Organizational Support for Action Learning in South Korean Organizations

Yonjoo Cho, Toby Egan

The purpose of this study was (1) to examine the impact of organizational support on employee learning and performance and (2) to elaborate on the context of organizational support for action learning in South Korean organizations. For this inquiry, two central questions were posed: What are employee reactions to organizational support for action learning? And what are key elements of organizational support for action learning? Framed by organizational support theory (OST), this study involved a mixed methods research design, including (1) a survey involving 268 action learning participants and their supervisors from 28 participating companies asked to report their perceptions of their organizations' support of action learning and (2) one-on-one, semistructured interviews with 34 HR managers and executives aimed at elaborating on the nature of support for action learning in their organization. Study findings support OST and indicate that South Korean organizations support action learning in a variety of ways and that such support was a critical factor in the success of their action learning efforts.

Action learning (AL) is a process and tool that enables individuals and groups to learn while solving problems and implementing actions (Marquardt & Banks, 2010). The popularity of AL has grown as a result of linking tangible outcomes and relevance to real organizational issues. AL has been particularly effective in building problem-solving skills, team building, leadership, and organization development in many industries and countries (Dilworth & Boshyk, 2010; O’Neil & Marsick, 2007; Pedler, 2011; Raelin, 2008). Although an increasingly utilized practice, research on AL is scant and there have been calls for empirical studies examining AL systematically and with greater depth (Cho & Egan, 2009, 2010).

The number of organizations utilizing AL is rapidly increasing in South Korea. Companies engage actively in AL as a tool for leadership and
organization development to improve their competitive advantage and adapt to rapidly changing global markets. The extent of support for AL by many organizations makes South Korea an important hub of AL practice (personal communication with M. J. Marquardt, July 25, 2010). What is not understood about this AL practice is the nature of support provided by these organizations, employee reactions to their organizational support for AL, and related outcomes.

The purpose of this study is to examine AL’s impact on employee affect, learning, and performance, and to elaborate on the context of organizational support for AL in South Korean organizations. This study involved a sequential mixed methods research design, including (1) a survey involving 268 AL participants and their supervisors from 28 companies asked to report their perceptions of their organizations’ support for AL; and (2) one-on-one, semistructured interviews with 34 HR managers and executives aimed at elaborating on the nature of support for AL in participating organizations. The mixed methods design utilized in this study was informed by organizational support theory, tested by a related conceptual model examining the impact of organizational support for AL, and used interviews to examine the nature of support for AL.

**Action Learning**

AL’s founding father, Reg Revans, first used the term *action learning* in published form in 1972, though he had formed his approach to action learning and had been refining it for some time—beginning in the 1940s (Boshyk & Dilworth, 2010, p. 147). A prime difficulty in researching AL is the lack of an agreed-upon definition (Pedler, Burgoyne, & Brook, 2005). Revans did not define AL but described it in terms of what it is not (e.g., a case study or a task force) because he believed that to define it would constrain its meaning (Revans, 2011). As a result, many definitions and variants of AL have been used, including business-driven AL (Boshyk & Dilworth, 2010), critical AL (Vince, 2004, 2008), work-based learning (Raelin, 2008), and virtual AL (Dickenson, Burgoyne, & Pedler, 2010).

Various frameworks have been used to analyze AL projects; however, many of these focus on the combination of two consistent themes (Revans, 1982, 2011): real, work-based issues (Raelin, 2008; Vince, 2004, 2008) and team learning (Edmonson, Dillon, & Roloff, 2008; Senge, 1990). AL is based on the pedagogical notion that people learn most effectively when working on real-time problems occurring in their own work settings (Raelin, 2008; Revans, 2011). Senge (1990) suggested that teams are the fundamental learning unit in an organization; teams play a crucial role in organizational learning (Edmonson et al., 2008). People learn best when they reflect together with like-minded colleagues, *comrades in adversity* in Revans’s terms (Revans, 1982, p. 720), on real problems occurring in their own organizations.
A critical issue involved in AL practice is the balancing act between action and learning in the AL process (Cho & Egan, 2009, 2010). Revans emphasized the need for conceptual and practical balance between action and learning in his seminal remark, “There is no action without learning and there is no learning without action” (Revans, 2011, p. 74). The real value of AL that differentiates it from other action strategies (e.g., action research) is a pragmatic focus on learning for the sake of problem solving (Raelin, 2008). Related literature suggests that AL programs should be carefully implemented to ensure balance between action and learning (Kuhn & Marsick, 2005; Tushman, O’Reilly, Fenollosa, Kleinbaum, & McGrath, 2007). An unbalanced approach to AL is not productive, as action without learning is unlikely to return fruitful longer-term results, and learning without action does not facilitate change (Cho & Egan, 2009, 2010).

Recently, organizational support surfaced as a key success factor for such balanced AL practice (Cho & Egan, 2009, 2010; Cho & Bong, 2010; J. Kim, 2007; Seo, 2009). For example, J. Kim (2007), through a survey of 288 participants from 10 Korean companies, identified two success factors of AL practice: team processes and organizational support systems. Organizational support systems, in J. Kim’s (2007) study, emphasized the strong involvement of senior executives (sponsors). These studies provide such a potential link between AL research and organizational support research.

Problem Statement

Despite strong evidence of continuous growth in AL practice and extensive AL narratives related in practice-focused literature, no identified studies have examined the outcomes of organizational support for AL. Given the broad investment in AL practice, research examining AL-related outcomes is needed. Better research designs, such as a sequential mixed methods research design (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2010) presented herein, will provide a clearer understanding regarding the potential benefits of AL for employee affective reactions, learning, and performance, and elaborate on the impact of organizational support for AL (for brevity, often referred to in this article as “support for AL”).

Although Reio (2009) expressed the strong need for emergent research designs in HRD, such as mixed methods, mixed methods research is virtually nonexistent, particularly in the HRD “flagship” Human Resource Development Quarterly (HRDQ) journal. For example, three most recent, related articles identified in the journal over the past 5 years involved quantitative analysis only (Choi & Jacobs, 2011; Ehrhardt, Miller, Freeman, & Hom, 2011; Madera, Steele, & Beier, 2011). These studies showed evidence of the role of perceived organizational support on training utility perceptions (Madera et al., 2011); the relationship between employee training perceptions and organizational commitment (Ehrhardt et al., 2011); and the influence of formal
learning on informal learning (Choi & Jacobs, 2011). However, these studies lack qualitative details and context.

Our report of a recent study in a South Korean context will contribute as one of the few systematically developed cross-organizational examinations of AL. A sequential mixed methods research design used in this study includes an examination of the impact of organizational support for AL on key employee attitudes and outcomes—satisfaction, fit, motivation, and performance. Qualitative elaboration on the ways South Korean organizations support AL is explored sequentially.

Consistent with the nature of mixed methods studies (Bryman, 2006; Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Clark, 2011; Morse, 2010; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2010), our aim is to develop a broad understanding regarding organizational support for AL and employee perceptions to such support. We integrate quantitative and qualitative methods in this study for “enhancement” in Bryman’s (2006, p. 107) classification scheme for mixed methods research in order to build upon quantitative findings by augmenting qualitative findings.

Theoretical Frame and Literature Review

Organization support theory (OST) (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, & Sowa, 1986) proposed that employees form overarching beliefs regarding the extent to which their organization supports their needs and values their contributions. A key indicator associated with OST, perceived organizational support (POS), is a valued assurance to employees that they are supported by their organizations in carrying out their jobs effectively.

Theoretical Frame

Consistent with OST, POS is enforced by the tendency of employees to assign a general reaction to the organization. Levinson (1965) suggested that organizational policies and culture help to support employee perceptions regarding the specific characteristics and features of organizational support. The underlying assumption—when individuals receive resources that are perceived to be provided discretionarily—is that voluntary provisions are more highly valued than those provided out of obligation.

The strength of OST is the inclusion of clear and testable antecedents and outcomes (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Shore & Shore, 1995). Several organizational characteristics have been identified as key antecedents of POS including: fairness, supervisor support, organizational rewards, and job conditions. In the context of OST and POS, HRD-related practices can be viewed by employees as organizational characteristics that communicate organization values, support employee development, and improve employee job conditions (Ellinger, Elmadag, & Ellinger, 2007).
A relatively small number of articles have examined HRD-related efforts (e.g., training) as part of POS (Kroth & Keeler, 2009; Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997). Through an investigation of the relationship between HRD-practices and employee affective reactions (e.g., organizational commitment), Bartlett (2001), Bartlett and Kang (2004), and Wayne et al. (1997) have contextualized HRD-practices as organizational actions. Such framing supports OST and Levinson’s (1965) perspective of which aspects of organizational efforts can be reacted to by individuals as personified organizational characteristics.

Prior research findings support OST’s general premise that an organization’s support of employee development through HRD-related efforts leads to greater employee commitment (Bartlett & Kang, 2004; Fornes, Rocco, & Wollard, 2008), sense of fit with the organization (Wayne et al., 1997), reductions in turnover (Allen, Shore, & Griffeth, 2003), and increases in productivity (Cullen & Turnbull, 2005). A key antecedent related to OST is the role of supervisors or organizational agents (e.g., HRD leaders) in influencing employee POS (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

Eisenberger et al. (1986) suggested that POS is an antecedent of job satisfaction. Riggle, Edmondson, and Hansen’s (2009) meta-analysis, covering 20 years of research of POS, found strong relationships between POS and job satisfaction ($r = 0.61, p < 0.001$). Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) also identified associations between POS and performance, as have Riggle et al. (2009). Wayne et al. (1997) suggested that HRD practices align with employee perceptions of an organization’s values and relate to employee perception of fit and POS.

A few studies examining HRD-related organizational characteristics in relation to POS commonly examine employee perceptions of a particular organizational characteristic (e.g., policies) and the impact of that characteristic on POS. An alternative approach has been to examine POS for a particular practice as a single organizational characteristic. For example, Tucker, Chmiel, Turner, Hershcovis, and Stride (2008) used OST and its association to social exchange theory (Gouldner, 1960; Shore, Coyle-Shapiro, Chen, & Tetricker, 2009) to suggest that the formation of a safety-oriented environment could be viewed as a voluntary act of organizational support. Other supportive HR practices also indicate that investment in employees is associated with POS (Allen et al., 2003); POS has been found to mediate relationships between these practices, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger, Cummings, Armelo, & Lynch, 1997).

Consistent with the formation of a theoretical study frame and the use of structural equation modeling (SEM) (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Kline, 2010), Figure 1 was informed by the aforementioned research related to OST and POS in the context of HRD-related interventions, job satisfaction, person–organization fit, motivation to transfer, and employee performance outcomes.
Although OST-related studies in the context of HRD practices are growing, no study elaborating on the nature of organizational support for AL or investigating the impact of such support on employees was identified. Similar to the approach taken by Tucker et al. (2008), we examine the extent to which organizational support for AL relates to employee sense of satisfaction and fit, motivation, and performance.

**Literature Review**

The review of literature is aligned with the purpose of the study, first, by examining employee perceptions of organizational support for AL, and, second, by elaborating on how organizational support for AL occurs in participating organizations. The literature review provides a context for the study by outlining key elements of AL, followed by a discussion of available literature related to organizational support for AL.

**Organizational Support.** Since Baldwin and Ford (1988) presented a framework for examining training transfer, research on three factors that affect transfer has been conducted: trainee characteristics, training design, and work environment (Blume, Ford, Baldwin, & Huang, 2010). Work environment includes organizational support (e.g., supervisor). Blume et al. (2010), in their meta-analysis of 89 empirical studies of transfer of training, confirmed positive relationships between transfer and a supportive work environment.

Although AL has been rarely examined in relation to organizational support for employee development, researchers have reported an association between organizational support for learning and employee affect and attitudes (Egan, Yang, & Bartlett, 2004). Such employee attitudes include satisfaction, motivation, and retention as they relate to overall learning and development.

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**Figure 1. Hypothesized Model—Organizational Support for Action Learning, Employee Attitudes, Motivation, and Performance**

![Diagram](attachment:image.png)

*Note. All paths are hypothesized to be positive.*
Organizational Support for Action Learning in South Korean Organizations

(Kontoghiorghes, 2001). The manner in which intra- and interpersonal learning is supported through learning-oriented structures is a key aspect of organizational support for learning (Marsick & Watkins, 2003).

OST suggests that employee perceptions of organizational support lead to positive, productive responses from employees. However, OST–AL intersections have not been examined. Therefore, further understanding regarding how organizations can form, support, and improve learning and development is crucial for practice, research, and theory building in HRD. In particular, there is little information regarding why and how organizations support AL from an executive/managerial perspective. In this study, we elaborate on the nature of such organizational support for AL in a South Korean context.

Job Satisfaction. Job satisfaction is positively related to perceptions that an organization supports individual workers (Eisenberger et al., 1997). Job satisfaction is an attitude often considered the culmination of emotion/affect, values/beliefs, and behaviors (Weiss, 2002). Behavioral manifestations found in job satisfaction literature include turnover (Saari & Judge, 2004), absenteeism (Wegge, Schmidt, Parkes, & van Dick, 2007), and citizenship (Organ & Ryan, 1995). Recent findings indicate that intention to quit has a negative impact on performance orientation and low citizenship behavior (Krishnan & Singh, 2010).

Research findings regarding job satisfaction and workplace performance have been mixed. The relationship of satisfaction to productivity is not necessarily straightforward and can be influenced by a number of other work-related constructs. In their meta-analysis, Judge, Thoresen, Bono, and Patton (2001) found the uncorrected correlation between job satisfaction and productivity to be $r = 0.18$ and the corrected correlation to be $r = 0.30$. The authors showed that job complexity moderated job satisfaction and performance whereby the correlation between job satisfaction and performance is greater for jobs with high complexity ($p = 0.52$). In short, the relationship of satisfaction to productivity is not necessarily straightforward and can be influenced by other work-related constructs.

Available research suggests that job satisfaction, as a work-related outcome, is determined by organizational culture and structure. S. Kim (2002) suggested that participative management incorporating effective supervisory communication can increase employees’ job satisfaction. Wagner and LePine (1999) in their meta-analysis revealed significant impacts of job participation and work performance on job satisfaction. In addition, leadership behaviors related to inspiring teamwork and rewarding high performance had significant effects on role clarity, self-efficacy, and job satisfaction (Gaertner, 2000).

Although the aforementioned studies have examined impacts of individual dimensions related to job satisfaction, the influence of the full range of organizational support, including AL, on job satisfaction is not known. Based
on the hypothesized model (Figure 1) and the focus of the quantitative element of this study, we propose the following hypothesis:

**HYPOTHESIS 1:** Employee perceptions of organizational support for AL will be positively associated with their job satisfaction.

**Person–Organization Fit.** Person–organization (P-O) fit is defined as the extent of compatibility between an individual and an organization (Kristof, 1996; Tom, 1971). A context in which individual characteristics, values, and goals are congruent with related organizational environments leads to positive work attitudes, intent to stay with the organization, and high organizational performance (Holland, 1997; Schneider, 1987).

Researchers have emphasized P-O fit to be the key to maintaining committed employees necessary for organizational success (Cable & DeRue, 2002; Kristof, 1996). Chatman (1989) was particularly influential in emphasizing value fit as central to the operationalization of P-O fit. In addition, goal congruence (Vancouver & Schmidt, 1991; Witt & Nye, 1992) and organizational socialization of employees (Kim, Cable, & Kim, 2005) have also been used as central operationalizing concepts for P-O fit. Although P-O fit has involved various operationalizations, the overarching landmark of the construct emphasizes personality fit between individuals and organizations.

Extant research findings indicate that a high level of P-O fit is related to positive outcomes such as work performance (Tziner, 1987), organizational outcomes (Schneider, Kristof, Goldstein, & Smith, 1997), and turnover reduction (Schneider, 1987). Individuals with low P-O fit often have low job satisfaction and low intent to stay with their current organization (Vancouver & Schmidt, 1991). For these reasons, those with low P-O fit often lack satisfaction with their jobs—a factor highly associated with turnover.

No identified studies have examined learning-related issues as independent and dependent variables in relation to P-O fit. According to Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, and Johnson (2005), more research is needed to investigate P-O fit in the context of organizational variables. The hypotheses associated with P-O fit are as follows:

**HYPOTHESIS 2:** Employee perceptions of organizational support for AL will be positively associated with employee perceptions of individual fit with their organization.

**HYPOTHESIS 3:** Employee perceptions of individual fit with their organization will be positively associated with their job satisfaction.

**Motivation to Transfer Learning.** Motivation to transfer learning (“motivation to transfer” hereafter) is described as “the trainees’ desire to use the knowledge and skills mastered in the training program on the job” (Noe, 1986, p. 743). Noe (1986) established the moderating effect of motivation to transfer between learning and behavior change, and hypothesized that motivation to transfer was influenced by perceptions of task constraints and
work group support. The emergence of a wider variety of learning-related modalities led to motivation to transfer being framed in relation to other forms of workplace learning and development (Egan et al., 2004; Holton, Bates, & Ruona, 2000).

Recently, HRD researchers have been interested in research on motivation to transfer in line with organizational learning and culture (Egan, 2008; Egan et al., 2004; Kontoghiorghes, 2001). For instance, Egan (2008) examined the relationships among organizational culture, organizational subculture, leadership style, and motivation to transfer. Egan’s (2008) study results indicate that an innovative and supportive subculture has the greatest influence on employee application of learning and that localized leaders play a major role in influencing direct reports’ motivation to transfer. Such localized learning experiences are similar to the team environment common to AL.

Egan et al. (2004) also found a positive relationship between job satisfaction and motivation to transfer, as did Gegenfurtner, Veermans, Festner, and Gruber (2009) in their comprehensive review of motivation to transfer. Although no studies exploring the relationship between motivation to transfer and P-O fit were identified, Gegenfurtner et al. (2009) found associations between motivation to transfer and performance across extant studies to be moderate or small.

As HRD expands discussions regarding organizational learning from training to various learning contexts, motivation to transfer is defined as employees’ desire to transfer new knowledge gained from learning contexts including AL. The hypotheses associated with motivation to transfer learning are as follows:

**Hypothesis 4:** Employee job satisfaction will be positively associated with their motivation to transfer learning.

**Hypothesis 5:** Employee perceptions of fit with their organization will be positively associated with motivation to transfer learning.

**Hypothesis 6:** Employee motivation to transfer will be positively associated with reported performance.

**Summary.** The constructs reviewed (AL, organizational support, job satisfaction, P-O fit, and motivation to transfer) are used in framing the current study and are further elaborated. In addition to asking a relevant question regarding the impact of support for AL on employee affect, motivation, and performance, qualitative elaboration for such support is aimed at enhancing our understanding of the impact of AL on employees, supervisors, and organizations.

**Research Questions**

The central focus of this study is, first, to investigate the extent to which organizational support for AL may impact employees by examining the
relationships between organizational support for AL, employee attitudes, motivation, and performance. Second, this study elaborates on the nature of organizational support for AL in South Korean organizations. Two questions guiding this inquiry are:

1. What is the relationship between perceived organizational support for AL and employee attitudes, motivation, and performance in South Korean organizations as identified by AL participants and their supervisors?
2. What is the nature of organizational support for AL in South Korean organizations as identified by HR managers and executives?

Methods

Over the past decade and a half, authors have clarified several forms of interrelated research designs, including rationales for mixing quantitative and qualitative design, types of data collection and analysis, the emphasis (qualitative versus quantitative) in a given study, the sequence of implementation (sequential versus concurrent), and the point in the research process in which integration or relationship between data collection and analysis occurs (Creswell, Fetters, & Ivankova, 2004; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2010). The study, reported herein, involves a sequential mixed-methods research design (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2010), including (a) the use of an online survey of employees and supervisors examining the impact of organizational support for AL, and (b) semistructured interviews with HR managers and executives elaborating on the nature of organizational support for AL.

We used quantitative and qualitative methods to inform the theoretical frame and elaborate on key aspects of both research questions 1 and 2. Our approach is an embedded data approach (Creswell & Clark, 2011) whereby we collected data sequentially to both explore the validity of the hypothesized model and to elaborate on the quantitative independent variable (perceived support for action learning). We clarified the nature of support for AL as reported by HR managers and executives (from the same organizations as survey respondents) with responsibility for an insight about their organization’s support for AL. By both exploring employee perceptions of their organizational support for AL quantitatively and elaborating on the nature of AL support qualitatively, elaboration regarding the nature and impact of organizational support for AL is extended.

These data collection and analysis approaches are unequal in that the dominant research paradigm for the study is quantitative with qualitative data supporting elaboration regarding survey respondent contexts associated with the independent variable—organizational support for AL. The quantitative portion of the study informed OST in relation to AL and answered research question 1. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used
to examine the hypothesized model, exploring interrelationships between perceive support for AL, affective, and performance-related reactions. SEM is a largely confirmatory technique and supported our investigation through determination of the extent to which the hypothesized model, associated with OST, was valid.

Analysis of survey results provided key insights into affective and performance-related dynamics associated with organizational support for AL. Although data collection was sequential, the qualitative portion of the study informed both the theoretical aspects of the study and research question 2, and the independent variable in the quantitative portion of this study. By using a systematic approach to collecting qualitative data, we elaborate on the survey findings in a manner that provides an in-depth description about the ways in which organizations support AL in a number of settings.

### Sampling

A total of 268 participants from 28 companies responded to the online survey (Table 1) and 34 HR managers and executives participated in the semistructured interviews.

Our sampling frame combined quantitative probability and qualitative purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2009). We used the Korea Action Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Supervisor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daelim Industrial</td>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doosan Heavy Industries</td>
<td>Shipbuilding</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyundai Oilbank</td>
<td>Energy</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KT (Korea Telecom)</td>
<td>Telecommunications</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LG Academy (LG Group’s HRD Center)*</td>
<td>LG Group</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIG Insurance</td>
<td>Insurance</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samsung Electronics (Gumi Business Unit)</td>
<td>Electronics</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samsung HRD Center**</td>
<td>Samsung Group</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samsung Life Insurance</td>
<td>Insurance</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (Beautiful Human Corp.)</td>
<td>Human Resources</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>182</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Note. LG Academy and Samsung HRD Center provide corporate strategic-level training programs for the company affiliates; LG Academy included 10 company affiliates and Samsung HRD Center 8 company affiliates in their AL program.
Association (KALA) membership directory. The initial sampling of six large organizations was solicited at the 2008 Global Forum of Business-Driven AL, co-organized with the KALA in Seoul, South Korea. After the first author’s initial contact with these large companies, she sent an e-mail to HR managers listed in the KALA membership directory explaining the purpose of the survey and asking for an online survey with participants and their supervisors.

A survey was sent via HR managers and executives to a set of respondents, 412 AL participants and 352 supervisors from 28 companies. HR managers sent e-mail messages to participants and their supervisors, asking for participation in the study, and also sent weekly reminders. We received 268 total responses from AL participants (182) and their supervisors (86), resulting in a response rate of 35%. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) test for homogeneity indicated no significant differences in survey responses across organization membership or job type.

Survey respondents worked in a variety of industries such as electronics, energy, telecommunications, construction, and insurance. Respondents were primarily men (90%), and their average age was 38.6, with 12.6 years (from 0.5 year to 29 years) of work experience. They worked in every corner of the organization, including management support (40%), sales (30%), production (20%), and trading (10%). No significant differences between respondents and responses across reporting organizations were identified using Pearson’s Chi-Square test—as all p-values were less than .0001 and indicated nonsignificant chi-square measures at the $p < 0.05$ level. Comparisons across responses suggested homogeneity between groups and/or organizations and low exposure to response bias (Paulhus, 1991).

It is important to note that these organization leaders indicated that employees and managers participated frequently in AL projects. These respondents were neither identified as a member of a particular AL group, nor sampled in a manner that implied the survey was related to participation in any specific AL team or project. Therefore, the data do not violate the assumption of independence as these employees were not “nested” within a specific team—rather, they were asked to participate in the study because their organization was a member of KALA and asked to react based on their individual perceptions regarding their organization.

**Survey**

An online survey was constructed. We used a questionnaire containing 5-point Likert-type scaled items (agree = 5; disagree = 1). Consistent with established research standards, previously validated items (Holton et al., 2000) were used to examine the relationships between employee attitudes, learning motivation, and performance. The following variables were associated with previously validated item sets.
Perceived organizational support for action learning was measured using a four-item set created for this study, but contained very similar language to POS-related survey items (see Blume et al., 2010 and Tucker et al., 2008 for examples). A sample item is “Action learning is supported by my organization overall” (alpha = .80; all four EFA factors were well above .700).

Job Satisfaction was measured using a three-item set from Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins, and Klesh (1983). A sample item is “In general, I like working here” (alpha = 0.80).

Person–organization fit was a previously validated three-item set by Cable and Judge (1996) and Lauver and Kristof-Brown (2001). A sample item is “My values match those of current employees in this organization” (alpha = 0.86).

Motivation to transfer learning survey items matched those five previously utilized by Egan et al. (2004). A sample item is “I get excited when I think about applying new learning to my job” (alpha = 0.83).

Individual job performance (titled “My Performance”) was measured using a five-item set from Porter and Lawler (1968), with employees reporting their relative percentile performance rating. A sample item is “My overall performance compared to my peers, I am in the ____%” (alpha = 0.91).

Two versions of the survey were developed according to two groups of respondents (participants and their supervisors). Two more items were added in the survey for supervisors: the main objective of using AL and an open-ended question about examples of individual/group/organization levels of performance led by AL. A back-translation of English to Korean was confirmed by an experienced Korean doctoral student enrolled in a tier 1 U.S. research university. Before surveying, feedback on the questionnaire was obtained by three HR managers and the president of the KALA for face validity. Feedback provided was reflected in the final version of the survey. SurveyShare, an online survey tool, was utilized to create and deploy the online questionnaire. The online tool accepted only fully completed surveys; therefore, techniques aimed at handling missing data were unnecessary. Tests for reliability within the study variables were high, with Cronbach’s alpha levels ranging from 0.80 to 0.91.

Interviews

Details regarding the nature of organizational support for AL provided a relevant context for the quantitative portion of this study. Thirty-four HR managers, executives, and CEOs were chosen from participating organizations for semi-structured interviews. Interview questions were aimed at elaboration of organizational support for AL. Data were collected first by e-mail exchanges with each interviewee, followed by semistructured telephone interviews. Both email exchanges and interviews involved definitions, process, evaluation, organizational support, and AL’s impact on organizational performance (see Table 2).
Each telephone interview took about 30 minutes to 1 hour. Interview data were carefully written notes by the first author. Data analysis in qualitative studies is emergent and is concurrent with data collection (Ellinger et al., 2007; Merriam, 2009). Interview data were analyzed using the “constant comparison method” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 28), which involved comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences. As a result of the iterative process of the constant comparison method, we identified six emergent themes. We used “member-checking” to establish credibility (content validity) (Creswell, 2009, p. 191). HR managers and executives were selected to review and provide comments on the initial analysis of interview data. Minor errors were identified in the interview data—facts, numbers, and terms—and were corrected in finalizing this article.

Results

Details regarding results of the quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis are presented below. The first step was to understand employee and manager perspectives regarding the perceived individual impact of organizational support for AL on their affective and performance related actions and reactions.

Quantitative Results

Quantitative analysis using SEM was undertaken on the survey data. The aforementioned Figure 1 represents the hypothesized model for this portion of the study addressing research question 1—What is the relationship between perceived organizational support for AL and employee attitudes, motivation, and performance in South Korean organizations as identified by participants and their supervisors?

Model Evaluation. Table 3 provides means, standard deviations and correlations associated with each construct in the tested model. According to Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aiken’s (2003) assessment of the value of these correlation coefficients, \( r = 0.10 \) is considered a small effect; \( 0.15 \) a medium-small effect; \( 0.30 \) is considered a medium effect; \( 0.40 \) can be considered a medium-large effect; and \( 0.50 \) can be considered a large effect.

Six indices were used to determine the fit of the model. The indicators used to determine fit are (a) goodness-of-fit-index (GFI) (best fit is
above 0.9); (b) adjusted goodness-of-fit-index (AGFI) (best fit above 0.9); (c) non-normed fit index (NNFI) (best fit near 1 but may be above 1) (Bentler & Bonnet, 1980); (d) comparative fit index (CFI) (best fit is above 0.9); (e) root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) (less than 0.08 desired); and (f) the likelihood ratio (LR) test chi-squared (significance level of \( p < 0.01 \) or better indicates that the models being compared are significantly different from one another).

**Model Testing Results.** Figure 2 provides standardized estimates for structural components and measurements for the hypothesized model.

![Figure 2](image-url)

**Table 3. Means, standard deviations, and correlations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Organization support for AL</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Job satisfaction</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Person–organization fit</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.60</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Motivation to transfer learning</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Individual job performance</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.23</td>
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Note. Correlations higher than 0.18 are \( p < 0.05 \); correlations higher than 0.26 are \( p < 0.01 \).
The structural model had a relative chi-square ($\chi^2/df$, CMIN/DF) greater than 3, the relative chi-square was 3.78 ($\chi^2$: 793.12; df: 230; $p < 0.001$). The four fit measures mentioned above involving best fits close to 1 were as follows: AGFI, 0.94; CFI, 0.97; GFI, 0.96; and NNFI, 0.98. Identified residual (RMSEA) was small at 0.078. We used the bootstrap method (bootstrap sample size = 1,000) (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Preacher & Leonardelli, 2003) to determine the confidence intervals for mediation effects. Results (unstandardized values reported) indicated that job satisfaction and P-O fit mediate perceived organizational support for AL to motivation to transfer (Product of coefficients – Estimate = $-0.05$; SE = $0.01$; $Z = -4.74$; $p < 0.001$; Bootstrapping bias-corrected – Lower limit = $-0.08$; Upper limit = $-0.02$) and motivation to transfer mediates job satisfaction and P-O fit to performance (Product of coefficients—Estimate = $-0.05$; SE = $0.01$; $Z = -4.55$; $p < 0.001$; Bootstrapping bias-corrected – Lower limit = $-0.07$; Upper limit = $-0.02$).

In both cases, the 95% confidence interval bootstrap estimates for these indirect effects did not include zero, which suggests a significant total mediation effect. The squared multiple correlations for motivation to transfer was 0.24; indicating the proposed model accounted for approximately one fourth of the variance in motivation to transfer and nearly one twentieth (.036) of the variance for individual performance.

**Test of the Hypothesized Model.** In order to ensure the model was the best fit for the data, we tested the hypothesized model in relation to three alternative models. The LR test $\Delta \chi^2$ discussed above was used to examine differences between the hypothesized model and the alternative models identified. Three alternative models with LR test results are (a) an interaction model with motivation to transfer removed ($\Delta \chi^2 = 48.22$, df = 211, $p < 0.01$; AGFI, 0.89; CFI, 0.88; GFI, 0.87; NNFI, 0.91; RMSEA, 0.089); (b) an interaction model with job satisfaction and P-O fit removed ($\Delta \chi^2 = 54.81$, df = 211, $p < 0.01$; AGFI, 0.87; CFI, 0.89; GFI, 0.88; NNFI, 0.90; RMSEA, 0.101); and (c) a fully saturated model with all possible interactions between the five study variables ($\Delta \chi^2 = 61.43$, df = 211, $p < 0.01$; AGFI, 0.92; CFI, 0.90; GFI, 0.91; NNFI, 0.89; RMSEA, 0.082).

The SEM results from the hypothesized model fit the data better than the alternative models. Although the fully saturated model generated several acceptable fit measures, these did not fit as well as the hypothesized model, nor could the fully saturated model be explained theoretically. These results provide additional support for the hypothesized interaction depicted in Figure 1 by indicating that alternative models 1–3 were significantly different from the best-fit hypothesized model.

**Common Method Variance.** When independent and dependent variable data are collected by a self-report survey, common method variance (CMV) is a possible problem. Following the recommendation of Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003), a CMV test was conducted on the survey data using the
unmeasured latent method factor. This procedure separates response variance into three components: trait, method, and random error (Loehlin, 2004). Richardson, Simmering, and Sturman (2009) elaborates on four models for testing these three components—trait-only, method-only, trait/method, and trait/method-R. Tests of these component models are contrasted. If the method-only model fits the data significantly less well than the trait-only model, there is support that observed variance in independent and dependent variables could not be attributed to method alone. If the trait-only model fits significantly less well than the trait/method model, evidence that trait-based and method variance are present is supported. If the trait/method model fits significantly better than the trait/method-R model, there is evidence of bias due to common method variance.

As recommended by Richardson et al. (2009), trait/method and trait/method-R models were compared. There was no evidence of significant worsening of model fit indices comparing $\chi^2$ values: $\chi^2 (18.98) \Delta df = 12, p > 0.05$. All significant relationships were maintained after controlling for the latent CMV factor. These findings provide evidence that CMV is not an issue impacting quantitative findings in this study.

**Summary.** Quantitative findings, overall, strongly support the hypothesized model (Figure 1) and provide key insights regarding the impact of organizational support for AL. Survey items were assessed and translations were determined valid prior to survey deployment. All survey measures were determined to be well above established research norms for questionnaire reliability. AL was found to be positively associated with job satisfaction and P-O fit—and these two variables mediated the relationship between AL and motivation to transfer. Interactions between all study variables was consistent with the theorized relationship and support the proposed influence of organizational support for AL on employee affect, motivation, and performance. Therefore, OST was supported in the context of POS for AL. Qualitative findings (below) elaborate further regarding the nature of support for AL and the influence of AL-related managerial support and involvement.

**Qualitative Results**

As aforementioned, qualitative analysis was undertaken on the interview data collected from 34 HR managers and executives to address research question 2—What is the nature of organizational support for AL in South Korean organizations as identified by managers and executives? As a result, organization and managerial levels emerged as major themes to frame organizational support for AL in two major ways (see Table 4).

**Organization Level Support.** In response to research question 2 (the nature of organizational support for AL), interviewees emphasized support for AL at the organizational level. Organizational learning and performance were emphasized as important to framing AL in terms of organization context and organizational motivation for support.
Organizational Learning. HR managers and executives who were interviewed identified their organization’s learning culture to provide supportive environments for successful implementation of AL. Examples include the use of cyber learning for participant understanding of AL and basic management concepts (Samsung HRD Center and Samsung Life Insurance); voluntary small learning teams (Daelim Industrial and Samsung Electronics-Gumi BU); online and offline communities (Hyosung Corp. and Samsung Fire & Marine Insurance); and knowledge management systems (Daelim Industrial, Dongbu Corp, Hyundai Oilbank, and LG Electronics).

Organizational learning culture is well reflected in each company’s definition of AL. For example, Samsung HRD Center defined AL as “organizational culture innovation through problem-solving of corporate strategic issues.” Hyundai Oilbank, in the CEO’s terms, “has established the company’s unique work culture by fostering problem-solving skills, innovative thinking and leadership development.” In so doing, incentives for best practices in AL are used to make AL part of organizational learning culture such as profit sharing for the best AL teams in Hyundai Oilbank and a mileage program similar to that of airlines for an AL team’s contributions to the organizational knowledge base in Daelim Industrial.

Organizational Performance. How is AL impacting organizational performance? To answer this question, interviewees provided many examples. As a Daelim Industrial HR manager opined, “AL practices have delivered a wide range of performance indices ranging from improved jobs and team culture to performance outcomes.” Participating companies used both qualitative and quantitative evaluation criteria to measure the success of AL. Examples of organizational performance indexes include Hyosung Corp.’s and Hanaro Telcom’s return-on-investment (ROI); Hyundai Oilbank’s increased financial performance index; LG Electronics’ Leadership Index; and LG Academy’s Great Workplace Index.

Companies using AL for organization development are clear about the use of quantitative performance indexes. For example, Hyundai Oilbank had undertaken 2,200 AL projects total between 2009 and its inception in 2002 and delivered profits of $244 million. The company has improved its management performance, including (a) debts have decreased from 430% to 186%, (b) accumulated profits have increased to $1.68 billion, and (c) their credit rating has been enhanced from BBB to A0. Daelim Industrial provided evidence that nearly all employees had participated in AL and there have been as

### Table 4. Two levels of organizational support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational Level Support</th>
<th>Managerial Level Support</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Organizational Learning</td>
<td>• Managerial Involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Organizational Performance</td>
<td>• Managerial Performance Evaluation</td>
</tr>
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many as 300 learning teams in one year and 150 AL coaches. The company’s HR manager stated, “Action learning teams have hugely improved the company’s adaptive capacity to the changing environment of the construction industry.”

Companies where AL for leadership development is practiced also used quantitative evaluation criteria to substantiate AL’s broader impact on organizational performance. For instance, Hyosung Corp., where a major objective is to develop talent, calculated ROI of AL in terms of increased income, cost savings, and better business processes. Samsung HRD Center developed 1,017 global leaders and delivered solutions to 192 strategic projects, of which 96% were implemented in the recent 11 rounds of AL programs. LG Electronics, as an HR manager assured, “has produced more than 80 percent of all high potentials in the company in the past 10 years that led to the company’s competitive advantage.”

In contrast, many companies like Samsung Life Insurance, Samsung Fire & Marine Insurance, and SK Telecom have used qualitative indexes of AL including sharing sales know-how, idea generation for improvement, and talent leadership development. SK Telecom’s HR manager remarks:

Action learning provides top management with an opportunity to get insights rather than immediate financial outcomes. For example, an action learning team’s idea of using unified landline/wireless services was later adopted in the company and delivered considerable profits in the telecommunications market.

Even in the case of Hyundai, where financial performance is highly valued, individual competencies and organizational culture change, influenced by AL, are often communicated qualitatively but are of equal importance. As a result, Hyundai was ranked the number one energy company for customer satisfaction in 2007 and awarded the best practice of organization innovation through AL by the government in 2008. A Performance Enhancement Team leader succinctly states:

Action learning participants’ systematic problem-solving processes and enhanced job performance are the most valuable outcomes of action learning because those have become the foundation of the company’s competitive advantage. Whenever problems at work occur on a daily basis, employees see it through from a systems perspective built upon through the action learning process and solve the problems through teamwork. And these are the common practices deeply ingrained in Hyundai Oilbank.

**Managerial Level Support.** The managerial level of organizational support by AL, according to interviewees, involves two emergent themes: managerial involvement and managerial performance evaluation.
**Managerial Involvement.** Organizational support for AL at the managerial level takes many forms such as managers and executives acting as AL sponsors and learning coaches in the AL process. Sponsors select AL projects and participants, clarify outputs, communicate with stakeholders (e.g., CEOs), motivate participants, provide physical and personnel resources, and make decisions regarding implementation and follow-up activities. Sponsors participate in annual workshops to support AL processes. For example, Hyundai Oilbank has a very clear definition of managers as sponsors. According to the company’s manager in the Performance Enhancement Team for AL, “Action learning team leaders play a team sponsorship role, while executives play a role for implementation.” Managerial sponsorship of AL, according to the company’s CEO, is recognized as “among the most significant key success factors for AL’s contribution to the organization’s performance.”

Learning coaches help participants learn the content of the project and problem-solving process using questions, feedback, and reflection in the AL process. Companies have heavily used external learning coaches (e.g., professors) in the past years but recently several companies such as Hyundai Oilbank and Daelim Industrial are developing their own internal learning coaches to enhance competencies and leadership skills of team leaders (managers) through training—with the help of KALA. To recognize the importance of learning coaches, Daelim Industrial awards learning coaches who work with outstanding teams.

**Managerial Performance Evaluation.** Organizational support also includes evaluation of managerial support for AL as part of the managerial performance appraisal system. The inclusion of AL in managerial performance appraisals reflects these organizations’ strong commitment to employee development. For example, an HR executive from Hyosung Corp. detailed, “Managerial support for employee development is guaranteed through manager evaluation and manager promotion is closely related to employees’ mandatory training points.” Although Samsung Electronics (Gumi BU) has no standardized AL-related evaluation criteria, most managers implicitly practice employee development, which is part of the company’s learning culture.

In most cases, managers and executives are evaluated on employee development and coaching. Samsung Fire & Marine Insurance has specified manager evaluation in its employee development program in which managers are evaluated on employee development (80%) and coaching (20%). It is common at Daelim Industrial that team members’ failure to participate in required training is reflected negatively in managerial performance evaluations.

**Summary.** Although specific actions associated with organizational support for AL varied across firms, it is clear that each organization interviewed had in place a set of commitments, actions, and policies that reinforced the relevance and importance for employees and managers who participated in AL. Interviewees indicated that their companies not only signaled the importance of AL itself, but the importance of employee and manager contributions to it.
As Revans claimed, AL is fundamentally a “learner-centered” process (Dilworth & Boshyk, 2010, p. 270), and, therefore, corporate declaration of the importance of AL concurrently signals the involvement in AL as meaningful for the organization. Interviewees repeatedly touched on the team-based nature of AL and the importance of each individual to the AL process. In turn, AL was communicated as a valuable employee and management development tool.

**Discussion**

We investigated organizational support for AL practices in South Korean organizations and key outcomes associated with AL. In the research context, where there is a dearth of well-designed systematically organized AL studies, this study provides meaningful insights regarding AL for research and theory, and practices.

**Synthesis of Findings**

Eisenberger et al. (1986) proposed that employees form beliefs regarding the extent to which their organization supports their needs and values their contributions; POS is a valued assurance to employees that they are supported by their organizations in carrying out their jobs effectively. When examining POS for AL, we assessed the impact of AL-related support on affective, motivational, and performance related outcomes. We determined the model to have accounted for more than one-quarter of the variance in motivation to transfer and about one twentieth of the variance in individual performance. These findings supported that organizational support for AL positively impacts employee and manager attitudes and approaches to effectively carrying out their jobs and everyday work.

The positive impact of POS for AL supports the need for better understanding regarding practices influencing survey respondent perceptions as well as informing a more general understanding of the ways in which organizations support AL. Qualitative results established that each organization interviewed had in place a set of commitments, actions, and policies that reinforced the relevance and importance for employees and managers that participated in AL. These organizations not only signaled the importance of AL itself, but the importance of employee and manager contributions to it. Managers were found to play a key role in supporting, reinforcing, and even participating in AL-related incentives. Based on these study findings, we have a better understanding of both how AL is supported and the positive impact that such support has on employees.

**Research and Theory**

Our study findings establish both overt support by organizational leaders for AL and for employee and manager self-reported perceptions that the
organization was supporting AL. By reinforcing the importance of employee and managerial participation in AL, OST is supported.

OST asserts that POS is strongly associated with positive employee affective responses to their organization and that such support influences employees’ sense of obligation to support their organization in achieving collective objectives (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Perceived reciprocation by the organization to individual demonstrations of affective and behavioral alignment are likely to lead to further strengthening of employee performance and increase employee perceptions of their fit to the organization (Kristof, 1996).

Organizations demonstrate their support for AL through managerial investment of time and energy in the support and promotion of AL, such as AL sponsorship, formal incentives and promotion, and having AL featured in performance appraisals. This is in addition to positive individual outcomes found in the quantitative portion of this study. Many interviewees indicated that their organizations established incentives to managers who support AL and, as a result of organizational and managerial support, experienced positive organizational and managerial performance outcomes.

A small number of articles have examined HRD-related efforts as part of POS. Cho and Egan (2009, 2010) noted that AL-related outcomes such as learning, learning transfer, and performance have been unexplored. Our study findings support OST’s general premises that organizational support for AL is associated with employee satisfaction, sense of fit with the organization, motivation to transfer, and performance improvement. Beyond being a key contribution to AL research, this study provides support that organization and managerial action in support of HRD-related activities aligns with OST and general POS. HRD practices, therefore, add credence to the notion that support for HRD practices align with theorized OST and POS outcomes.

By elaborating qualitatively on the nature of support for AL, we also establish not only the importance of top-down and organization-wide support, but also that managers play a key role in POS for AL and, likely, HRD. Although established interactions between study variables (such as the relationship between P-O fit and job satisfaction) are similar across several national contexts, this study provides insight into South Korean organizational contexts specifically.

Practice

The quantitative results from this study suggest that organizational support for AL leads to several positive outcomes, while the qualitative findings provide elaboration regarding the ways in which organizations can support AL and resulting performance outcomes. Our study findings suggest that organizations may use AL to positively impact several aspects of employee learning and performance and that the assessment of employee perceived support for AL may be warranted not only for evaluative purposes, but in support of a
broader understanding of the impact of AL practice on employee and organizational success.

Among other things, sponsors surfaced as a crucial form of managerial involvement in AL. Sponsors are those who make decisions in projects and participants. In particular, top management’s sponsorship has been a key success factor for AL (J. Kim, 2007; Seo, 2009). To ensure sponsorship, practitioners should provide diverse programs to help sponsors understand and support AL in the AL process. For example, in the sponsor workshops, practitioners emphasize the important roles of participants (managers and executives) as sponsors, which can also be applied to other contexts, including:

- Communicate constantly with participants throughout the AL process.
- Ensure participants have time for AL activities.
- Provide personnel and physical resources.
- Be present in final team presentations.
- Provide feedback on solutions and implement follow-up activities.

As AL practices are becoming more visible as a leadership and organization development tool, a critical success factor has been whether AL is continued in the process of internal/external changes in the organization. Several large companies (Hyosung Corp., CJ, and Hanaro Telecom), in spite of their successful track records in using AL, do not foresee using AL. Reasons for discontinuation of AL include decreased sponsor (e.g., CEO) support (CJ); AL leader resignations (Hyosung Corp.); and M&As (Hanaro Telecom). In other cases, existing AL programs have been downsized due to leadership changes such as a new performance-driven CEO (LG Electronics) and head of HRD (Samsung Fire & Marine Insurance). In contrast, Hyundai Oilbank has continued practicing AL for the past 9 years with exceptional support from a recently retired former CEO who initiated AL programs as a management innovation tool.

Study Limitations

When it comes to the limitations for this study, we had a moderate-to-low response rate (35%), though this means our response rate is well within a common response range established by Baruch and Holtom (2008; mean = 52% with a lower bound SD of 31% an upper bound SD of 73%). We successfully recruited a set of respondents, participants (182) and their supervisors (86), to examine organizational support for AL from the two major stakeholder perspectives. We invested extra efforts to gather more responses with the help of HR managers and executives but had limited responses, particularly from participants’ supervisors. Although our ANOVA and chi-square results support respondent homogeneity, more could have been done to ensure respondents and supervisors are not nested within respondent
groups. Due to their busy schedules, it is likely that managers did not respond to our requests to complete the survey. Because of this unequal number of responses between the two groups and a moderate-to-low response rate, we should be conservative in interpreting the results of our quantitative analysis.

Our study findings explained a relatively small amount of variance in performance using a self-versus-other comparison whereby employees rated their own performance in relation to their perceptions of others’ performance. There was no way to determine whether these respondents had been previously exposed to evidence contrasting their performance with that of peers. Future studies should use more objective measures of individual performance both on the job and in relationship to AL-related outcomes.

In the case of our sequential mixed methods design, whereby a quantitative survey was deployed first, these results are more vulnerable to researcher predispositions and, as a result, more structured qualitative inquiry than if conducted concurrently. While CMV was not found to influence study findings, a second source of quantitative data would improve future efforts to explore outcomes associated with support for AL.

Conclusion

Despite these limitations, the strong support for the hypothesized model (Figure 1) and for OST in this study suggests that employees who perceive their organizations to be supportive of AL will have positive reactions about their work and organization, and these reactions are likely to lead to greater motivation to transfer learning and improved performance. Prior anecdotal support regarding participant perceptions of AL, leading to positive outcomes, may well explain the recent rapid growth of AL practices in South Korea. And these empirical results provide initial support validating anecdotal arguments regarding positive outcomes associated with AL.

Future studies should examine OST in other cultural contexts and strive to elaborate further on the specific impact of organizational support for AL, including specific outcomes associated with individual and organizational success. Future use of a concurrent mixed methods design is recommended, as the sequential design, reported herein, involved more semistructured/structured qualitative interview questions and our qualitative process was vulnerable to alignment with the assumptions of the quantitative design. To better understand the potential for shared/overlapping responses, related quantitative examinations should carefully detail the relationships/interrelationships among study respondents. Each method deployed independently may lead to more elaboration and a different level of elaboration by interviewees.

Longitudinal studies and studies detailing key aspects of AL, the manner in which it is implemented and supported, and qualitative details regarding
organizational and individual performance outcomes are recommended. Job satisfaction has been strongly supported in prior research as an inverse correlate to turnover, so closer examination of the impact of support for AL on turnover is warranted. Further inquiry could also be improved by reducing or eliminating exposure to CMV. For instance, a measure other than self-report or a distal performance measure would be helpful in better understanding outcomes related to support for AL. And contrasts between organizational support for AL between firms could be formed based on the future development of an AL support typology.

As established earlier, both systematic research on AL and mixed methods studies in HRD are rare. Overall, we have established the value that systematic research in AL can contribute to both AL and HRD. We also took an additional step toward further establishing the relevance of mixed methods studies for research in HRD. Perhaps most promisingly, we have added to the gradual advance of HRD further establishing the positive impact of HRD-related practices on employee attitudes, perceived support, learning, and performance.

References


Yonjoo Cho is with Indiana University.

Toby Egan is with the Purdue School of Engineering and Technology–IUPUI and the Purdue University Graduate School.