Workplace changes and workplace learning: Error friendliness as critical factor for personal initiative

Introduction

• **Problem:** There is little empirical evidence about the relation between personal initiative (work behaviour) and individual attitudes towards errors at work. Psychological safety is considered as a critical factor regarding coping with errors, because it helps to understand how the individual respond to occurrences in the organisational environment of work.

• **Aims of the study:** (1) To explore the relation between error friendliness and personal initiative in such work environments which are characterised by a high amount of workplace changes. (2) To assess the effects of psychological safety (concerning both colleagues and supervisors) on this relation.

Theoretical background

**Error friendliness**

Error friendliness is characterised by a positive orientation towards errors at work. It consists of six dimensions (Rybowiak et al., 1999): thinking about errors, learning from errors, error competence, error risk taking, error anticipation and error strain.

**Personal initiative**

Personal initiative is characterised as work behaviour which aims at initiating workplace changes and pro-active adaptation to such changes (e.g. by initiating learning processes). It consists of three dimensions (Frese et al., 1997): self-starting, pro-active and persisting.

**Psychological safety**

Psychological safety results from a shared belief held by members of a work group that there is safety for interpersonal risk taking and coping with errors while achieving work goals. It consists of two dimensions (Edmondson, 2002): psychological safety colleagues and psychological safety supervisors.

Method

**Sample**

77 customer consultants (retail banking) from a German bank. Banking sector (retail and corporate banking) is characterised by a high amount of workplace changes in daily, weekly, and monthly work.

- Age: 18-60 years (M=36.58, SD=13.09)
- Work experience: 1-43 years (M=12.52, SD=11.58)

Research questions

Q1: Are error friendliness and personal initiative significantly correlated?

Q2: Does psychological safety (colleagues and supervisors) has an effect on the correlation addressed in Q1?

Instrument

Questionnaires (Error friendliness: 27 items in 6 sub-scales, Cronbach’s α = .67 to .92; Personal initiative: 18 items in 3 sub-scales, Cronbach’s α = .76 to .82; Psychological safety: 8 items in 2 sub-scales, Cronbach’s α = .73/.78)

Results / Conclusions

The table shows descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) and intercorrelations of dimensions of error friendliness (learning from errors, thinking about errors), personal initiative (pro-active, persisting, self-starting), and psychological safety (psychological safety supervisors, psychological safety colleagues), as well as of age and work experience.

Results to Q1: Significant correlations were found between error friendliness (thinking about errors, learning from errors) and personal initiative. No significant correlation were found between 4 dimensions of error friendliness (error competence, error risk taking, error anticipation and error strain) and personal initiative.

Results to Q2: Psychological safety (colleagues and supervisors) was significantly correlated with error friendliness and with personal initiative. No significant correlation were found between psychological safety supervisors and personal initiative.

Regarding workplace learning processes the results show that learning from errors and thinking about errors are associated with all aspects of personal initiative. Psychological safety, in particular concerning colleagues, is associated with both error friendliness and personal initiative. Unexpectedly, not each dimension of error friendliness contributed to the understanding of personal initiative and psychological safety.

References

