

Chapter-1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a brief overview of the changes in employee learning in the workplace over the last few decades, from formal to informal learning. The chapter encapsulates the discussion, explaining informal learning in the workplace in a variety of different ways. Additionally, it covers the need for informal learning in the workplace, its antecedents, key barriers, and necessary skills for employees in the BPO sector.

Different discussions have been considered in order to gain a better understanding of informal learning and its role in employee's learning. The chapter shed light on the learning of employees that takes place in the BPO sector. All of the study's findings were derived from a review of the literature, which included various research papers, theses, books, articles, and related work done in the related field.

1. Introduction

This thesis broadly researched the skills enhancement of the employees through informal learning at their respective work in context to the BPO sector. The researcher's primary goal was to investigate workplace informal learning and its impact on employees. The researcher focused on how employees evolved and understands workplace informal learning and its impact on employees' learning and skills development.

Learning is a vital part of employee and organizational development. To be competitive and keep up with technology advancements, it's crucial to keep personnel educated, updated, and learning. New difficulties and turbulence, such as financial crises and climate change, have emerged in today's world (Russ-Eft et al., 2014).

Until the 1990s, workplace learning was considered as "learning as a result of formal training and education." Informal learning is not structured, unplanned, and directed by the learner. Formal learning can be defined as learning that can be planned, structured, and monitored by others. Workplace learning, on the other hand, is a much broader word that includes both formal and informal learning.

In recent decades, informal learning has made its mark everywhere. Changes such as technology advancements, a fast-growing globe, a demand for competent abilities, and time restrictions have led to the growing dominance of informal learning. Informal learning at work has aroused people's curiosity throughout the previous two decades. The interest stems from a variety of places, including modern businesses that recognize the potential for increased production (Boud, & Rooney, 2018).

Human resource departments continue to value formal education, assuming that working and learning are two separate activities. However, research shows that the majority of work is done on the job rather than off the job. (Dale, and Bell, 1999). The organization's expectations and the current workforce's competencies are vastly different. According to research, traditional and formal learning programmes are not as successful or inventive in educating employees to meet the needs of today's society.

Many policymakers emphasize lifelong learning because continual technological change alters skill demands. However, the focus is usually on formal training courses, ignoring informal learning in the workplace, which current evidence suggests is far more important for skill development (De Grip, A. 2015).

1.1 Important Definitions: Title of thesis comprises of variables which are described below conceptually as well as operationally:

a) Conceptual Definitions

Informal Learning as defined by Marsick, & Watkins, (1990), “suggests that informal learning is a process of learning that takes place in everyday experience, often at a subconscious level.

Informal Learning at the workplace is defined by Dale, & Bell, (1999), as that form of learning: "which takes place in the work context, relates to an individual’s performance of their job and/or their employability, and which is not formally organized into a program or curriculum by the employer.

Workplace Under the Act. (2013), "workplace" has been defined as which means establishments, enterprises, institutions, offices, branches, premises, locations or units established, owned, controlled by the Company or places visited by the employees out of or during the course of employment including accommodation, transportation provided by the employer for undertaking such journey.

Skill According Green, (2011), Unlike constructs in the natural sciences, skill is one of those social science words in common parlance with many meanings, numerous synonyms such as “ability”, “competence”, “knack”, “aptitude” and “talent”, and varied imprecise translations in other languages.

Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) According Parikh, & Khan, (1999), to Business process outsourcing is “the act of transferring some of an organization's recurring internal activities and decision rights to 1 outside providers, as set forth in a contract.”

Employee Section 2(f) of the EPF “employee” means any person who is employed for wages in any kind of work, manual or otherwise, in or in connection with the work of an establishment, and who gets, his wages directly or indirectly from the employer, and includes any person.

b) Operational Definitions

Informal Learning: - It is learning which takes place outside of a planned, scheduled, and classroom setting.

Informal learning at the workplace: - This is a self-directed or based on experience, a team, or co-workers. The methods of informal learning at work used in this study are those that exist or are used by BPOs to train and skill their staff.

Workplace: - A workplace is a place where a group of individuals come together to accomplish a similar goal. This study will consider BPO as a workplace for the research.

Skill: - Ability to perform tasks efficiently and smoothly. For this study, a working definition was formulated to define skills. These skills are related to the important technical and soft skills that BPO personnel require to perform their tasks.

Business Process Outsourcing (BPO): - BPO is an organization that undertakes work on behalf of other companies. The researcher will conduct a study on major BPOs of the Jaipur Region.

Employee: - A person who provides their services in exchange for regular compensation. In study. employees who are working on the lower (associates) middle (supervisors) and upper- middle-level (middle management) in major selected BPOs.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

The study made inferences through the **constructivism** theory of learning; it is a theory of knowledge and learning. According to constructivism theory, humans are capable of receiving and comprehending information perfectly. This theory says an individual draws on his or her prior experiences to comprehend and integrate new information. Although each learner will have unique experiences during the learning process, each will gain sufficient and valid knowledge.

The following are some important features and assumptions of Constructivism Theory highlighted by (Boethel, & Demock, 2000).

Learning is an adaptive activity.
Learners should be challenged by ideas and problems.
Knowledge is constructed by the learner and by the active participation of the learner.
Experience and prior understanding play a role in an individual's learning.
Social interaction plays an important role in the learning of learners.
Proper time should be given to the learner for reflection, discussion, and the construction of relationships.

Fig.1.1.Features of Constructivism Theory

Fig 1.1 shows the main characteristics of the constructivism theory evaluated by philosophers and mentioned by author Boethel & Demock, 2000. Constructivism theory does not adhere to any particular teaching method or pattern. This theory says that a learner constructs self-learning through experiences and self-efforts. As a result, information cannot simply be passed down from one learner to the next but must be constructed by each learner independently. Piaget, Vygotsky's, and the philosopher Glasersfeld were the key proponents of the theory, and numerous thinkers have since added value to it. The study is influenced by the concept of constructivism as given by the psychologist:

1. Jean Piaget (1975)

The constructivism theory was founded by **Jean Piaget**, he didn't agree with the traditional views and viewers about learning. Constructivist notions in learning, such as children's plays and extracurricular activities, were not given much weight by early educationists and philosophers. On the other hand, Jean Piaget argued that children's play is essential for their cognitive development. "Piaget's constructivist theory is established on biological analogies of adaptation and evolution. He said that one's actions in this world are important for cognitive development"(Khan, 2019).

Piaget claimed that an individual's actions, experiences, accommodation, and assimilation might be used to generate new knowledge and learning.

“Now constructivism theory is influencing the formal and informal sector”.

2. Vygotsky (1978)

In the development of cognitive skills, Vygotsky stressed the importance of culture and social interaction. He thought that kids could learn more efficiently if they interacted with their teachers, coaches, and peers. He believed that a learner's mental ability would not grow if their information is limited to their discoveries.

He explained his concept through ZPD (Zonal of Proximal Development). The ZPD defined it as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978).

“Vygotsky’s theory has been extremely influential in the learning of children as well as adults”

The constructivism theory is supported in this study in two ways: self-directed learning and learning from others. The self-directed approach such as trial & error, observing, and prior experiences, According to the study, the learner gains abilities by obtaining knowledge through the self-creation method, according to the study. The study also illustrates how a learner acquires

information and knowledge from others by receiving, storing, and retrieving it. Conversations, discussions, and mentoring are some of the ways to learn from others.

1.3 Concept of Learning at Workplace

Workplace learning is a location where employees may study to improve their productivity and advance their careers. Workplace learning allows individuals to keep their abilities up to date to meet the demands of their jobs. Many analysts feel that learning has become critical to an organization's survival (Senge, 1990; Pedler et al., 1997). Employees increasingly regard their workplaces as places where they can learn and grow professionally and personally, and they may take part in a range of learning activities to improve their job performance. Learning activities are those that alter a person's behavior in a variety of ways, providing advancements and skills to perform a job more effectively. Employees learn in the workplace in a variety of ways, including official education/training and informal learning.

Employees gain knowledge and skills that change their attitudes, resulting in improved performance and aiding in the achievement of organizational goals. Learning at work is a combination of formal and informal learning in which employees gain knowledge and skills that change their attitudes, resulting in improved performance and aiding in the achievement of organizational goals. Workplace learning is becoming more important in organizations, and it is gradually becoming a part of organizational culture and employees' daily activities. In the workplace, learning can take several forms, including formal, informal, and incidental learning (Marsick & Watkins 1999).

Before workplace learning, the phrase "learning as a result of formal training and education" meant "learning as a result of formal training and education." Learning that is organized, arranged, and supervised by others is referred to as formal learning. Informal learning, on the other hand, is unstructured, unplanned, and guided by the learner. However, workplace learning is a much broader concept that encompasses both formal and informal learning.

Table 1.1: Difference Between Formal Learning and Informal Learning

Particulars	Formal Learning	Informal Learning
Meaning	Planned, structured, and based on the curriculum.	Not planned, unstructured, and not based on a curriculum.
Format	Learning is through the learning material.	Learning is through observations, by doing, by default, etc.
Approach	Formal learning is based on “push” approach.	Informal learning is based on a “pull” approach.
Measured	Tests and evaluations are used to assess performance.	It is measured by self-assessment and a change in attitude.
Knowledge	Depend on expert’s knowledge, formal knowledge, and codified knowledge.	Depend on practical knowledge, individual knowledge, implicit knowledge, and pragmatic knowledge.
Frequency	Formal learning is not continuous.	Informal learning is continuous in nature.
Certification	It is certified.	It is not certified.

Table 1.1, describes the difference between formal learning and informal learning concept. Formal learning is formalized in nature, pre planned, based on fix curriculum, explained by experts and certified. On other informal learning is not formal, not pre planned, not based on fixed pattern, self-driven approach and not certified.

In the industrial era, the focus was, specifically, on preparing employees for a specific job through formal training and classes. The organization used to follow the principles of scientific management (Harp, N. F., 2012). Learning is viewed as a separate activity to prepare employees for work through planned education and training. However, in recent decades, the traditional idea of knowledge management, generation, and sharing in the workplace has begun to change (Li et al., 2009; Marsick, & Watkins, 1992).

With the shift from industrialization to globalisation, the organization's focus has also changed towards employees and their education. Nowadays, employers place a greater emphasis on employees' practical learning, self-learning, and informal learning at work. New ways to boost organizational learning capacity are increasingly favouring approaches that emphasize experimental, unstructured, and self-directed learning, supporting both personal and organizational development. (Skule, S., 2004).

The comprehensive changes in the workplace, management approaches, customization, and digital technology revolution that occurred in the twentieth century were fully captured in the twenty-first century. The revolution in the workplace brought changes in the working patterns and learning patterns of employees, which are due to technological changes becoming more informal in nature. In recent decades, informal learning has made its mark everywhere.

Supremacy of informal learning has enhanced due to changes such as technology advancement, a fast growing world, the need for competent skills and lack of time etc. The learning of the employees is the main aim for the organizations and focusing on practical learning, which is informal in nature to develop the skills of employees. The majority of learning takes place informally at work, and is ongoing, instantaneous, random, and more realistic, enhancing employee performance. Many forward-thinking businesses and industries have adopted this new casual approach, allowing workers to design their own workspaces free of predetermined desk positions and learning practices. Mary Parker Follett (1868-1933), a psychologist who pioneered the use of community centres as important social and educational venues, emphasised the importance of informal learning in the development of modern democracy.

In the last few decades, informal learning has made an important mark in both literature and at workplace. The prevalence of informal learning takes place due to rapid, fast changing technology, growing competition in the market, demand for multitasking employees, need for skilled employees, and a lack of time for formal training programs with organizations. Employees learn in the workplace through informal learning methods that are part of everyday regular activities, are instantaneous, continuous, and task-oriented. As a result, today's firms value non-formal means of ensuring that people are educated, skilled, and experienced. Companies like Google, Microsoft, IBM, and the IT/BPO industry are shifting away from formal to informal learning, allowing employees to choose work-based learning.

1.4 Informal Learning

The term "informal learning" was first introduced by Knowles in the 1950s as "informal adult education" (Informal Adult Education). Knowles was known as the father of Andragogy. The concept of informal learning has been evolving since the 1950s, but it took a couple of years for its practical implications to become apparent. Many researchers have since worked on and advocated the idea of informal learning. Research on informal learning took longer to evolve, not emerging until the decades of the 1980s (Marsick, & Watkins, 1990). In practically all segments, work-based learning, practical learning, spontaneous learning, social learning, self-learning, learning outside the classroom, digital learning, and informal learning have now become the primary sources of knowledge. Work-based learning and the promotion of generic and transferable knowledge, interdisciplinary knowledge, multiliteracies, and trans-coding finally became viable outlets and venues for individuals engaged in experiential, informal, and community-based learning (Edwards & Usher, 2001).

Informal learning is learning that is not structured and based on any set guidelines. It is a process of learning that starts with a learner's efforts and experiences that happen outside the classroom and formal training. It was earlier considered that learning is a by-product of formal learning. Formal learning is structured, planned, and directed by others. On the other hand, informal learning is unstructured, unplanned, and monitored by oneself. Informal learning is supposedly is an outcome of incidental learning, self-learning, everyday experience, or curiosity of a person.

Though there are regular formal training programmes for the capacity building of employees at the workplace, most learning is informal in nature and happens under the line of invisibility, which is hard to recognise and understand. Learning cannot effectively take place without previous individual learning, much of which rests on intuition combining formal schooling and informal experience (Crossan, et. al. 1999).

It is not possible, to sum up, informal learning in a single definition; instead, it is defined by various researchers according to how it fits into various contexts.

Marsick, & Watkins, (1990) "Informal learning are those containing self-directed learning, e-learning, coaching (coaching), supervision (mentoring), to complete the task, namely to provide learning opportunities needs".

Garrick, (1998) “Learning can happen at work, in order to help organizations, operate more efficiently, the occurrence of non- structure, which is a way of learning outside the classroom, an activity called informal learning”.

Clus, (2011) “Situations Informal learning is planned or unplanned learning that is impulse learning, self-directed, and involves trying new things and learning with the flow. Informal learning emerges during everyday activities in the workplace, there is the possibility for this type of learning to occur more often than formal learning”.

In general, informal learning is not pre-planned, not followed by a schedule, not based on any curriculum; it just takes place as per the needs of the learner. Since the learner is himself or herself attracted towards the learning, it is also called "learner's choice" or "pull learning." In informal learning, the experience is based on a problem, or identified knowledge and skills gap, which is determined by the learner who then engages in learning activities intended to close the knowledge gap or otherwise mitigate the performance challenge or problem (Boileau, 2017). The informal learning outcomes are skill-based, generic, and applicable to all kinds of jobs (Van Der Klink, et al. 2012).

Marsick & Volpe (1999) summarized a few characteristics of informal learning:

- a) Informal learning takes place in our daily activities through our senses.
- b) Informal learning is self-motivated learning, learner's instinct motivates learn informally.
- c) It is not highly conscious learning; the learner is not aware while learning.
- d) It is unstructured.
- e) Informal learning is linked to other types of learning like formal and informal learning.
- f) It is tacit knowledge that can be gained by a learner but is not easily expressed.

Some of the few characteristics that define informal learning are such as:

- a) Informal learning is unorganized, not based on set patterns, rules, curriculums and guidelines.
- b) It is self-directed.
- c) It happens at the time of need, so it is spontaneous.
- d) It is not evaluated as it is uncertified.

- e) Informal learning is a continuous process.
- f) Learners learn according to their choice and c
- g) Convenience, so it is flexible.
- h) It is not as costly like formal learning.
- i) Informal learning promotes skills and learning needed in the world.
- j) It is not driven by others; informal learning is a self-motivated approach.
- k) Anyone can be your trainer or guide in informal learning-it can be senior or junior.

Informal learning provides lifelong learning opportunities for an individual and is a learning style of the 21st century (Milligan, C., 2014). People learn the most from informal learning, which occurs in a variety of ways, both consciously and implicitly. Self-approach/learning, interactions, everyday tasks, and conversing with others are some of the places to learn informally. Informal learning can be classified into three categories.

1. Self-directed learning is learning that is undertaken by an individual with their own approach and effort.
2. Incidental learning is learning that occurs as a result of a person's own experience and is unintentional.
3. Socializing is learning from others' attitudes, behaviours, and ways of life, skills, and values.

Whenever we learn, it is either intentional, or we are aware of that learning. So informal learning is also described with intention and awareness as follows:

Table 1.2: Types of Informal Learning

From	Intentionally	Awareness
Self-Learning	Yes	Yes
Experiences	No	Yes
Learning from others	No	No

Source: infred.org (<https://infred.org/mobi/informal-learning-theory-practice-and-experience>)

Table 1.2 shows that informal learning is sometimes acquired deliberately and with awareness about it, like self-learning from reading, social media, etc. Sometimes we don't learn intentionally and it just happens and is acquired from an event, situation, problem, etc., but at the same time we are aware that we are learning, such as when we interact or converse with others intentionally, but we don't want to learn, and we are not even aware that we are learning while talking with friends, colleagues, and experts. Individual learner perspective: the learner as a self-help on understanding individual participants' experiences; views on context: interactive learning from nature; we know that learning is the product of the individual learner and the social context of interaction; views on context: interactive learning from nature."(Baofeng, 2002; Cafarella & Merriam, 2000).

1.4.1 Informal Learning at Workplace

“Learning may take place at work in order to help organizations perform more effectively, with the occurrence of non-structured learning, which is a type of learning that occurs outside of the classroom and is referred to as informal learning” (Garrick, 1998). Rapidly changing skills demand and rising mandatory retirement ages make informal learning more important for workers (Grip, 2015). Employees' expectations about work are also changing. They value feedback about their job performance, opportunities to develop their skills, and work that is challenging and personally fulfilling yet contributes to their organizations' goals. However, they also want flexibility to decide when and where to work to effectively balance work and life demands (Butts et al., 2013).

As a result, organizations are making a huge investment in formal training sessions to develop human resources. Still, they fail to make them competent due to the rapid changes in technology and working. In general, HRD professionals spend a lot of money on advanced instruction for managers' proficiency, but a study shows that managers develop much of their skills through informal learning (Enos, M. D., et al., 2003). In general, investments in informal learning are predicted to have lower direct and indirect costs than investments in informal training (Grip, 2015). Even though early human capital theory recognized the value of workers' experience, it was primarily concerned with education and formal training. According to recent research reports, however, 80 percent of work-related learning occurs informally, which includes self-directed learning, networking, coaching, and mentoring (Yeo, 2008) The organization is used to following the principles of scientific management (Natalie, & Harp, 2012).

The development of human resources in today's workplace is needed and informal learning leads to self-development and the development of human capital (Noe, R. A. et. al., 2014). Nowadays, organizations are focusing more on employees practical learning, self-learning and informal ways of learning at the workplace. Informal learning creates the environment so that employees can learn from one another. Informal learning encourages flexibility and allows them to do experiments (Harp, 2012).

New techniques to strengthen organizational learning capacities are increasingly favoring practices that emphasize experimental, informal, and self-directed learning, promoting both personal and organizational growth (Skule, 2004). The various prevailing ways of informal learning at the workplace like books, self-study programs, coaching, support material and system and expert communities (West, 2011). Experiential learning imparts knowledge dependent on real-life experiences and emotions (Clements, 1995). Many organizations claim to be learning organizations, which could have been considered true if one considers informal learning.

1.4.2 Facilitators of Workplace Informal Learning

Informal learning is a valuable technique for enhancing an employee's knowledge, and abilities according to reviews on informal learning at work. But there are no defined ways or programmes of informal learning for employees.

Many experts have undertaken various investigations and have come up with facilitators that assist informal learning. Informal learning and a positive attitude toward learning are influenced by organizational resources, management, and the self-learning attitude of employees. Personal qualities have a significant impact on how people behave, make decisions, and communicate (Gregorc, 1982; Hirsh, & Kummerow, 1990). As a result, personal factors such as age and educational experience may have an impact on their level of informal learning engagement (Tikkanen's, 2002; Kremer's, 2005). In studies, less experienced, younger individuals reported greater informal learning, whereas more experienced, older workers reported less informal learning and tended to regard their informal learning as less rooted in their work. Organizations want to keep their employees informed and interested, so they need to figure out what factors encourage informal learning at work (Jeske, & Robnagel, 2016).

Organizations should foster a culture of trust among employees so that people know they won't be punished or misunderstood if they ask a question or make a mistake), this will aid in greater learning and understanding of an individual (Marsick & Volpe M, 1999). Since proficiency is the product of informal learning, organizations should promote informal learning and should focus on increasing the meta cognitive abilities of managers irrespective of spending on formal training (Enos, 2003).

Networks and communities of practice, collaborative platforms, knowledge-sharing initiatives, hosted conversations, and other methods that an organization can use to support employee learning include new technologies, e-Learning, and a variety of learning resources.

Employees get personal learning through the job and sharing information with their colleagues. The factors that influence informal learning are: - the job itself, organizations, employees' characteristics such as age, job tenure, and attitude of colleagues. The study also concluded that employees' prior experiences trigger immediately at the time of need (Van der Klink, et al., 2012).

The researchers have also concluded that instant learning from other people or from any other means leads to skill acquisition among employees. Management can support informal approaches within the organization to facilitate informal learning and improve performance (Klein, & Moore, 2016). The autonomous types of team work led to different types of learning and majorly informal learning (Inanc, H., et al. 2015). Some new innovative practices that can support informal learning are phone calls with valuable information, sales meetings, chat rooms, web-based meetings, conversation with the mentor, and chance meetings at the water cooler (West, 2011). Social media and blended learning are more in demand for the skills and knowledge enhancement of employees (Noe, R. A. et. al., 2014)

Table 1.3: Facilitators of Informal Learning at Workplace

Authors & Year	Facilitators of Informal Learning at Workplace
Simona S. O. R. A. (2011)	1.Seniors sharing information. 2.Consulting with colleagues. 3.Talking and collaborating with others.
Clus, (2011)	1.Reading Documents. 2.Daily Routine activities. 3.Learning with flow.
Boud, & Rooney, (2018)	1.Extra activities apart from Daily Routine 2.Observing others and listening
Marsick, & Volpe, (1999)	1.Seekig Feedback from Others 2.Opportunities for Trial & Error
Grip, (2015)	1.Movements of colleagues 2.Group activities 3.Challenging activities
Harp, (2012)	1.Buddying 2.Mentoring 3.Self-Analysing
Marsick, & Volpe, 1999	1.Employee/Team Initiated

Table 1.3, depicts the facilitators of informal learning at workplace. These are some of the daily routine activities through which employees learn, intentionally and unintentionally. Employees can learn informally either through self-directed learning or learning through others. Self-directed learning, which is gained through personal experiences, trial & error, observations, reading, and social media. Methods of learning from others; mentoring & coaching, job shadowing, water cooler talks, huddles etc.

1.4.2.i) Learning from Self at Workplace

Learners sometimes attend fairs and conferences where they learn by using their senses by seeing, hearing, and interacting with other people. They develop a skill in their job through their own past experiences, by doing practice with the trial and error method, or by learning through temporary assignments given to them related to their routine job or other which they try to complete with their understanding.

1.4.2. ii) Learning from Others at Workplace

- a) **Leader Member Exchange:** In this approach, the leader's interaction with his or her subordinates is casual, with two approaches: open dialogue and knowledge exchange between the two, a relationship founded on trust and loyalty, and a constructive attitude by the leader toward all subordinates. This strategy differs from the conventional approach, in which leaders/managers give orders and subordinates carry them out.
- b) **Water cooler conversations:** informal conversations between employees during their breaks from work in which employees interact with employees not only from their departments but also from other departments. Conversation during these breaks may be related to work, problems in the workplace, and other issues that give awareness to employees about the other departments, organization, and employees. This approach aids in the development of positive employee relationships, corporate culture, and a greater understanding of the job. Through casual talk during these breaks, employees can be unable to speak with their bosses but can interact with them more effortlessly.
- c) **Job Shadowing:** Job shadowing is something similar to on-the-job training where an employee has an opportunity to work alongside with the more experienced colleague, so they can learn and develop their skills without any formal training or classes. Through job shadowing one can get to know about:
1. How another employee work and what does is his role in the organization?
 2. Reflect, and learn from others.
 3. Got an opportunity to discuss things and get deeper knowledge about the organization, job roles and career opportunities.
 4. Get feedback from an experienced person about the job and the skills needed to do that particular job.
- d) **Attending Brown bags:** A brown bag meeting, is an informal meeting that occurs at the time of lunch with seniors, managers, and experts from inside or outside the organization. These kinds of meetings are called “brown bag meetings” because usually the lunch box comes in bags or brown paper bags. This approach promotes conversation from both the

participants because it is a more informal way of learning through casual talks, and the employee gets to know their function in a more comfortable way.

- e) **Huddles:** This is a short, informal meeting or conversation on a regular basis between leaders/seniors and the whole team and subordinates regarding work, issues at work, feedback and sharing of best practices to do a job. In this way, any challenges or snags in which an individual is grappling are resolved quickly, and they also learn the proper skills for performing a specific assignment and dealing with a specific situation in a more effective manner.

- f) **Buddy up:** Many organizations adopt this method, in which a junior or newcomer and his or her immediate supervisor collaborate, with the senior employee assisting the junior in learning and developing skills and facilitating the completion of work more quickly and effectively. This approach helps to encourage everyone to participate in mentoring and gets everyone into the habits of learning. It is a one-on-one kind of learning where the learner gets mentoring from his or her immediate boss, not in a formal way. It is, moreover, sharing in an informal approach.

Employees learn both knowingly and inadvertently from these routine tasks. Informally, employees can learn in a variety of ways, including through self-directed learning and learning from others. Personal encounters, trial and error, insights, reading, and social media use all contribute to self-directed learning. Mentoring and coaching, job shadowing, water cooler chats, huddles, and various forms of learning from others, Informal learning takes place when people go about their regular activities and tasks. Individuals benefit from social contact with co-workers, managers, and others in particular (Jeon, & Kim, 2012).

1.4.3 Barriers to Workplace Informal Learning

When discussing informal learning and guidelines on how to utilize its value as workplace learning, it is necessary to know how much informal learning is actually undertaken by employees and what the prospective barriers are attached to it. Although informal learning is vital for employee learning and performance, there are various barriers that individuals and organizations encounter when learning informally, which numerous scholars have identified and disclosed via

their research. Several research studies have been carried out to determine the primary problems that employees experience while learning informally at various firms.

The most common barriers to informal learning reported by HR practitioners, researchers, employees, and concerned individuals in this field are a lack of time, a lack of environment, fast learning, individual barriers, organizational rules and regulations, and job types (Noble, & Hassell, 2008). Labor faces barriers to participation in informal learning due to a lack of time, inconvenience of time and place, and a lack of employer support (Caniels, & Kirschner, 2012). Restrictive job designs and workload do not much hinder as the attitude of seniors towards learning has an impact on junior employees' learning (Panagiotakopoulos, A., 2016).

Because informal learning is unconscious and unrecognized (Dale, & Bell, 1999; Fuller, & Unwin, 2003), there is a risk that overvaluing informal learning will result in fewer opportunities for employees to participate in formal "off-the-job" training. After conducting a meta-analysis, it was determined that informal learning in the workplace continues to occupy a backward space when compared to other modes of learning, despite being an important tool for workplace learning (Carrasco et al., 2017).

Informal learning is emerging due to rapid changes in technology. It has raised the bar for learning and shifted the focus from formal to informal learning. Informal learning takes place in an open environment rather than a closed environment. As a result, organizations and employees must be willing to learn and share information that will aid in the removal of these barriers. The subjectivity of both experts and learners (how they take the learning process) such as willingness, trust, anxiety in sharing, differentiation in understanding and awareness are some of the issues that come up when learning informally (socially) (Braun, & Schmidt, 2006).

Encouraging environment where no question sounds stupid, providing coaching rather than instructing such kind of practices provides access to learning opportunities to employees and improving their efficiency.

There are so many ways to provide learning for the development of an employee's skills and knowledge, both novice and experienced. Learning is becoming more important to renew workforce skills development and close the skill gap caused by workforce aging, diminishing young cohorts, increased competition in the workforce for the necessary skills, and developments

in science and technology. Altogether, these factors force organizations to look for more effective and innovative ways like informal learning, to engage the existing workforce in learning and developing their skills.

1.5 Skills

A skill is an ability to perform or do a specific task. A skill is the ability to use one's knowledge and education effectively. Skills mean logical thinking with the help of which a person can complete a task in a better way. The success of any organization, whether it is small, medium, or large, private, public, national, or international, totally depends upon the skilful contribution made by the employees of an organization. Organizations hire people based on their technical knowledge, but because technology is continuously evolving, organizations cannot afford to hire workers regularly to keep up with technological advancements. With the changing business landscape, there is a need for a highly competent workforce capable of thriving in this competitive market. Skills mean logical thinking with the help of which a person can complete the task in a better way. A skill is an art that helps a person carry out a specific task, work, or activity with success.

According to Merriam Webster:

“Dexterity or coordination especially in execution of learned physical task”.

Generally, skills are broadly divided in two parts Technical skills and Soft skills:

1.5.1 Technical Skills: Technical abilities are those needed to complete a specific task. These are a person's ability, knowledge, and abilities to perform a task that needs technique and are referred to as "technical skills." These abilities are more practical and necessitate a thorough understanding of the job. Technical abilities are those that are required in the workplace to do a specific task quickly and effectively, as well as to maintain command over task performance. Employees with technical skills are more likely to accomplish their jobs confidently, skilfully, and on time. Individuals can learn hard skills in a variety of ways, including through apprenticeship, mentoring, and on-the-job training, as well as through books, online, and trial and error.

1.5.2 Soft Skills: Unlike technical skills, soft skills are not concerned with the knowledge you possess for a given job, but rather with the behaviour you display in various settings when executing a task. Personality traits and behaviour are linked to soft skills. Soft skills are not directly tied to a task, but they do aid in the efficient and effective completion of one. People skills, communication skills, presentation skills, social skills, social intelligence, and emotional intelligence are all examples of soft skills. Soft skills are those that require working with other people and successfully communicating with co-workers to complete a task productively. It is an individual's aptitude and competencies that allow them to coordinate with others and perform in a team or group.

“Desirable qualities for certain forms of employment that do not depend on acquiring knowledge include common sense, the ability to deal with people, and a positive, flexible attitude”. An individual can learn soft skills through observing, listening, self-learning, and some crash courses”.

For example, if an employee works in a team or a group, he or she should have soft skills in order to present himself or herself in front of others and coordinate with others.

To complete a task, grow, and survive on the job, an employee must have both technical and soft skills. With technical skills, employees also require soft skills, which are very important for both the organization and the employees. Every job requires different technical and soft skills as per the requirements of the job and industry. Employers also ensure that their workforce has the right quantity and quality of skills to do tasks competently, so both employer and employee can grow successfully in a competent world globally. Software engineers must have the skills as per their job and industry needs. Business analysts are required as per their job and sector in the same way. BPO employees need technical skills as per their job and sector. Many separate processes operate simultaneously in BPO, necessitating staff to work on various profiles. To serve different processes, BPO employees require different technical and soft skills as per their job profiles, designations, and processes.

Table 1.4: List of Common Technical Skills Required by BPO employees

Jobs in BPOs	Technical Skills Required
Voice Job Profile	Good Communication, language skills, accent control, and computing skills etc.
Data Base Management services	Skills of documentations, management, and basic computing skills.
Human Resources Services	HR policies, rules, and regulations of different countries or area.
For Engineering Services	Specific technical skills, engineering design and computing skills.
Finance and Accounting Services	Accounting knowledge as well as accounting rules and regulations according to process.
Market Research Services	Skills of promotions sales, knowledge of the market and language skills.

Table 1.5: List of Common Soft Skills required by BPO employees

Communication Skills	Aptitude Skills
Presentation Skills	Corporate Etiquettes
Customer Handling	Self-Management
Interpersonal Skills	

Tables 1.4 & 1.5, show the skills required by the BPO employees as per the profiles. Some important common skills required by BPO employees are communication skills, time management, presentation skills, team development, process knowledge, organizational skills, and corporate etiquettes (Kumar, & Kumar, 2014).

As the title suggests, the study is focused on the technical and soft skills required by BPO employees. The skills are considered as dependent variables for the study.

1.6 Business Process Outsourcing (BPO)

Business process outsourcing is a process where one organization hires another organization to perform a task (i.e., a process) so that the main organization can concentrate on core business and run the business successfully. The concept of BPO was started by the manufacturing industry. Other companies have made tie-ups up with manufacturing companies to handle some specific processes such as manufacturing of some parts, assembling, supply chains etc. Nowadays, most of the big national and international organizations hand over a few of their jobs, units, or sometimes departments to other organizations that do work on behalf of the core companies to meet their business goals and objectives. This concept has expanded in every sector and in almost every

country. And in some countries’ government organizations also contract with BPO service providers in the United States.

1.6.1 Types of BPO

BPOs are defined and classified based on the nature of the BPO and the services provided. Broadly, they are categorised as follows:

1.6.1.i) Types of BPO on the Basis of Services

Table 1.6: Types of BPO On The Basis of Services				
Customer Care Services	Back Office	IT/Technical Services	Financial Services	HR Services
Telesales	Check/Credit/Debit Cards Processing	Requirements	Billing Services	Hiring & Recruitment
Marketing Services	Collections	Application Development	Account Receivables	Payroll Services
Customer Support	Direct and Indirect Procurement	Application Testing	Account Payables	Workforce Training
Order Processing	Transport Administration	Packaged Application Outsourcing	General Accounting	Healthcare Administration
Warranty Administration	Logistic Dispatch	Implementation Services	Audit Compliances	Retirement Benefits
Customer Feedback	Warehouse Management	It Helpdesk	–	–

1.6.1.ii) Types of BPO on the Basis of Structure

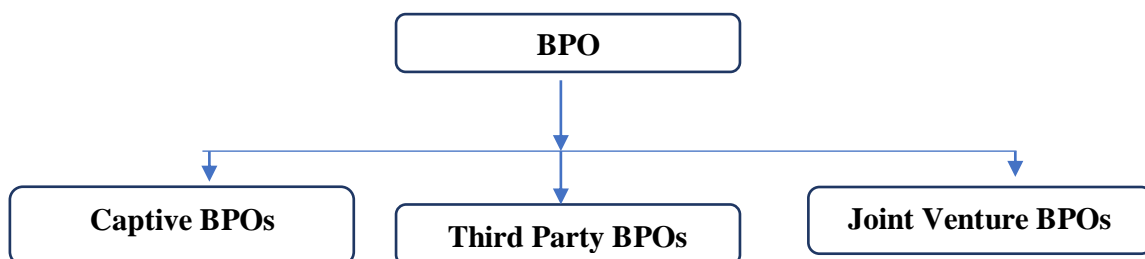


Fig.1.2: BPO on the Basis of Structure

- a) **Captive BPO:** A BPO that is completely owned and managed by its parent company and has its headquarters in a foreign country. They do outsource to their parent company. An example of captive BPOs is GE, American Express, and HSBC. These two companies set up captive BPOs in India in the late 1990s. The benefit of captive BPOs is that they secure the data in another country and capture the margin; otherwise, it goes to a third party.

- b) **Third party BPO:** The BPO works on behalf of their client company, which may be a foreign company or a domestic company. They do outsource work simultaneously to many such companies, which are located in different countries of the world. Some of the BPOs working as third party BPOs are WNS, Wipro, Infosys, and IBM, etc. Some of the benefits of hiring a third party BPO are: being able to focus more on the core business while some other business-related work is handled by a third party; getting repetitive work done at a low cost; and motivating employees in other developing countries.

- c) **Joint-venture BPO:** This is a hybrid between captive and third-party BPO, in which the client company owns the facility but the third-party provider builds it and employs the staff to run it on behalf of the parent company for a set amount of time before handing it over to the client company. This type of working pattern is known as "build operator transition," and it allows the client company to save time and money while establishing a centre in another country. A client company does not need to be concerned with regulatory or technological matters related to establishing and operating centers in a host country since they are handled by a third party. Aviva, a UK based insurance company, has an alliance with Mumbai based WNS Global Services, Delhi based EXL, and Bangalore based 24X7.

1.6 .iii) Types of BPO on the basis of processes

- a) **Voice Process:** Voice-based BPO employees make calls to the customer on behalf of the core company to sell products, provide services, and handle other customer issues. The voice process is of two types; i) Inbound process in which BPO employees can receive calls from customers regarding any issues and problems

faced by customers; ii) Outbound process in which employees of BPO make calls to customers to sell products or get customer feedback etc.

- b) Non-Voice Process:** Non-voice-based BPO employees do not make calls or answer calls. This includes providing support in areas like emails, handling websites, documentation, and technical support.

1.6.2 BPO Sector in India

Annex and GE were the pioneers in outsourcing to India by setting up facilities in Gurgaon, near Delhi, in the 1960s. In terms of market share, the United States is India's largest ITES BPO customer. India has established itself as a popular outsourcing destination. The term “BPO” was first used in India in the early 1990s, and it quickly spread throughout the country; today, BPOs may be found not only in I-tier cities but also in II-tier and III-tier cities. The government is also working on developing BPO rules for small towns and Tier II and III cities. The main purpose of establishing BPO in these town and cities is to create more employment and upgrading their economic levels in these places. BPO is growing very fast rapidly in India because of factors like:

1. **Workforce:** India has a talented, skilled population and, most importantly, English-speaking BPOs need them to communicate with clients. Every year, a huge number of young people graduate. The majority of them are fluent in English.
2. **Cost Advantages:** In comparison to other nations, India has a lower cost of labor and an investor-friendly tax system.
3. **Infrastructure:** Fine infrastructure and development in BPO infrastructure attract both clients and employees. In India, there has been significant progress in telecom, power, BPO setup, and road infrastructure in recent years.
4. **Business Policy:** In most sectors of the economy, Indian policymakers promote foreign investment as a source of financial resources as well as a facilitator of information and technology. The Indian government's tax-friendly and open policies have benefited the ITES-BPO sector.
5. **Technological Advancement:** From ancient times (Verma, S., 2019), India has had a long and distinguished tradition in science and technology. In the field of information, Indian experts have proved themselves beyond the country's borders. Indians are known for their technical skills, learning capabilities to learn new technologies and flexibility.

6. **Government Initiatives:** The Department of Information and Technology proposes to expand and improve the exciting core infrastructure to draw more clients to outsource in the 12th Five-Year Plan (2012-17).
7. India's geographic location and round-the-clock (24*7) facilities are two reasons that make it a top choice for outsourcing jobs.

Table 1.7: Facts and Figures About IT-BPO Industry in India

Growth Rate in IT and BPO Industry in 2017-18	7.8 Percent
Projected growth rate in 2018-19	7-9 Percent
Expecting to add one lakh job in 2018-2019	1 Lakh
Revenue Contribution in Financial Year 2017-18	20 percent

Source: NASSCOM Report 20 February, 2018

Table 1.7, describes the facts and figures about the IT-BPO industry in India (2018-2019). As per the NASSCOM report, the top 10 states preferred for BPO work are Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, West Bengal, Punjab, Rajasthan, Kerala, Tamil, Nadu and the National Capital Region, which come under the Tier I cities.

1.7 Workforce in BPO

With the enlargement of the BPO sector in India and the development of BPO, there is a huge demand for a skilled workforce. Globally, advancements in innovation, new technology, and worldwide competitiveness are some of the primary drivers of global business process outsourcing industry growth and expansion. A shortage of trained workers, as well as the need to train staff in the skills required in today's changing market, is a major concern for BPOs.

Generally, organizations hire employees based on their technical knowledge. Organizations cannot afford to recruit workers frequently to meet technical up-gradation with the changing scenario of organizations. There is a need for a more skilled workforce who can cope with this competitive environment. In the changing landscape of business, there is a need for a more professional workforce capable of coping with this demanding climate.

1.8 Workplace Learning in the BPO Sector

Business process outsourcing is India's fastest-growing industry, accounting for a major portion of the country's GDP. The majority of young talent wants to work in BPO and with BPO because it is a major source of jobs in India. Technology is constantly developing, presenting opportunities and difficulties for India's BPO industry. Employees must be highly trained, up-to-date, informed, and professional in their employment due to advanced technology, tough competition in the global market, and a constantly changing internal and external environment. For all of these reasons, BPOs should prioritise quality and provide clients with value-added services in the future. BPO firms are constantly working to improve employee learning so that they can perform their jobs more efficiently and enterprises can provide better service.

The BPO industry has transformed the workplace into one that is more creative, realistic, and learner-friendly. When we talk about training programmes in the BPO industry, classroom training is certainly one method of training. The fact is that classroom training is only one part of the training that goes on in the learning process. In the BPO industry, one more important part of training or learning takes place through "on job training" (OJT) Shiva, K. (2011).

On job training, where all learning takes place at the working desk, is more practical, innovative, time-consuming, group learning, less formal and more informal learning. BPO organizations are focused more on the high performance of employees. To achieve that, they work hard on the learning of employees through providing a better learning environment.

For young people with talent, BPO is the ideal location to work. BPO hired both new and experienced employees and trained them according to industry standards, competition, and technological advancements. It's difficult to keep employees in the BPO industry up to date, well-informed, tech-savvy, quick learners, and task-skilled. Employees in BPO workplaces participate in training and learning programs. They also give employees the option to learn on the job by allowing them to self-study and learn from others in an informal setting. Allow people to study while working by providing them with opportunities and strategies to learn from one another in an informal setting.

Employees in the BPO sector use informal methods and the extent to which they have an impact is still unknown.