The Development of an On-the-job Learning Style Questionnaire for the nursing profession

Marjolein Berings
Tilburg University

Rob Poell
Tilburg University

Robert-Jan Simons
Utrecht University

Although numerous questionnaires measuring learning styles have been developed, none of them are sufficient for workplace environments. This paper reports the development of an on-the-job learning styles questionnaire for the nursing profession (OLSQN). The instrument measures the use of learning strategies in different on-the-job learning situations. Content validity was guarded by basing the questionnaire on empirical data. Concurrent validity was confirmed based on relationships with employees' characteristics. The questionnaire could be used by nurses, their supervisors and hrd-professionals in hospitals, to make nurses aware of their on-the-job learning styles and improve their on-the-job learning.

Keywords: Health care, nursing, on-the-job learning, questionnaire

HRD-practices focus mainly on formal education and training, even though the challenges of work itself and interactions with other people in the workplace are significant sources of learning for employees (e.g. Eraut, 2004, Poell, van Dam and van den Berg, 2004). We know little about methods that can be used to improve on-the-job learning in a broader sense.

A first step to improve employees’ on-the-job learning could be making them aware of their on-the-job learning styles. Knowledge about their own and other possible on-the-job learning styles can make people aware of their options and choices in learning behaviour and therefore offer opportunities for adaptations (Berings, Poell and Simons, 2005b). An on-the-job learning style can be defined as the tendency to use a particular combination of implicit and explicit learning activities that a person can and likes to perform on the job. The person adapts the combination of learning activities to each situation differently. This particular combination is called the actualised learning strategy (Berings et al., 2005b).

Although numerous questionnaires have been developed to measure learning styles, none of them are adequate in workplace environments. Most of the instruments are suitable for educational contexts, but not for workplace contexts. Furthermore, most
instruments do not do justice to the fact that people use different learning strategies in different learning situations (Berings and Poell, in press).

The current paper describes the development of an on-the-job learning style questionnaire for the nursing profession (OLSQN). For nurses, the need for continuous learning is particularly high, since they need to keep up with new technologies in nursing equipment and changing disease patterns. Besides, they are also faced with changing task patterns (Clark, 2001). There has, for example, been a shift from task-centred nursing to patient-centred nursing. Furthermore, the boundaries between the work carried out by nurses and by junior hospital doctors are shifting as well. Although hospitals can provide education and training to enable individual learning, these opportunities are not always financially possible and it often seems difficult to transfer what has been learned to the daily work situation (van Woerkom, 2003). On-the-job learning is a favourable alternative.

The instrument that we have developed measures the use of learning strategies in different on-the-job learning situations that nurses confront. The scale was constructed using the facet design method (Oosterveld, 1996). All facets and facet elements were based on qualitative studies on nurses’ learning activity and learning content (Berings, Gelissen and Poell, in press, Berings, Gelissen and Poell, 2005a). The scale consists of nineteen items containing learning activities measured in six different learning situations (114 items in total). The questionnaire was distributed to 800 nurses working in different departments of general hospitals in the Netherlands.

To investigate the quality of the instrument, we used measures such as internal consistency measures of reliability, factor analysis, and nonparametric item-analysis. The full paper will describe the actual outcomes of these quality measures.

The questionnaire can be self-administered by nurses, or being used by supervisors, mentors, coaches, and other HR-professionals to make nurses aware of their on-the-job learning styles. They can, for example, organize a coaching session for nurses, to reflect on their use of learning strategies in different learning situations. Different alternative learning strategies can be discussed and new learning strategies in addition to their current personal preferences can be tried out and developed in the every-day working and learning process, leading to the improvement of the nurses’ on-the-job learning (Berings et al., 2005b). Further, our instrument can be used to improve the person-job fit, that is a good fit between learning style and the learning demands of a job in order to promote effective learning (Hayes and Allinson, 1998).

References


