questions (Schreier, 2014); all the process was carried out in Lao and the English-only translation was made for the purpose of the publication. An extract of the coding framework is presented in *Table 1* below.

**Table 1.** An extract of the coding framework

No.	Category names	Definitions	Anchor examples
C1	Lack of self-learning	The unwillingness of individuals to engage in learning and/or seeking new knowledge.	<i>"From my point of view, what I see is that some faculty members are only waiting for a push by others to learn something. This is a barrier" (Case 3).</i>
C2	Leadership	The workplace's action of leading is the ability to influence the members for learning and transformation within the workplace.	<i>"One of the barriers in the leadership of our workplace appears to be a transparency of work practices" (Case 10).</i>
C3	Administrative system	A workplace's internal structure informs the direction of certain activities, such as coordination, task allocation and supervision, to achieve the goals.	<i>"An unclear strategy is a huge barrier in our workplace. This barrier causes a problem with job performance among faculty members and they find it hard to perceive the purpose of their roles and the direction of the workplace" (Case 2).</i>

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As stated earlier, the present paper looks into the barriers perceived by faculty members in implementing workplace learning in higher education. Through analyzing the interview data obtained from 12 informants, the findings found 2 major groups of barriers: individual and organizational barriers which appear to be hindering the conduct of workplace learning in higher education. The detailed description of each group of barriers is discussed as follows:

##### 4.1 Individual barriers

According to the analysis, individual barriers, including lack of team learning, lack of self-motivation, lack of self-learning, lack of interpersonal communication, lack of self-efficacy and gender perspective, tend to hinder workplace learning.

1. Lack of team learning: this refers to a barrier concerning a low level of teamwork among the faculty members. For this barrier, 6 out of 12 participants reported a limited ability to work and learn together in the workplace. They are likely not to communicate about work very much. Moreover, some faculty members are not keen to listen to others' ideas, including a lack of sharing knowledge within the workplace. This tendency is reflected in the following quote:

*"A barrier found in capacity building is that there is no the same practice. It is obvious that some units are working hard while others are not. This is a simple situation representing some dissonance in learning at our workplace (Case 3)."*

2. Lack of self-motivation: this barrier relates to a limited aspiration for learning and a feeling of resistance to change among the faculty members. In this regard, 5 out of 12 participants reported that a major barrier relates to personal motivation for learning. They explained that the faculty members in their workplace expressed some

demotivation when it comes to professional development and learning for change. It is observed that they are very passive and uninterested in learning. Furthermore, they are not willing to understand the external environment. A sample statement is demonstrated below.

*“There might be often a case when nominating a faculty member to a training program, but he/she makes excuses not to. I try my best to encourage the members to further learning but they are not very positive about it (Case 10).”*

As mentioned earlier, some of the participants also claimed that they are fine with the existing knowledge they have. Therefore, they do not seem to perceive the value of updating themselves with new knowledge. A sample quote is below:

*“Learning is individualistic. I think that learning should start with oneself. If he/she is not ready for change, learning will never happen (Case 3).”*

3. Lack of self-learning: this barrier is about not having a learning-like behavior. According to the data, 4 out of 12 participants reported that the employees do not seem to seek a self-learning opportunity. For them, they only learn something if someone or the workplace pushes them to do so. This is reflected below:

*“From my point of view, what I have seen is that some faculty members are only waiting for a push from others to learn something. This is a barrier (Case 3).”*

4. Lack of interpersonal communication: this barrier relates to the ineffectiveness of communication among colleagues. In this aspect, 3 out of 12 have shared that there is a barrier with the lack of good communication skills by the faculty members, such as communication with partner organizations, coordination, and collaboration within the workplace. This communication inability may sometimes lead to misunderstanding or conflict and even failure. According to the quotes, misunderstanding may occur due to not listening to others. A sample statement is revealed as follows:

*It seems to me, that a dominant barrier would be the faculty members' interpersonal communication, that is the inability to communicate to the point. One related issue is that they tend to stick to their standpoints by not accepting others' ideas (Case 10).*

Furthermore, a lack of self-efficacy and a gender perspective are two additional barriers to the conduct of workplace learning. That means these attributes represent a negative attitude. By not being able to take a risk or make a decision about learning, he/she will never get an opportunity for learning, as stated by one participant. Moreover, gender is seen as a limitation for participating in a learning activity. Some faculty members tend to perceive that a learning opportunity is linked to gender.

To conclude, the conduct of workplace learning at the sampled higher education institution appears to face different individual barriers. They are concerned with the faculty members' lack of team learning, they are not willing to discuss and share ideas with others; they have low motivation for learning, are likely not to invest personal dedication into learning for personal growth; there is a lack of self-learning, that is a limitation of seeking learning opportunities; there is a lack of communication skills, that is a limited ability to

communicate information effectively; also a lack of self-efficacy, this is an individuals' perceived confidence to attend to a learning activity; and a barrier of gender perspective, some faculty members still have traditional beliefs and habits.

#### 4.2 Organizational barriers

This group of barriers encompasses several organizational attributes that impede the conduct of workplace learning, including leadership, lack of learning culture, budgeting, the administrative system, lack of expertise, lack of trust, limited facilities and a lack of reward.

5. Leadership: this aspect refers to the unqualified leadership of the workplace. According to 8 out of 12 participants, a barrier is that the leader is not likely to encourage the employees to work practices and that also includes a lack of evaluation and monitoring by the leader. Moreover, it appears that the leader does not see the employees' potential knowledge, and lacks an assessment of the professional training needs of all employees. As a result of this, the leader does not seem to arrange tasks for them accordingly. Some quotes of this tendency are demonstrated as follows:
6. A barrier is that the leader of the workplace is not able to enhance and /or motivate the employees to perform a job. Also, I see that the leader does not care about arranging tasks for employees (Case 4). Another perspective exists, whereby the transparency of the leadership style of the workplace is in doubt among the employees. This reflection is presented in the following quote:

One of the barriers in the leadership of our workplace appears to be transparency of work practices (Case 10).

7. Lack of learning culture: this problem refers to an absence of a variety of activities for professional development. According to the data, 6 out of 12 participants reported that the conduct of learning activities is not well-structured and the employees are not supported to learn things regularly. Instead, the faculty focuses more on developing students' skills. The following statement reflects this:

*At our faculty, there are very few capacity-building implementations for the faculty members, compared to the provision of skills for students (Case 11).*

8. Budgeting: This concern appears to hinder the conduct of workplace learning as well. It refers more to the shortage of financial support for learning activities in the workplace. 6 out of 12 participants shared that budgeting tends to be a barrier in their workplace: without the capacity of funding, the learning activities at work cannot be implemented. Moreover, they reported that finalizing the budgeting priorities tends to be mismatched in the workplace. This reflection is demonstrated in the following statement.

*I think that the faculty has a limited budget to support workplace learning activities. Hence, different activities cannot be implemented simultaneously and sometimes some learning activities cannot be funded (Case 2).*

9. Administrative system: this aspect refers to a concern regarding the management approach within the workplace and this seems to hinder the implementation of workplace learning. According to the data, 5 out of 12 participants reported that individual faculty members and units cannot perform jobs functionally due to unclear



regulations and human resource management. A sample quote points that out in the following statements.

*An unclear strategy is a huge barrier in our workplace. This barrier causes a a problem with job performance among faculty members and they find it hard to perceive the purpose of their roles and the direction of the workplace (Case 2).*

10. Lack of expertise: this issue relates to the lack of experts and the opaque knowledge among the members. According to the data, 5 out of 12 participants reported that a limitation for conducting workplace learning is due to the faculty members' experiences and specialized knowledge. This condition serves as a barrier because they do not have considerable skills to transfer to colleagues. Also, some faculty members, who have participated in a professional training program, seem not to be able to translate the knowledge learned into actual practice. This tendency is reflected below:

*What is considered to be a barrier is the lack of experience in work practice. Furthermore, we don't have an expert to share a particular specialization with our faculty members (Case 6).*

11. Lack of trust: this aspect refers to the trust among members of the workplace. The lack of trust appears to be a barrier to implementing workplace learning in the sampled institution. 4 out of 12 participants explained that the leader sometimes lacks trust in the faculty members, this involves not listening to different ideas proposed by the members, not valuing the members' performance, not accepting their productivity, as well as the disrespect among colleagues. A sample statement is as follows:

*A barrier that we have at the faculty concerns not allowing the members to think independently, not accepting their innovative ideas and not praising what the members have achieved (Case 5).*

Furthermore, more barriers include limited facilities and an ineffective rewarding system. At the faculty, the facilities that support the employees' learning are problematic, including the infrastructure, learning materials, IT equipment, etc., as stated by 2 participants. Last but not least, one participant recommended that promotion for learning should be integrated into a rewarding and recognition system. This participant shared that this remains a limitation in the workplace.

In conclusion, the organizational attributes appear to be a major barrier to implementing workplace learning in this case study. Those barriers include leadership, that is the unqualified leader; lack of learning culture, referring to the lack of professional training within the workplace; budgeting, referring to the limited funds and effectiveness of financing; unclear management, which is an ambiguous administrative system; lack of expertise, that is the opaque knowledge of employees and the absence of experts; lack of trust, referring to the respect and the trust of the leader-members and among the members themselves; limited facilities and lack of rewarding, with these last two relating to the support in the implementation of learning activities.

This present paper, having interviewed 12 faculty members from a Laotian university,

finds two major barriers concerning individual and organizational factors. The findings seem to be consistent with several previous studies. The barriers merging from individual factors include a lack of team learning. According to the participants, most members of their institution are not very active in discussing issues, sharing ideas and learning from each other. This tendency has also been confirmed in many other studies (Faladillah et al., 2020; Fiza et al., 2015; Guggssa & Kabeta, 2021). They do not seem to be open-minded about accepting other people's different ideas and even keep their own knowledge to themselves, not wanting to share it in the workplace. McLaughlin and colleagues (2008) explained that an individual being passive about knowledge-sharing may be due to a person's perceived lack of reward. This study also reveals that one of the individual barriers concerns resistance to change. This tendency is found in some individuals' negative attitudes to learning and the learning environment of the workplace (Keeling et al., 1998; McLaughlin et al., 2008; Voolaid and Ehrlich, 2017). Keeling et al. (1998) asserted that a major barrier to promoting workplace learning is the need to overcome employees' lack of perception of the value and benefits of change. Another reason for not wanting to change may be caused by one's feeling of unnecessarily seeking new ideas and knowledge (Matin & Alavi, 2007). Furthermore, a dominant barrier found is that some faculty members lack good communication skills - they do not seem to feel confident in communicating with each other within the workplace, including in the coordination and/or collaboration with partner organizations. This is also consistent with past works (Fiza et al., 2015; Makambe, 2014; Matin & Alavi, 2007; McLaughlin et al., 2008). According to Maxwell (2014), learning something is connected with opportunities for observing, listening to, and working together with more experienced peers, including building relationships with peers. Moreover, two additional dimensions also appear to be somewhat significant barriers: a lack of self-efficacy among faculty members, with some of them not seeming willing to take a risk or make a decision about their learning. According to the literature reviewed (Billet, 1995; Fiza et al., 2015; Matin & Alavi, 2007; McLaughlin et al., 2008), it is another barrier to implementing workplace learning. However, this problem was mentioned by only one participant in the current study. Along with these, a gender issue was also raised by one participant as a barrier. A study by Fiza et al. (2015) has also pointed out that this problem reflects a negative attitude toward women colleagues within the workplace and this issue may affect the confidence level of other women workers for learning and development. Future research would do well to investigate this issue.

Regarding organizational barriers, the current study finds that one barrier relates to unqualified leadership. Workplace learning at the sampled institution is affected by the leader's lack of motivation for employees to learn on the job, including a lack of evaluation and monitoring of the members' work practices. An absence of leadership assessing the employee's potential knowledge causes a lack of understanding of their learning needs (Faladillah et al., 2020). The study also pointed out that an opportunity for professional development and training at the faculty is not very accountable, as some faculty members were found to have little chance of attending such activities. According to (Matin and Alavi, 2007), a leader should focus his/her attention on their leadership rather than on management. According to the interview data, most participants all agreed that meetings, reflection and group discussion are sources of learning but they have little access to that. This also reflects another barrier to developing a learning culture. True workplace learning should involve regular reflection of the members in the workplace (Čierna et al., 2016; Salaman & Butler, 1994, cited in Rowley, 1998). A learning culture influences the members' efforts to learn, encouraging them to engage more in group interactions (Maxwell, 2014). However,

developing a learning culture needs strong leadership (Khalifa & Ayoubi, 2014). A cause for this barrier could be that the sampled faculty members lack a supporting mechanism and a vision of workplace learning development (Faladillah et al., 2020), as the situation can be seen that faculty members have a heavy workload for their teaching mission. That means the sampled faculty focuses more on developing students' skills but less on the empowerment of faculty members. It is critical for a workplace to establish a mechanism of knowledge transfer (McLaughlin et al., 2008), effective planning and clearly-determined goals (Fenwick, 2010) when developing workplace learning. Furthermore, several past studies (Billett, 1995; Faladillah et al., 2020; Makambe, 2014; Matin & Alavi, 2007; McLaughlin et al., 2008) have proposed that a lack of facilities is a barrier to workplace learning. This study seems to find a similar tendency, as the sampled faculty does not have the readiness in providing sufficient infrastructure, IT equipment and related materials in promoting workplace learning. Another last barrier that is found includes a reward system. This is a limitation in which most faculty members are reluctant to engage in self-learning due to personal negative perceptions of the faculty's reward (Faladillah et al., 2020; Gugssa & Kabeta, 2021; McLaughlin et al., 2008). A well-organized rewarding system may also encourage competent staff and/or knowledgeable seniors to share their valuable experiences with colleagues (Gugssa and Kabeta, 2021; Hartono et al., 2017).

## 5. CONCLUSION

The current study probes into barriers to workplace learning in higher education. 12 faculty members from a Laotian university participated in a one-to-one interview. By integrating a qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2014), the finding reveals that there appear to be two levels: individual and organizational barriers that impede workplace learning implementation. At an individual level, dominant barriers are explained by having insufficient motivation for learning, the faculty participants do not seem to value learning new things, having low self-interest and also do not think that they need to; another significant barrier includes a lack of team learning. Most of them do not care to discuss, exchange and share knowledge with colleagues. Moreover, they do not seem to possess learning habits or learning-seeking behaviors. Regarding organizational barriers, unqualified leadership appears to be a frequently cited barrier. Faculty members with expertise in specific knowledge are found to lack the opportunity to use their knowledge at work. This problem could be due to a lack of regular follow-up and/or evaluation of the employees' tasks and work practices. The study also finds a limited learning culture as another organizational barrier to implementing workplace learning. Since the current study analyzed barriers qualitatively, one limitation can be concerned with the generalization of a larger population of faculty members. Moreover, one of the most dominant barriers is leadership. Future inquiry may further investigate the influence of leadership on workplace learning in higher education. Together with this, the two levels of individual and organizational barriers identified in the present study should be further tested by future quantitative research.

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