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 – 02

Lecture 42: How do individuals learn?

Hello students! Welcome back to the course on Organizational Behavior, Individual Dynamics in Organization. We move to the second lecture of module 9 where we were looking into learning and specifically today, we will look into how do individuals learn. Now this is very intriguing question, how do individuals learn? Sometimes we tend to say that we learn by doing, sometimes we say that we learn by experiencing, there are experiential learning, then sometimes we say that we learn by observing, sometimes we learn by reading, sometimes we learn by understanding others behavior. So, there are different phases associated with that. We will discuss this in detail today.

I am Dr. Abraham Cyril Issac. I am a faculty at the School of Business, Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati.

So, today's theme would be the greatest benefit of simulation is that it creates the space for trainees to fail gracefully, analyze why this has occurred. So, when you look into the traditional methodology of learning, if there is something like that, if I can name one, those learnings were more of hit and trial methods. You used to do something, maybe it goes wrong, you get the feedback. If you recollect the previous lecture, we had mentioned it as setting an objective and taking feedback.

Once you set the objective, there is some activity that is going on and based on that objective to achieve that objective, you do some work and it could be leading you towards objective, sometimes it could be taking away from that objective based on your performance, your given feedback. All these aspects combine together and reflect as what is seen as the learning by objective based method. But when you are looking into newer methods like simulation, it gives you an option, an easy option to learn where you can have the scope to fail and when you are failing also, it does not affect the system. Rather, it gives you another chance. It gives you multiple chances to actually improvise on what you are learning. So, technology has done this, technology has given you this particular opportunity, so that would be the theme of today's lecture.

Let's look into how people learn. The first and the foremost aspect I would like to take it in a different way which is learning from novelty. When you look into successful learning, it tends to happen when an individual reacts to opportunities. Sometimes we say that there are people who actually see difficulty in every opportunity. Now there are also people who see opportunity in every difficulty. So, when there are opportunities, you tend to put your foot down and you tend to learn those things or understand those things. The more novel the task specifically, the greater the understanding required and more challenging the range of solution, thus greater would be the learning potential.

You relate it with a work tactic or let's say an example, an episode in your organization. Sometimes you are into mundane regular task, it happens and you are not very keen, not very interested. But many a time if you have focused, you will see that the moment you are given a new task, a new objective, maybe a new project, you tend to be very interested for the very fact that you go to the basics, start learning and try to break it down to the simpler concepts. So, when your learning happens in that level, that when you are more passionate towards that learning, it is mainly because it is a novel task that is assigned to you. The same old regular traditional mundane task which you have to do on a day-to-day basis will not elicit much of interest.

Let's be very honest. But if you are being given a new task, a new position, let's say a new position brings in a lot of challenges, it brings in a lot of opportunities. So, if you are a person who sees opportunities in the face of those challenges, then nothing like that. So that would be learning from novelty. I hope that the concept of learning from novelty is made clear.

So many theorists including Dreyfus and Dreyfus in 1986, Dewey in 1969 and Schon in 1983 maintain that learning specifically involves a progression from novice to expert status. When you are actually coming as a student to learn this subject or any other subject, you have a basic understanding of this. Let's not undermine ourselves. Whatever be the course, however tough it is, we have a basic understanding about this because we have done our education from school, college, etc. There is some level of basic foundational education we are having.

So based on that and based on our common sense, again which is not so common, but based on the common sense, we have certain knowledge associated with that. So based on that, when we start learning, we tend to see that our status is uplifted from a novice to actually an expert. So, this sequence or this sequential set of activities is nothing but learning and it actually culminates in an instinctive action. If you look into the whole learning process, the day one, let's say you have worked in your organization, let's say for five years now or ten years now, as an individual when you walked into the organization

for the first time, you are much more superior, not only in terms of the position, but also in terms of the learning. There is no doubt about it.

Even if you have not done anything, there is a certain learning that has gone into you over these years. There is no denying the fact. The people who are very exuberant, very active, very energetic and have worked very hard during the last ten years might have a lot of learning episodes and that is nothing but learning from novelty when they are trying to seize the opportunity which they have obtained or which they are getting.

Now another important aspect could be learning through experience. Many a time we associate or we say that this is one of the finest way to learn something, you know learn through experience. There is no doubt about it. If you want to teach somebody, teach them how to do it, let them do it and if they are faltering good, that's a learning experience. If they are able to complete it, that's a success for them. The learning through experience is one way that employees could learn even without actual support from outside. You are being, sometimes I tend to recollect after our, let's say my graduation and I got a campus selection and I was directly put into the Erection Commissioning site.

So a lot of learning happened automatically. A lot of learning in the sense that I was apart from what I have seen in the textbooks, for the first time in my world I was seeing these machineries like induced fan or like FD fan or even a boiler in a real time setup. So that not only to see that or observe that, we had to actually erect that, commission that etc. So, step by step we could learn a lot. So that's how the learning happens even in your industry, even in your organization. It is not that your recruitment or selection has happened based on the existing knowledge. But the company or the organization has a certain level of understanding that if you are being trained in this particular field, you are going to excel. So, they have just checked your attitude and aptitude at best. So that's how you have got into the organization. Seldom it happens that you have learned everything and you are into the organization.

So learning through experience is one of the most important activity that has happened or that is happening in every industry, every organization, everyone who is from industry can relate with that. So generally experiential learning actually starts when we engage with the environment in particular, then we reflect on that particular experience that we have gained from maybe from theories in and around the world. Now this particular understanding till this point is followed by experimentation. So, when I actually stressed on my textbook knowledge which was followed by a lot of experimentation which actually led me to learn in which we can actually find out how these particular theories or whatever we have learned in classrooms work. You learn lot of motivation theories, you learn lot of learning theories, learn lot of personality theories.

If you are unable to apply them to your organizational context, it is not making or it is not beneficial for you. It may be having some benefit like on a formality basis you have completed a course. But rather than that I would prefer that all these theories I am trying to connect it with the real time world with the industry for the simple reason that the moment you go back from the class there is some takeaway. There is something that you can actually take it and apply to your work, to your organization or to your workplace. So experiential learning requires all these steps which I have mentioned and although people tend to prefer one step more than others it happens that experiential learning is essentially sequential in nature. It is not like it is like you are being thrown into something and you experience something and you learn. It does not happen like that. Ladies and gentlemen please listen that, please understand that learning happens when there is an opportunity and when you are able to understand that even in difficulties there is an opportunity and with respect to that opportunity you are able to start learn the whole process and you get into a certain level of experience where you start experimenting with the things and that is how you improvise on the particular learning.

Now learning through experience when we talk about it, we cannot neglect the relevance of mistakes. Mistakes happen, mistakes do happen. They are evidence of practice of action and experimentation in particular. So, building on the intellectual foundations of particularly John Dewey, Kurt Lewin and even Piaget, the American organizational behavior specialist David Kolb brought together an explanation for the entire process which is known as experiential learning. So, the core of the Cope's model comprises a four-stage learning cycle which actually shows how experience is particularly transformed to let us say learning process or learning the concepts and finally new experiences are formed. So learning is depicted clearly as a process not an outcome. So, this is the relevance of Cope's model in the real-world scenario.

Many a time we see that we have learned something that is the end of the process, no. Rather it is the process in itself. Learning is never an outcome. You have been sent to a training program. You make a mistake when you try to understand that the objective or the motto behind that training program was to complete some training.

It could be based on a software, it could be a training on let us say your behavior etiquettes or maybe it could be a training on some technical stuff, it could be a training on let us say some transfer of technology. Your learning has just begun with that. Let us say you venture into a workshop which deals with statistical analysis tool or it looks into a methodology. For the researchers in the class you will try to, you will appreciate that you are attending a seminar or workshop which actually looks into the methodology part and you feel that once you have done the workshop you are expert in the methodology or learned the methodology. No, that is a beginning of a process. The process has just begun and learning emerges as a process and not as an outcome.

Another important aspect would be learning through social interaction. We have already touched upon this in the previous class. If learning is specifically driven by experience then it must be in part a social process since interaction between people is a powerful source of new experience. Now when you are putting the organization into context you learn a lot of things through how your co-workers are doing the thing. You learn a lot of things so how your boss is doing that or maybe there are some role models for you within the organization sometimes outside but you carefully monitor, carefully observe and more than observation you tend to interact with them, understand how it is done, what could be the possible pitfalls that are associated with that whereby you can actually not fall in those problems and actually steer yourself in the right way or in the right path. So, observation of others' behavior specifically their successes, their failures provide an important source of indirect experience that may be used to approximate the desired behaviors.

Please recollect the vicarious learning part that I have already given to you in one of the earlier lectures. Vicarious modeling. Vicarious modeling is quite significant when it comes to social interaction here.

In the early 1930s Russian cognitive theorist Vygotsky discovered that children could perform well beyond their mental age when provided with elementary assistance from an adult or an older child. This is quite familiar all the concepts of teaching when it comes to practice-based teaching is based on the fundamental social interaction principle. If you are not capable in learning something through social interaction then any teaching will be ineffective. So, there could be some teaching you can always take exceptions you know like learning through doing or let us say learning through experimenting etc. But that said there should be some initiation that should happen with respect to social interaction.

Based on that initiation only the further learning process is getting continued. Please recollect that learning is not an outcome it is just a process. So, learning through social interaction is critical. The implication of this experiment is that social interaction specifically greatly enhances an individual's ability capability to learn within the limits set by the developmental stage. So, there is certain limit that has been set but based on that even there are situations where those could be outperformed.

The view of learning specifically and social participation is vital because few tasks specifically in organization and some of them which are conducted in isolation from other employees, clients or suppliers and many are conducted in specific teams. So social interaction is neither a prerequisite or the outcome for all types of learning since there are many sources of experience open to an individual not all of them are socially mediated. So, when you are saying that social interaction is vital it does not mean that there should be a person.

Let us say you are using a charge equity it would be a very far first example I am taking here but there is some level of social interaction that is happening. There is some level of you know give and take that is happening means you are input you are giving some inputs and it is giving you some outputs.

So based on that there is some learning that happens. So tomorrow you know exactly what to input or what to give as input to get the desired output. This is in effect a social interaction that has happened essentially which is not socially mediated. So, this is the point where when you see learning through social interaction you should see it from a larger context not that you are put in a social environment and you are supposed to learn. Social mediation might not be specifically there rather it could be any via media, it could be any mediation that is happening it need not be a person in general that is the point I would like to stress here.

Now let us look into other approaches of learning like experiential approaches to learning. When you are looking into experiential approaches to learning they emphasize particularly on experience, conceptualization and practice. So, this is where the experience part becomes critical. You see that you know there is some way or some aspect of doing the particular job. Based on that experience you tend to make a model of yourself, you tend to conceptualize okay if I am going to do like this, these are some of the pitfalls.

If I take a different way than him or her I am going to get a more effective or efficient way of doing the particular job. Now this is how the experiential learning happens. It is not that you are exactly following the particular individual, it is more of a hit and trial mechanism whereby you tend to walk in a tight rope but you tend to get a very efficient way of moving ahead. They stress and the benefit for learning by doing learning through mistakes and of absorbing and emulating others close proximity.

So learning happens when mistakes happen. It is wrong to assume that you know one time, the first time everything will be correct. It happens such that there are people who are able to hit the jackpot. There are people who are able, they might be lucky or they might be just you know in the right person in the right place, it happens like that. But most of them, majority of them, the concept is that learning happens through mistakes and this is the fundamental block of experiential learning altogether. So, several promising approaches have emerged in this regard.

However, amongst them action learning, performance simulation and problem-based learning are the vital dimensions of experiential approaches to learning. So let us look into action learning. In this approach, small groups of colleagues mainly formulate

approaches to real problems they are encountering in work. So, action or action-based learning is to find out a solution to a real-based problem.

So that is the real world-based problem. So, this is what specifically action learning is all about. The group remains together while the results of the action taken are reviewed and the lessons are drawn. So, this is a combined process based on the experience and creativity of the set members, action learning searches for solutions to particular problems of the here and now rather than case-based approach. So action learning is more of, let us say that happens on the go, action learning is more of reactivity in nature, how reactive you could be in terms of you know something has happened, what could be an action that could have been taken or maybe it could be in such a way that you tend to review the whole process that somebody else has done and based on that experience you tend to deliver that or you tend to obtain that action learning.

Another important aspect and I am coming to the theme of today's lecture is performance simulation. So when you are looking into simulation technology has in fact enabled simulation and in fact it has become one of the most critical element of learning or tool or you know the way of learning. When you look into this established route to experiential learning it comes essentially in two forms, one is the electronic simulation best known for its use in training specifically pilots and it is very difficult otherwise you cannot even imagine how you otherwise would have trained the pilots, you are just flying a very costly machine. Now it is very difficult to assume that there are chances of making mistakes and when you make mistakes you are actually making a lot of damages, a lot of losses but thanks to simulation-based learning specifically in training pilots things have actually changed, the whole scenario has actually changed.

Even you can relate this with situations like role play, a teacher, an effective teacher definitely would use role play to bring in a certain different level of understanding. So many a time I have seen in the class itself you tend to you know teach a particular concept for let us say so much of time instead if you are able to pull out a particular role play, if the students are assigned particular roles and they are able to undertake that particular role play with taking in the concepts or the theories which they have learned it is the best way to go ahead with teaching or learning.

So this is in effect at par with simulation role play which has virtually unlimited applications from let us say medical diagnosis to even training programs of leadership development etc. So electronic simulation is no doubt it is expensive to produce and the task selected for simulation must inevitably appeal to large number of potential trainees because if you have made a particular training program and let us say you are not in a position to actually attract people who attract customers or clients who are actually going to buy it they would have preferred something else or let us say you have made a

program only to a niche set of people then it is a futile exercise because you have put in a lot of time, labor, cost etc into that particular activity and it is not as rewarding. So, the greatest benefit of simulation is that it specifically creates the space for trainees to fail gracefully and analyze why this has occurred. No single learning aspect or no single learning method would otherwise give this opportunity for performance simulation.

Now comes another important aspect which is problem-based learning. When you are looking into the industry particularly your job profile, your performance within the organization most of the things are pertain to problem based learning in specifically in industry. Ordering the learning experience around problem-based activities rather than merely going into subjects or disciplines for that matter can help develop the skills necessary to find solutions to actual real-world problems. In a complex situation are there which can be presented in a problem-based activity particularly requiring learners to appreciate the totality of a particular situation rather than set of very discrete elements presented to them through conventional training.

So, problem-based learning has emerged into a mainstream curricular model even in education and training. With the advent of new teaching pedagogies this has emerged as one of the most creative, in fact the most effective learning aspect or learning approach which is problem-based learning.

Now we looked into different aspects of learning, different approaches of learning specifically. To conclude I will just say that learning has moved out of the traditional paradigm where you were given some goals and based on that you are working. But learning has taken the help of technology where by things like simulation have come into picture, whereby problem-based learning has come into picture. All these approaches which are to a certain extent guided by or aided by technology gives you a chance to fail and fail gracefully.

The moment you fail gracefully you tend to understand that there could be something that could be improvised based on that and based on that you get a new learning experience which was previously not happening.

On that note we will end today's lecture. Please take care. See you in the next class. Bye bye.