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Paradigm Shift from Informative Learning To Transformative Learning: A Preliminary Study

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Abstract:

In India, the perception towards the use of psychiatric methods to treat stress related problems is not appreciable. People who go for such counseling sessions are looked down upon and are treated as mentally ill by the society. In order to find out a better way of helping people to handle their work pressure, a number of participants and their thoughts were analyzed through a survey questionnaire. It was found that those people who have undergone the transformative learning sessions had a more enthusiastic approach towards their work and contributed efficiently to the overall productivity of their respective organizations. Such people performed better in terms of stress management and personality improvement. As a base of survey, “Art of Living” and Landmark Forum sessions was taken up as they were well established in this area and are also acceptable by the society.

Key words: Transformative learning, cognitive behavior theory, stress management, job satisfaction, personal growth, working efficiency.

1. Introduction

Transformative learning is the expansion of consciousness through the transformation of basic worldview and specific capacities of the self; transformative learning is facilitated through consciously directed processes such as appreciatively accessing and receiving the symbolic contents of the unconscious and critically analyzing underlying premises.^[1]The theory of transformative learning emerged as a concept in 1978, through the work of Jack Mezirow. Since then many theories and research have been formulated.

This theory brings about a transformation in what is possible in people's lives. It gives them an awareness of the basic structures in which they know, think, and act in the world. From that awareness came a fundamental shift that leaves them more fully in accord with their own possibilities and those of others. This shift is not a one-time event, but an ongoing access to a previously untapped dimension of effectiveness and creativity. Transformative theory is a practical methodology for producing breakthroughs—achievements that are extraordinary, outside the limits of what's already predictable, attainable, or known. This training enables people to think and act beyond existing views and limits—in their personal and professional lives, relationships, and wider communities of interest. The philosophical, ethical, social, and methodological issues in adult education are raised by transformative theory and possible ways to resolve these issues.

Transformative Learning, unlike any work oriented learning operates on various levels of organizational reality. It makes the individual undergoing this training competent enough to handle levels where conceptual issues dominate and values are important and organizational purpose has to be addressed. Individual consciousness, capability of mind and heart to handle stress, and ultimately levels of individual will. This learning not only emphasizes what people do and how they do it, but also the interior condition of the individuals involved.

Cognitive Behavioral theory is one of the ways adopted in early 1980s to implement transformative learning. It is a psychotherapeutic approach that addresses dysfunctional emotions, maladaptive behaviors and cognitive processes and contents through a number of goal-oriented, explicit systematic procedures. One of the characteristics of cognitive behavioral therapy includes the use of psychiatry, but in India there is an extremely limited use of psycho-social methods of treatment. In 1973, when Varma and Ghosh did a survey on the practice of psychotherapy among Fellows of Indian Psychiatric Society, only 17% of them reported to be

using any psychological method of treatment. Today we have a much larger number of psychiatrists in this country, but the percentage of those using psychological methods of treatment is unlikely to be much greater. This limited use of psychological method in clinical practice (even in academic centres) is reflected in the publications in this area. It is found that among the papers published in Indian Journal of Psychiatry (IJP) only about 2% deal with psycho-social methods of treatment, in comparison to 16% in the British Journal of Psychiatry.^[2]

Most psychiatrists in India will admit that the psychological methods involved in cognitive behaviour therapy are useful or even essential in some psychiatric disorders. Often such patients are referred to psychologists or social workers who are interested in psycho-social methods of treatment. But the main concern is that, the classical cognitive behaviour therapy has not been accepted by a large portion of Indian working population.

This paper deals with the modern, sophisticated and easily accessible approach to transformative learning. In India though this approach has always been a passive part of every organizational curriculum but was never extensively followed. There was no exclusively well-defined set of training programmes/workshops to promote the concept of transformative learning, until in 1981 Shri Shri Ravishankar brought the concept of youth empowerment (Art of Living) into the gambit. But most of the people misinterpret it as some kind of God Man's spiritual theory. But later on it was widely followed by people from all over the world. It proved to be a breakthrough in the field of transformative learning. Later in 1991 an organization called Landmark came into existence in San Francisco. It offers programs in personality development. The company claims that more than 2.2 million people have taken Landmark's programs since its founding in 1991, and that it hosts courses in more than 20 countries including India.

Through this paper we are not trying to review the state of cognitive behaviour therapy in India, instead we are trying to find out a more efficacious method to help the working people tackle various day-to-day mental and behavioural problems arising due to workload. Also we have discussed what transformative learning is and its impact on people who have undergone the same and people who haven't.

2. Hypothesis

The organizations implementing transformative learning on their participants bring about the process of "perspective transformation" with three dimensions: psychological (changes in understanding of the self), convictional (revision of belief systems), and behavioural (changes in lifestyle) in them. Perspective transformation leading to transformative learning occurs infrequently. Mezirow believes that it usually results from a disorienting dilemma, which is triggered by a life crisis or major life transition, although it may also result from an accumulation of transformations in meaning schemes over a period of time.^[3] An important part of transformative learning is for individuals to change their frames of reference by critically reflecting on their assumptions and beliefs and consciously making and implementing plans that bring about new ways of defining their worlds. This process is fundamentally rational and analytical.^{[4][5]}

Transformative Learning methods are essential for students in an institute, because these young individuals will form the future of some organizations. So transformative learning helps them in advance to enhance their critical reflective approach towards life. Critical reflection (Figure 1) has been elevated to the major objective of adult education in the work of Mezirow (1990). Perspective transformation is the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; of reformulating these assumptions to permit a more inclusive, discriminating, permeable and integrative perspective; and of making decisions or otherwise acting on these new understandings. In other words, the real significance of adult learning appears when learners begin to re-evaluate their lives and to re-make them. Hence this learning becomes a mandatory part of their academic curriculum.

Transformative Learning offers several stress-elimination and self-development programmes to employees working in various organizations. These programmes have helped them to overcome depression and stress. It involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and irreversibly alters their way of being in the world and obviously their respective organizations. Such a shift involves their understanding of themselves and their self-locations; their relationships with their colleagues and with the natural world; their understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender; body awareness's, visions of alternative approaches to living; and sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy. In order to foster transformative learning, the educator's role is to assist learners in becoming aware and critical of assumptions. This includes their own assumptions that lead to their interpretations, beliefs, habits of mind or points of view as well as the assumptions of others. These training/workshops help employs in recognizing frames of reference. By doing so, they encourage practice in redefining problems from different perspectives. The goal is to create a community of learners who are "united in a shared experience of trying to make meaning of their life experience.

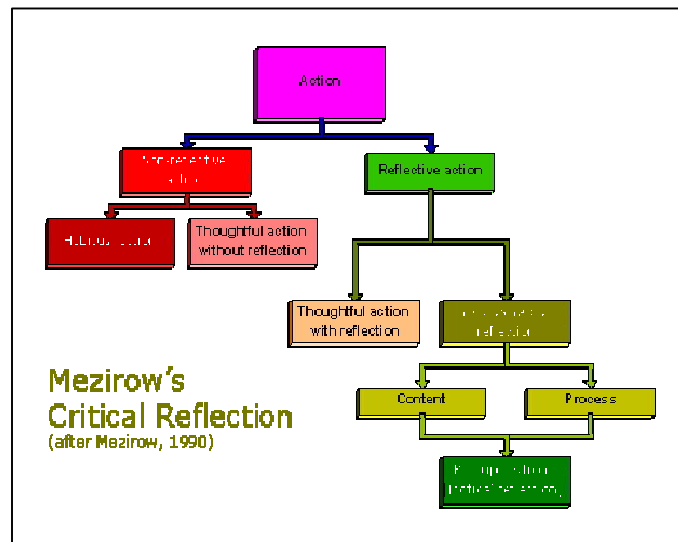


Figure 1

3. Method

3.1. Participants

A total of sixty participants were taken up for survey which included students from colleges as well as some working people in the age group of 20-50 years. In particular, the purpose of canvassing college students was to find out if this training can help them to cope with the adverse working situations at an early stage. Further, these sixty participants were sub-divided among those who have attended transformative learning course and those who have not. Of these, 30 participants were those who attended a training of this type, which included both college students as well as working people.

3.2. Design

The participants were asked to answer a Likert-scale type questionnaire to check if they are satisfied with their job and the working conditions and whether they are able to overcome the stress arising due to workload. The questionnaire also aimed to investigate their time management, social behaviour, confidence, positivity towards life, emotional intelligence and personality development. These parameters were the dependent variables of survey as they explain whether these training programs are actually helping an individual in order to increase overall working efficiency and level of efficacy for the organization. The data collected was independent of what the participant did and his/her age.

3.3. Measures

The questionnaire sought answers as a level of their agreement and disagreement with various situations as was required to understand their response to the dependent variables. A very few questions also sought answer in the form of frequency to look into what they did or felt at times. This helped in understanding the contrast between the attitude and thoughts of participants and also their response to various situations which ultimately dictates the success of a work environment.

Based on the response of participants a graphical analysis is done.

4. Analysis

Through the survey we have tried to analyse the working efficiency of individuals working in an organization as well as students in an institute. Working efficiency is analysed with the help of certain factors like job satisfaction, stress management, personal growth, social behaviour, failure and decision making. For the analysis a stark contrast is made between the trainees and non-trainees.

The factors analysed are described below:

4.1. Job Satisfaction

Factors like quality/kind of work, working environment and working hours were taken under survey. Based on the responses of trainees and non-trainees, level of job satisfaction was deduced. Figure 2, depicts the level of job satisfaction among trainees and non-trainees in various organizations and educational institutes.

It can be concluded from figure 2 that people who haven't undergone these training programmes mostly lack the level of satisfaction towards their job as compared to the people who have. Moreover, there is a slight difference between trainees and non-trainees who do agree that they are satisfied with their job. Paradoxically the trainees are more confident about their choice of careers. Ostensibly, it can also be inferred that people who haven't undergone these training programmes are in a state of dilemma regarding their choices as compared to trainees.

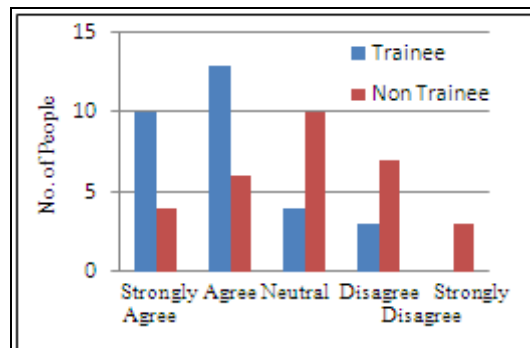


Figure 2: Job Satisfaction

Reason to this can be attributed to the psychological dimension of Mezirow’s principle i.e. the thought process of the individual during the training programme orients his/her psychology in one direction because of which they end up enhancing their critical reflective approach towards their job. On the other hand our survey depicts that non trainees mostly lack this approach.

During our survey one of the participants of the survey shared this amazing story with us. He was working in an organization for the past one and a half year. Though all the above mentioned factors about job satisfaction were favourable to him but still he wasn’t satisfied with his job. He always found himself under pressure running from one deadline to another. On the suggestion of his manager he joined one of the transformative training offered by the organization. After undergoing this training he realized that this is not the kind of work he wanted to do. Since his personal circumstances don’t allow him to quit the job, therefore he decided to carry on with it but with a changed approach i.e. instead of escaping and finding faults with the work he would rather do it effectively.

4.2. Personal Growth

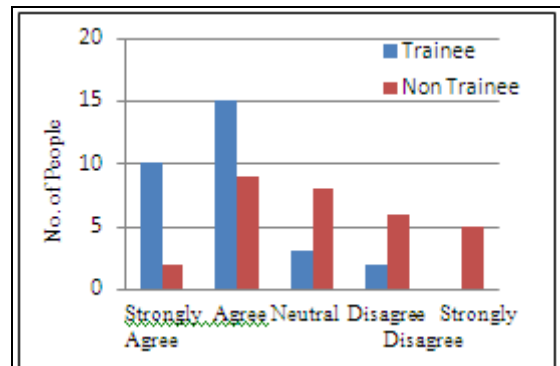


Figure.3: Personal Growth

Through this survey we tried to analyze whether the people involved are continually improving, growing, and learning every day and take charge of their professional/personal development. Here’s how:

- Development of learning perspective
After this kind of training sessions, trainees started looking out for opportunities from where they can learn things. Their approach changed towards learning and they also started to think who can be benefitted from these things.
- Benchmarking of skills periodically
Once a year, trainees were asked to benchmark their skills and every three months especially those who are in fast moving profession or industry. They kept looking into their portfolio to see whether it is filled with skills or competencies that are up-to-date and sought after. Or with skills that are obsolete and not very portable.
- Creating a learning plan
Every trainee learnt to pinpoint their specific skills and knowledge that they need to acquire or upgrade. Then they could identify the professional development activities and include mentor relationships, special assignments at work, in-house and public seminars, professional conferences, online courses, journals, blogs etc.

It can be inferred from the figure 3 that trainees mostly believe in taking out time for creative thinking, visualization and emotionalisation of their goal. On the other hand the non-trainees either disagree or are neutral towards this approach.

Transformative learning makes you analyse your own self, a feeling of belongingness and dedications towards your dreams and ambitions which were suppressed due to the monotonous and cumbersome lifestyle you were living. Hence these trainees are more oriented towards the enhancement of their personal growth and a motivated way of lifestyle.

4.3. Stress

Stress is the most significant factor which affects the working efficiency of employees/students in their organisation/institutes in a negative manner. Ineffective stress management can lead to decrease in working efficiency upto 50%. Job satisfaction statistics depicts this scenario among non-trainees. Infact, poor stress management often leads to job dissatisfaction. Statistical analysis shows that non trainees are often found under stress. Infact, some of them had even condemned their working hours. Not only this, poor stress handling had lead many of the non-trainees to adopt addictive means to handle their stress. Survey report reflects that more than 65% of non-trainees have an increased consumption of coffee during working hours. Also, inability to handle stress had a severe impact on college students. Some of them have become addicted to alcohol. On the contrary, trainees had reflected a better trend in stress management. Figure 4 depicts that trainees are rarely under stress. Moreover, less than 20% of trainees have an increased consumption of coffee during working hour.

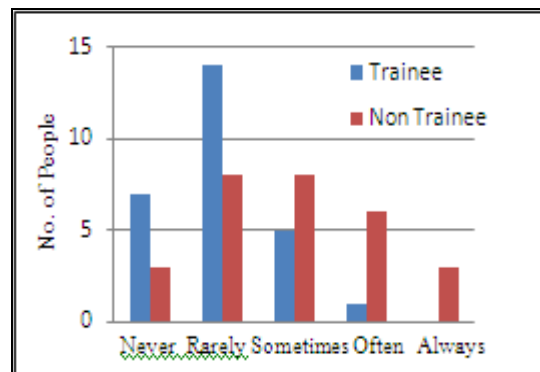


Figure 4: Stress

Figure 4 justifies that transformative learning helps in stress management. Their various stress elimination and self-development program helps in reduction of stress level. This training insists the trainee to adapt these methods in his/her day to day life. Some of these methods involve relaxation techniques like yoga, meditation etc. Hence, it can be concluded that transformative learning helps in better stress management.

4.4. Decision Making

The survey reflects that, transformative learning has a remarkable impact on their trainee's decision making capabilities. It is quite evident from the responses that trainees tend to follow methodical or analytical approach during problem solving and decision making. On the contrary, most of the non-trainees blindly follow others direction. In some of the cases non trainees even follow hit and trail or random guessing approach.

Inference is quite clear, transformative learning brings a change in people's perspective through a change in their frames of reference by critically reflecting on their assumptions and beliefs and hence, transforming their thought process to a conscious decision making and problem solving approach.

4.5. Failure

Survey revealed that trainees handle failure more positively compared to non-trainees. Majority of trainees take failure as a stepping stone to their success in comparison to non-trainees who either goes into depression or tends to criticize the situation. The basic fundamentals of transformative training deals with behavioural changes that accounts for more developed positive approach towards life. Hence, this can be the reason why trainee reflects a more positive approach towards life.

5. Conclusion

It is quite evident from the survey analysis that transformative learning has become a necessity in Indian job scenario. Knowing the fact that CBT is not accepted by a majority of people in India, transformative training is the only rescue. Moreover, the kind of contrast that came out of the survey reflects it is the need of the hour. Because, the trainees reflects greater working efficiency as compared to the non-trainees as employees as well as students. Survey not only reflects a better job satisfaction level of trainees, it also concludes that these people have more positive approach towards life. They are thoughtful decision makers, skilful stress handlers and better in time management. In fact in a survey conducted by The Times of India, they estimated that most people are in need of these transformative therapies either in the form of CBT or transformative training. Hence, we conclude that these training programs are becoming important in present job scenario for the betterment of employees as well as the organization.

This paper invites renewed curiosity in line with these principles.

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