SELF-ACTUALIZATION AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING THEORIES: IMPLICATIONS FOR VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND COUNSELLING

Dr. F. E. E. NWANKWO
E-mail: nwankfez@gmail.com Dept, of Edu. Psychology (G&C), Nwafor Orizu Coll. of Education, Nsugbe

Abstract
This paper examines the relevance of Abraham Maslow's self-actualization (motivational) theory and Kolb's experiential learning theory for the pre-service (vocational) training of the individual by the training institution to acquire the requisite knowledge and skills for the workplace. Each employable personnel should have the appropriate subject matter knowledge and the associated critical and analytical skills applicable to the practical context of work. He has to learn from experience and take responsibility for improving own performance on the job. Maslow's model provides for constant striving by the individual to do things to the best of one's ability, and better than before, towards self- actualization. This would likely motivate the individual towards acquiring the needed training for the vocation or career aspired to. Kolb's experiential learning model emphasizes the value/role of concrete experience by doing in both training and re-training for skills acquisition of the individual by the training institution for all levels of employment. To improve individual personnel's knowledge and skill for direct work applications and ultimately improve organisational performance, the training institution has to knit together the self-actualization need of the individual and the requisite training as propellant for career choice or placement. The implications of these theories for pre-ser\'ice training, workplace training and counselling have been highlighted and recommendations made for improved overall instructional training environment and vocational counselling.
Key words: self-actualization; experiential learning; pre-service training institution; workplace training; vocational counselling

Introduction

The individual studies to gain subject matter knowledge and develop the associated critical and analytical skills to be applied to the more practical context of work. It is in the workplace or enterprise that the individual earns a living in his strives towards self-actualization. He learns from earlier experiences and takes responsibility for improving on future performance on the job and retension. Therefore, the individual is motivated to seek specific training and employment in order to live out a life of self-actualization within the society. Therefore, the individual must possess the four major skills areas that relate to employability:

- Traditional intellectual skills - to apply theoretical knowledge to practice
- The personal and key skills - that relate to communication, data handling, problem solving and management of self
- Personal attributes - pertaining to self-reliance, flexibility, creativity, resilience, initiative, reliability
- Knowledge about how organizations work - in terms of aims and objectives, structure and appraisal procedures (Work Experience Module, 2012).

The enterprise of whatever description and scope, as a business entity, has organizational functions that may include the following:

- Production/service
- Administrative and accounting

- Processing and packaging
- Marketing and sales.

These functions have to be performed by categories of personnel beginning with: the worker; the supervisor / manager; and the management /owner / entrepreneur. All of them must be appropriately trained, and adequately motivated for optimum performance. Both the academic and work-based environments are vital for preparing the individual for work.

Among the theories relevant for the training of the individual for the vocation or career of his choice, are the theories of self-actualization by Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and experiential learning by Kolb. They sum up to what drives an individual towards knowledge and skills acquisition; strategies employed; and the opportunities/avenues for validating acquired competencies both for employment and job progression in whatever discipline or career of interest. The two theories have implications for the pre-service training of the individual; his/her on the job training as well as the vocational counselling practice as highlighted in this paper.

Self-actualization theory: Abraham Maslow's Needs Hierarchy.
Human motivation is the psychological feature that arouses an individual to action toward a desired goal, and elicits controls and sustains certain goal-directed behaviours. It is the crucial element in setting and attaining goals. Individuals can influence their own levels of motivation and self-control.

Behaviour is both directed and result from unsatisfied needs: and being goal-directed as one does something that leads to achievement of a goal. The goal is the end product while the need is the driving force that spurs one towards that result. A number of needs vie for satisfaction, but we satisfy the strongest needs first. The need for self-actualization seems to drive the individual into choosing a particular vocation or career. In the performance of the individual in that particular career, the individual strives to attain self-actualization. Therefore, the individual is self-motivated to undertake a course of instruction or training that would enable him enter the ascribed vocation towards ultimate self-actualization.

In the hierarchy of needs, Abraham Maslow (1954) postulates that individuals are motivated to satisfy a number of different kinds of needs, adding that as we satisfy the most proponent needs first, then other needs loom-up and become motivators to our behaviour (Microsoft Encarta, 2009). Maslow represents this prepotency of needs as hierarchy, with the most proponent needs at the bottom of the ladder, adding that prepotency decreases as one progresses upwards towards self actualization as shown below:

5. Self-actualization:- reaching own maximum potential: doing own best thing.
4. Esteem: - self respect, respect from others, recognition.
3. Belonging: - affiliation, acceptance, being part of something.
2. Safety: - physical safety, psychological security.
1. Physiological: - hunger, thirst, sex, rest.

Maslow maintains that physiological needs are the most proponent and once satisfied, the next level of needs emerges. Maslow describes self-actualization as the desire for self-fulfillment; to become everything that one is capable of becoming and more and more of what one is. For

instance, when the individual belongs to an enterprise or organization, he is motivated by a desire to be held in esteem. People need to be thought of as worthwhile by others; recognized as valuable; and see themselves as worthwhile. Without this type of self-concept, one sees oneself as drifting, cut-off, pointless. Much of the dissatisfaction with certain types of jobs centres on the perception by the people performing them as demeaning and damaging to their self-concept. No job in any workplace should be seen as demeaning. Rather one should take pride in both obtaining self-sustenance and securing needed opportunities for self-improvement and growth in the chosen career or vocation.
The specific form these needs take vary greatly from person to person and may be expressed maternally, athletically, aesthetically, inventively and so on. Individuals express, to varying degrees, all levels of needs at the same time. However, individuals do not progress simply from one level in the hierarchy to another in a straightforward, orderly manner as there is ever-changing pull from all levels and types of needs. In almost all organisational or occupational settings, individual juggle their needs for security (job security) with the needs for esteem.

The needs hierarchy does not necessarily reflect the same prepotency for every individual as some people are able to subordinate one need for another as exemplified by the war hero or the labour leader. Once a need is satisfied, it is no longer a motivator until it re-emerges. Maslow's model provides for constant growth of the individual as one is always striving to do things to the best of one's ability and better than before. Similarly, the enterprise or organization sets goals that reflect the desire to remain competitive by producing maximally at the minimum costs possible using the available work-force and materials. The work-force has to be adequately trained and sufficiently motivated. The pre-service training of the individual for any career or vocation tends to be institutional-based requiring due certification at the end of the appropriately prescribed course of instruction. The training institution should, therefore, factor the self-actualization needs of enrollees in their training and not just chum-out unmotivated, unemployable graduates.

Experiential learning theory/model
Kolb and Fry (1975) developed the Experiential Learning Model (ELM) composed of four elements that typically begins with:

- Concrete experience:- Doing
- Observation of and reflection on that experience:- Reviewing
- Formulation of abstract concepts based on that experience:- Concluding
- Testing the new concepts:- Planning

Experiential learning theory defines learning as the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. "Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience"(Kolb, 1984 p.41). The experiential learning model portrays two modes of grasping experience as: Concrete Experience (CE), and Abstract Conceptualization (AC); and two modes of transforming experience as Reflective Observation (RO) and Active Experimentation (AE). These are relevant for both pre-service and on-the-job training.

According to the 4-stage learning cycle, immediate or concrete experiences are the basis for observation and reflections. These reflections are assimilated and distilled into abstract concepts

from which new implications for action can be drawn. These implications are actively tested and serve as a guide in creating new experiences.

Experiences may be grasped by perceiving new information through experiencing the concrete, tangible, felt qualities of the world, thereby relying on our senses and immersing ourselves in concrete reality. On the other hand, an individual can perceive, grasp, or take hold of new information through symbolic representation or abstract conceptualization by thinking about, analysing, or systematically planning, rather than using sensation as a guide. In transforming or processing experiences, some individuals tend to carefully watch others who are involved in the experience and reflect on what happens as in modeling and mentorship. Such individuals form Reflective Observation. Some others choose to jump right in and start doing things, in Active Experimentation.

Because of our hereditary equipment, and our past life experiences, and the demands of our present environment, we develop a preferred way of choosing learning style namely, diverging, assimilating, converging, and accommodating (Kolb, 1984). This is to enable us acquire the requisite knowledge and skills for efficient job performance at all levels of duty assignment in any enterprise or organization in our choice career or vocation. The training institution should take full cognizance of both the individual learning styles and experiential learning theory in fashioning and delivering instructions in any vocation or career.

Implications for pre-service training institutions

Experiential learning as the process of making meaning from direct experience or simply learning from experience (Itin, 1999) demands that both pre-service training and on the job training be concrete, preceding eventual deployment at all organizational levels. Experiential learning is learning through reflection on doing through observation and interaction with the environment. Thus, one makes discoveries and experiments with knowledge first hand. Dimensions of Experiential learning are analysis, initiative and immersion by actively involving the learner in a concrete experience (Stavenga de Jong, Wierstra & Hermanussen, 2006). The individual learner should be encouraged to be directly involved in the experience, and then use analytic skills to gain a better understanding of the new knowledge and retain the information for a longer time. Most skills training practices demand direct hands-on-doing for the skill and competency to flow.

Experiential learning requires qualities such as self-initiative and self-evaluation; and employs the whole learning wheel from goal setting, to experimenting and observing, to reviewing, and finally, action planning in order to enable the individual to learn new skills, new attitudes or even entirely new ways of thinking (Kolb, Boyatzis& Mainemelis,1999) . Actively learning and innovative work-force is mandatory for any meaningful transformation to take place in the workplace towards self- actualization.

For a genuine learning Experience to occur, as knowledge is continuously gained through both personal and environmental experiences, there must be certain elements/abilities (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007). The learner should therefore:

1. Be willing to be actively involved in the experience
2. Be able to reflect on the experience

3. Possess and use analytical skills to conceptualize the experience
4. Possess decision-making and problem solving skills in order to use the new ideas gained from the experience.

With these, the individual would be equipped to always increase his job performance skills and be motivated towards higher responsibility and productivity to enhance the enterprise growth and development. The individual thus acquires the three keys to transformational learning: Experience; Critical reflection; and Development (Merriam et al, 2007).

Experience is an important factor in one's ability to create, retain and transfer knowledge (Argole, McEvily & Regans, 2003). For critical reflection, the individual demonstrates the capacity for reflection and analysis by contemplating the ramifications of the learning experience and responsibilities. Development involves taking their personal development into consideration when creating the learning opportunities.

Implications for workplace training and performance

The organisation is in constant flux responding to the impact of an ever-changing operating environment. "One key to organisational survival and growth is the efficiency of the work force" (Osinem & Nwoji, 2010 p.53) that need to be constantly trained and retrained. Training can improve productivity by equipping the individuals' with additional new knowledge, skills and attitude needed to enhance performance (Osinem & Nwoji, 2010). Therefore, an enterprise or organization trains the individual worker for enhanced performance. The motivated learner studies a particular theory and then puts it into practice when presented the opportunity to do so. Besides, towards the attainment of self-actualization, an individual learner is more self-directed, has a repertoire of experience, is internally motivated to learn subject matter that can be immediately applied to the developmental tasks of his/her social role (Merriam et al, 2007).

The organisation or enterprise is in constant need to increase productivity; improve the quality of work-force and raise morale; develop new skills, use correctly new tools/machines/processes; reduce waste and other overhead costs; fight obsolescence in skills, technologies, methods; develop replacement, prepare people for advancement (Osinem & Nwoji, 2010). Management should accept that people change their habits, outlook & attitudes and have the capacity to improve (Travers, 1998). Management should provide good and right work atmosphere, pay promptly and promote rapport among employees. By doing so, the work-force would be sufficiently motivated for sustainable production output to meet the goals of the enterprise or organization.

Implications for vocational counselling

Vocational counselling process demands that the individual's aptitude and disposition be factored in guiding him/her towards the career option or vocation that would best enable him/her attain self- actualization. The need for self-actualization tends to drive the search for the choice career. The information on the prescribed per-service course of instruction necessary for success in any given career needs to be readily available to the counsellor for the proper guidance of the individual.

The pre-service training institution for any given vocation or career has to deliver quality instruction to maximally benefit the enrollee and equipping him/her for self-actualization. The

individual enrollee as so guided by the counsellor sees the life transforming effect of the vocational guidance process. If, on the other hand, the pre-training institution delivers poor instruction to the extent that the enrollee cannot fit into the workplace, the vocational guidance effort would be negated. The self-actualization theory informs the training institution that the enrollee comes in with the primary aim of being equipped sufficiently to transit to the workplace to contribute meaningfully. The experiential learning theory suggests that pre-service and in-service trainings should be practice-based to impart the requisite skills and competencies needed for success in the choice vocation or career. The obvious implication is that appropriate trainings for the vocations should be delivered by the training institutions to make vocational counselling meaningful and effective.

The enterprise or organisation is in constant flux responding to the impact of an ever-changing operating environment and improving the efficiency of the work force. Constant training and retraining of the work force can improve productivity by equipping the individuals' with additional new knowledge, skills and attitude needed to enhance performance. Therefore, the workplace has to be both challenging and rewarding enough to propel the individual towards self-actualization. It appears obvious that the more people attain self-actualization in their chosen vocation or career, the more successful the guidance efforts in that direction.

Summary and Conclusion

The self-actualization theory by Abraham Maslow provides the motivation for the individual to seek the vocation/career and training in order to attain the maximum potential in life. The experiential learning theory by David Kolb prescribes the training mode to enable the individual to attain the requisite skills and competencies necessary for success in any chosen vocation or career.

Both the enterprise/organisation and the individual have goals they are motivated to attain. While the organisation sets goals in order to remain competitive and remain in business, the individual set goals to remain in employment and derive maximum benefits from the organisation, in any vocation or career of choice. There is mutuality in set-goals and their attainment towards personal fulfillment of the individual and the continued survival of the enterprise or organisation, given the vagaries of the operational environment.

The self-actualization and experiential learning theories have implications for the pre-service training institutions. Vocationally intended pre-service training institutions should tailor their instructions to impart the requisite skills and competencies to the trainees. This is to enable them fit into the workplace successfully. Maslow's hierarchy of needs provides insight into the behaviour and conduct of an individual in both the pre-service training and the organisational setting. The individual is motivated to acquire the requisite training for the workplace, and by a desire to be held in esteem, thought of as worthwhile and valued both by colleagues and management, and en-route to self- actualization.The individual juggles the need for security (of job) with needs for esteem. As the individuals are endowed with the potential to always strive to do things to the best of their abilities, they would likely be motivated towards, achieving the goals of the organisation if their unsatisfied needs are emphasized by the management as targets for attainments.

The enterprise or organisation is constantly transforming its practices. As a result, Kolbs experiential learning theory emphasizes that concrete experience be provided to the work-force to enable them improve their skills and transfer same to increased productivity and work out-put. Knowledgeable, properly trained and motivated work-force is the key to the modernization of organizational practices.

On the job training of workforce, upon placement, enables the organisation to have full appreciation of the work-force and how to appropriately train them for enhanced performance. It is important to optimize the work climate and interpersonal relationships in the work place by promoting development of skill, confidence and competence. In all, a pro-active enterprise or organisation needs to command knowledgeable, skilled, and competent work-force working, and the conducive environment for carrying out all the practices that make for innovative response to the demands of the market.

The implications for vocational counselling are obvious. Vocational guidance would be enhanced if the pre-service training delivers quality instruction that enables the individual transit on graduation to the workplace. Besides, the workplace that provides the individual with the working tools and motivation would likely enable him/her to live out a self-actualized life would also enhance the vocational/career guidance process.

Recommendations

1. An individual should seek pre-service training in vocation/career to enable him/her attain self- actualization in life.
2. The individual need to be assisted by the counsellor to make appropriate career choice.
3. The pre-service training institution should be able to deliver quality instruction to enable the individual acquire the requisite knowledge, skills and competencies to function efficiently towards attaining his/her maximum potential.
4. An enterprise or organization should keep abreast with modem practices that will guarantee its viability and relevance, and critical workplace training to the individual worker to enable him/her attain maximum productivity.
5. The enterprise or organization should ensure the welfare of the work-force in order to appreciate their own mutual with the organization to survive and progress in life.
6. The counsellor should have relevant vocational or career information in order to guide the counsellee towards the path for the attainment of self-actualization in life.

References

"Abraham Maslow", Microsoft Encarta® 2009 [DVD], Redmond, W A: Microsoft Corporation, 2008.

ltin, C. M. (1999).Reasserting the philosophy of experiential education as a vehicle for change in the 21st Century. *The Journal of Experiential Education, 22(2),* 91-98

Kolb, D. A. (1984*).Experiential Learning: Experience as the source of learning and development.* New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

Kolb, D. A., Boyatzis, R. E. &Mainemelis, C. (1999). *Experiential learning theory: Previous research and new directions.* Cleveland, O. H: Case Western Reserve University Press.

Kolb, D. A. & Fry, R. (1975).Towards an applied theory of experiential learning. InC. Cooper *(Ed).Theories of group process.* London: John Wiley.

Merriam, S. B., Caffarella, R. S. & Baumgartner, L. M. (2007)*Learning in adulthood: A comprehensive guide.* San Francisco: John Wiley.

Osinem, E. C. &Nwoji, U. C.(2010). *Students industrial work experience in Nigeria (rev.ed).* Enugu: Cheston books.

Stavenga-Jong, J. A., Wierstra, R. F. A. & Hermancissen, J. (2006). An exploration of the relationship between academic and experiential learning approaches in vocational education. *British Journal of Educational Psychology 76(1)* pp 155-169.

Travers, N. (1998). *Experiential learning and students' self-regulation.* Saragota Springs, NY: The National Centre on Adult Learning.