Course Name: Organizational Behaviour: Individual Dynamics in Organization

Professor Name: Prof. Dr. Abraham Cyril Issac

Department Name: School of Business

Institute Name: Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati

Week – 09

Lecture – 01

Lecture 41: Defining learning

Hello learners. Namaskar. Welcome back to the course on Organizational Behaviour, Individual Dynamics in Organization. Today we start with module 9 and this is one of the most interesting modules of the entire course where we actually look into learning, the thing which we are all doing, which we keep on doing and we will do till our death bed. So, on this note let us start the module on learning and as part of the lecture 1 of this module I will be looking into the definition of learning. So, basics of learning, understanding learning.

I am Dr. Abraham Cyril Issac. I am a faculty at the School of Business, Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati. So let us move to the theme of today's lecture.

Learning occurs when interaction with the environment leads to behaviour change. So, I feel that this theme itself warrants a certain discussion. The moment I pitch this theme I think there would be thoughts running in your mind that every second we are learning. There is every single opportunity when we go outside or when we are in the room, when we are introspecting ourselves, there are different types of learning that is happening in a real time scenario. When you are looking into learning as such, if that learning is not creating an impact in your life, in other sense, in other words, if that learning is not leading you to a behaviour change, then that learning is of no use. So on that theme we will start today's lecture.

Let us understand the basics of learning in a very clear manner. Learning can be defined specifically as the process of acquiring knowledge, skills, behaviours or understanding through study, experience or teaching. So, there are lot of factors that have been compressed into this one simple definition. So let us dissect this definition one by one and see what specifically learning is.

When you are looking into learning, it is certainly acquiring knowledge. You are here as part of this course or as a student of this course of organisational behaviour because you

have a drive to acquire certain knowledge. Now it could be based on your requirement in industry, it could be based on your requirement in the academia or it could be based on your interest to the discipline. Being a very generic subject, it is possible that many a student here is being a student here because of inherent interest on the topic, not because of any other extrinsic motivation. So, acquiring knowledge happens to be the first and the foremost aspect of learning, there is no doubt about it.

When you look into training purposes or learnings associated with training, there is some skill development that is happening. You know when we talk about things like skill development mission or when we specifically look into institutions which train for skill enhancement, then we see that there is learning that is happening specifically with respect to skill development. Now as the theme of the lecture says, there should be a behaviour change also. Understanding that this particular behaviour in this context will not be the right suitable way to go ahead, rather there should be a modification in our behaviour and that modified behaviour would be the right behaviour to go ahead would be another learning and there could be also learning that happens to study in terms of detailing on what you have heard about something. You can research on that, many a time in this particular course itself we fall back to empirical research, I take support from the text book, I take support from empirical research papers, so all these aspects are a detailed study on the particular aspect.

Another important aspect could be to learn via experience. Anything which experience can teach you, seldom any book or any particular friend can teach. So, there are certain things which we do, which we learn by doing, there are certain things we gain through the experience. When we look into let us say situations in organization, when the particular knowledge because I will be detailing this particular idea in knowledge management specifically, if we are looking into situations of let us say where you are actually not willing to share knowledge and from this particular organization you move to another organization, what happens is that the knowledge which you have gained, let us say over the training or the improvement that has happened for you, with you, within the organization is also moving with you. So those knowledge which actually should have been converted to the institutional memory, those knowledge is being taken back to a different organization. So, there is no transfer of knowledge that is happening, but let us come back to the topics of our learning today, where experience can also teach you, experience can also make you learn things and ultimately if you can teach somebody something then that is the highest learning experience an individual can have. So, I hope the definition though it looks very complex, it is more comprehensive because it has lot of keywords associated with that which clarifies all the different dimensions associated with learning.

When you are looking into learning specifically, key components of learning include retention, comprehension and application. Now if you take out any particular element, either retention or comprehension or even application I would say that the learning is incomplete. Many scenarios in terms of let us say school teaching or school learning or your learning in your universities or your higher educational institutions have happened in such a way that you were able to comprehend something, you were able to retain also something, but interestingly when it came to application we are not taught enough so that we can apply those learnings in the real world scenario.

Every now and then we face, nobody is perfect in this world, we see that retention, comprehension and application should go hand in hand and that completes the entire cycle of learning altogether. When you look into any one component specifically and you take it out your learning is incomplete, needless to say that. Now learning can occur consciously or unconsciously and it can be influenced by factors such as let us say motivation, attention, prior knowledge, feedback and the learning environment. So basically, when we look into larger scheme of things, we understand that if let us say you are being forced to learn something, those learning or those forced fit arrangements of studying will not actually reflect or translate into learning. Instead if you are intrinsically motivated, if you have the urge to learn, understand let us say let us take an example, a particular coding, a particular program, let us say Python or let us say you want to learn something like running a CNC machine or maybe to understand the details of a particular engine or maybe sometimes to understand a particular circuit, all these aspects pertain to learning and learning will occur ultimately when you are motivated.

So motivation is one factor, you have to have attention. We look into the zone of attention etc. in the coming classes but think of those situations in your organization, you were attending some training programs, you fell asleep. The problem there would not have been let us say the speaker was not motivated or speaker was not interesting rather it was lack of your attention that caused that whole scenario. Now there are also situations where even prior knowledge or even feedback gives you some learning.

There is a subordinate who is telling you sir I do not know whether I should tell but if the thing would have been done in this way, then it would have been better. That is a feedback, that is a learning that is happening right then and there and there are also situations where you actually yearn for learning environment. There are organizations which are not concerned about learning. In one of my earlier lectures I have talked about two situations in an organization where you have either mastery climate or a performance climate. Now organizations which are basically driven by the performance climate, they encourage competition, they encourage people to actively fight against each other to achieve the target. So, the objectives of the organization becomes very critical. Whereas

there are organizations which actually promote a sort of mastery climate where learning is more important, knowledge acquisition becomes relevant.

So let us understand more on learning. Learning is a relatively permanent change in behavior. Now this is where the relevance or the most critical aspect of learning comes into picture. The behavioral change that occurs as a result of person's interaction with the environment. So, I am getting environment cues based on that, that is a learning stimulus for me and based on that stimuli if I am able to change or correct or course correct my behavior nothing like that.

Learning occurs when interaction with the environment leads to behavioral change which is our theme of today's lecture. Some of what we learn is explicit knowledge, something which is written, something which is codified and reading those information or learning those information is relatively easy but there is other diametrically opposite segment which is known as tacit knowledge and tacit knowledge is less codified, less available in the actual platform. You do not have that, you have to, sometimes people gain that through experience, through maybe informal discussions or maybe by doing a task.

So all these aspects accumulate and compound to form what is known as tacit knowledge but learning from the tacit knowledge might be difficult because you do not have a certain level of codification, openness associated with tacit knowledge.

Now when you look into the broad types of knowledge I have introduced explicit and tacit knowledge it will be in detail dealt in the sessions where I will be looking into knowledge sharing and knowledge hiding etc. But I would like to put in a word with respect to explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge.

So, you should understand what do you mean by explicit and implicit or explicit and tacit knowledge. Explicit knowledge is as I have already mentioned formal, codified and easily articulated. So, it is nothing but it is tangible and can be expressed in words or numbers. So, there would be a data, let us say you have a particular pin code, let us say you have a particular pin code 781039. So, what does this indicate? These are just mere numbers for anybody from outside but as a faculty in IIT Guwahati I can relate it to this particular number that this is a pin code of this particular place. You can similarly look into other numbers which actually are a part of you know a codified data. There are pin codes, there are phone numbers, there are registration numbers for cars, there are registration numbers for fires of let us say land movements or let us say real estate etc.

So all these aspects pertain to what we known as what we know as explicit knowledge. This type of knowledge is consciously known and can be easily communicated and shared. So, if somebody is asking me what is the pin code of this particular place, I will

not hesitate and I can directly let him or her know these numbers which ultimately translate into the pin code.

But when you actually look into something like tacit or implicit knowledge it is informal, it is more experiential, it is informal, experiential and difficult to articulate or codify. So, this makes the transfer of tacit knowledge all the more difficult which I will try to ascertain in the module where I will be looking into knowledge sharing, knowledge hiding etc.

So it is easy that when you look into explicit knowledge it is easy to share, but when you look into tacit knowledge it is deeply rooted in personal experience, intuition, insights and practical know how. So, a person who has gained, let us look into the psychology of why you know it is difficult to share tacit knowledge. There could be situations where you have learned this particular knowledge or you have gained this particular piece of information with great effort. You have studied it, you have tried to work let us say years to understand the process, it might be as simple as working of a machinery, but a very complex machinery it has taken you years to formally understand let us say erection and commissioning of a particular equipment or it could be that you have taken years to understand a particular chapter in mathematics. So, it is very unlikely that you are going to share that particular knowledge like that.

You will take some time, you will try to check the benefits and losses associated with that. You will also be very much particular that okay I have got this information, I have got this knowledge after strenuous hard work, after stringent schedules following that, but why should I actually share that? So that makes the sharing of tacit implicit knowledge more difficult. Whereas when you look into explicit knowledge it is codified, it is available, it is well articulated, it is not based on any intuition, it is not based on any insights, it is not based on any personal experience. These are written codified rules or codified statements which you can just take and read. So, this makes the difference between explicit knowledge and implicit knowledge.

When we look into learning we have to understand learning from different perspective. One it is learning is sometimes taken for granted. There is a clear perspective that people who are associated with learning tend to take. There are segments of people who differ, who have a different opinion, who have a different perspective altogether which I will be discussing shortly. But when we actually look into learning for granted, in the taken for granted perspective learning is described in very absolute terms as an essentially reproductive memorizing activity.

So when you are in let us say in school, you are sending your kid to school, they are to a certain level, certain extent they are memorizing the particular aspect or whatever they

are learning. It could be a poem, it could be a prose, it could be let us say even formulae. All these aspects are certainly essentially reproductive memorizing activities. So, if you take this perspective of taken for granted perspective learning and knowledge, knowledge and learning are perceived as congruent. So, we do not actually differentiate that much between learning and knowledge when it is we are going with the perspective of taken for granted. So, you have a knowledge and learning happens naturally. That is the spirit of the whole theme when you look into learning as taken for granted.

People tend to equate knowledge with what might be called discrete units of information. Discrete units of information are nothing but facts and learning is consequently the transfer of these discrete units into the head of the learner. So, you break down the entire scheme of things or entire content whatever it is that is to be learned into smaller fragments and those fragments you break down the entire content into smaller fragments and those fragments, those discrete units of information are simply put facts, they compound and make out or evolve as the particular content of or the knowledge repository.

Now when you look into the different other perspectives of learning, learning becomes thematic. There is an approach where learning is considered more thematic. The thematic character actually manifests itself in the fact that the people in the category start to introduce various qualifications and distinctions as they describe their conceptions of learning as well as their methods of study. So, learning essentially will not be just one thing. More than that let us say you associate a degree to a particular understanding of a particular discipline. You associate, correlate a particular distinction to a particular mastery of a certain subject. So, all these aspects pertain to the thematic understanding of learning.

Now when you look into thematic understanding, there are different themes that have emerged in this thematic understanding or the thematic learning approach. The first of these distinctions concern participants reporting themselves as becoming aware of the influence of the context of learning on what you should learn and how you should set about it. In the previous learning approach if you have noticed that whatever is given your way, whatever is coming your way, whatever is given to you, that piece of information is to be learned.

That is a situation where you hardly find any difference between knowledge and particular learning associated with that. So that we have already seen. But in this context where this theme, the context of learning becomes important. What you should learn and how you should go about it becomes important. So there are processes where you have to be trained in a particular program. So it becomes essential that you should be focusing on that program and how you should learn that that also becomes relevant. Quite a large

proportion of the participants make this distinction, the essential nature which seems to be this criticism of learning in school. As I have already mentioned, as an activity which to a large extent has become stereotyped and routine guided only by the needs and the principles of schools themselves. Some schools would follow a certain pattern, some schools will follow a certain other syllabus. Let us say we have in India, we have the CBSE, ICAC.

So it is based on the principles that are being already codified with respect to the particular school. Based on that we make some distinction that is more stereotype. Perhaps the most interesting distinction concerns the fact that at certain points some of the participants actually report themselves as having started to think about the nature of what is to be learned or what is learned. So, this becomes the critical distinction between the different themes of thematic learning particularly.

Now let us look into a case where you look into behavior modification for promoting individual learning at Tech Growth Solutions which I have taken from the book.

 he background is that Tech Growth Solution is a software development company recognized the need to enhance individual learning initiatives among its employees to maintain a competitive edge in the rapidly evolving tech industry. Despite offering various learning resources, the company observed inconsistent engagement levels among employees in pursuing continuous learning opportunities. So, the key challenge appears that the HR team at Tech Growth identified a need to employ behavior modification techniques to encourage consistent and proactive engagement in learning activities among its workforce. So, the primary challenge was to motivate employees to embrace a learning mindset and actively seek opportunities for self-improvement.

So learning does not stop there. Learning as the theme of the lecture runs, learning is more than just textbook reading. Learning is more than just experiencing a theme. Learning is more than just interacting with others. Learning is a more comprehensive process.

 Learning is a more detailed process. So let us have different approaches. We have seen different approaches in fact in industry and otherwise that have been taken towards learning.

The first and the foremost approach is setting clear objectives and feedback mechanism. So, I venture into an organization, let us say I am given a particular task. Now the task has come with a deadline, the task has come with what are the deliverables. Based on that I start working. You can relate it with your assignments that you do on a day-to-day basis in your organization. Let us say you are a student. Now every single subject or the

course will come with certain assignments, some tests, some presentations, some group tasks etc. Those things are evaluated and based on that you are given a mark or given a score.

Now let us take an example of you being an entrepreneur. So, there is some level of objective that is set that you have to register your organization. You have to, once registered you have to actually think of developing the organization from the scratch. So, there are certain objectives and based on the feedback you learn. So, setting clear objectives and feedback mechanism happens everywhere. It is not particular to let us say student-based arrangement, student-based setup.

It is not particular only to industry. This is the most universal approach that has been observed when it comes to learning. You give a particular objective and based on the objective how you perform certain feedback is given. So, when you are looking into learning per se, this happens to be the most important approach that universally the world has taken. You are given an objective, I repeat again and based on that objective you perform and based on that performance you are given certain feedback. Now another important aspect or approach that learning has seen especially from Skinner's time or behavioral psychologist period specifically or even the Pavlovian experiments also actually support the statement and that is where reinforcement comes into picture.

So this is yet again another approach, positive reinforcement. It starts from when you are a kid, you do a good behavior, you are given a chocolate or you are given something which the kid likes. When you are, let us say you are doing a stunning work in the organization, you are being recognized as maybe the employee of the month or employee of the week, something like that. So, this positive reinforcement itself has emerged as a very important approach towards learning.

Another important approach is gamification of learning. Now this is more connected with industry nowadays. When you look into gamification of learning it is nothing but bringing some gamified elements, bringing some game elements into the context of learning. It could be based on let us say badges, levels or maybe you know activities that would take you to different platforms. So, all these are gamified elements that are being brought in the context of learning. So, what happens is this has translated as a very effective approach even on those learners who are actually inherently not interested in learning.

So the result or the way they actually see the gamified elements that are promoting or those features or those elements are actually promoting learning. So, it might not be that the individual is intrinsically interested. There could be situations where he or she is intrinsically interested. But there are more situations where they are not very keen but the

gamified elements within the whole scheme of the learning will bring the interest, will actually elicit the interest for the particular individual. So, gamification of learning has seen a drastic success especially within industry, especially within training programs, especially within learning of different aspects.

Even in the work schedule you are seeing gamification of learning being clearly brought into a new perspective or new approach towards learning. And then there are also social learning networks. You always fall back towards observational learning. It's hardly a world where you actually go to a classroom, you learn that is there and with the advent of you know let us say online portals like this you are able to study, you are able to learn.

But that said there are certain experiential learning that happens. There are certain social learning networks that can be coming up as an approach or that emanates as an approach towards learning where you tend to see that particular individual. Within your organization there are some professional circles where they actually exchange the knowledge, where they actually try to train the junior workforce. So, this is a classic example of social learning networks. There could be other situations where you actually tend to get trained from other maybe faculty members or trainers who are otherwise not accessible to you, social learning networks. So, all these approaches have emerged and it is not only the fundamental setting clear objectives and feedback mechanisms that are at play.

There are also other approaches like positive reinforcement, gamification of learning, social learning networks etc. So, to conclude the first lecture of this module let me tell you one thing which I would like to reiterate again. Learning is not mere reading. Learning is not mere observing. It is more than that. It is a more complex process and to the complexity the different approaches have tried to make it simpler. When you are given an objective and they are trying to give you a particular feedback there is a learning that is happening which is irreplaceable.

When you are actually put up in an environment where you have features of experiential learning, the learning process is actually getting reflected there. When you are actually bringing in gamified elements to a learning context, even the people who are not interested are suddenly become interested in learning. So, these are the different approaches or these are the different statements which categorically show that learning is not a simple process.

We will look into the complexities of learning in the coming lectures of this module. Till then take care. Thank you for listening to me patiently. We will see you in the next class. Bye-bye.