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# Autonomous Learning in the Workplace



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## AUTONOMOUS LEARNING IN THE WORKPLACE

### An Introduction

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Traditionally, organizations have invested in formal training and development programs to insure employees have the knowledge, skills, and experiences necessary to perform their current job as well as to prepare them for future positions and career opportunities. In fact, one estimate is that US organizations have spent over \$160 billion on formal training and development (*training*, 2014). Formal training and development activities refer to training and development courses and events, including classroom instruction, on-line courses, college degree programs, and mentorship programs which are systematically designed and organized by a company. Formal training and development programs have specific goals, learning objectives, assessment instruments, and expectations (Chen & Klimoski, 2007). Further, these programs are not voluntary in the sense that employees are required to attend and complete them. Formal training and development programs give organizations the opportunity to provide consistent and programmatic ways for employees to enhance their knowledge and develop their skill sets. They can also be “strategic” in the sense that they contribute to and align with business goals by directly developing human capital and enhancing the firm’s ability to attract, motivate, and retain talented employees. Further, formal training and development programs have been shown to benefit individual and firm-performance as well as society as a whole (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009).

For these reasons, organizations will continue to use formal training and development programs to enhance employees’ knowledge and develop their skills. But, as reflected by the title of this book, “Autonomous Learning in the Workplace” attention is shifting to how employees are developing their skills and acquiring knowledge outside of formal training and development programs. One estimate is that informal rather than formal learning accounts for up to 75 percent of learning within organizations (Bear *et al.*, 2008). Also, although