



Facilitating Informal Workplace Learning for Organizational Capacity and Public Service Improvement: Managers' Experiences in Cambodia's Sub-National Administrations

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the Study: This study explores how managers facilitate informal workplace learning within Cambodia's sub-national administrations. It examines the managerial practices, workplace conditions, and organizational factors that support employee learning and development and contribute to organizational capacity within decentralized public-sector organizations.

Methodology: A qualitative exploratory design was employed to examine managers' experiences of facilitating informal workplace learning within Cambodia's sub-national administrations. Data were collected through 14 semi-structured interviews involving 16 managerial participants, including governors, deputy governors, administrative directors, deputy administrative directors, and office chiefs across multiple levels of sub-national administration. Interviews were conducted in Khmer, transcribed, translated into English, and analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis.

Main Findings: Four interrelated dimensions of managerial facilitation of informal workplace learning were identified: structuring opportunities for learning, creating supportive learning climates, developing employee capability through work participation, and managing organizational constraints affecting learning. The findings demonstrate that managers play a central role in creating learning-supportive workplace environments that foster employee development and strengthen organizational capacity within Cambodia's sub-national administrations.

Novelty/Originality of this Study: This study provides an empirically grounded framework of managerial facilitation of informal workplace learning within a decentralized public-sector context. It advances workplace learning research by introducing Constraint-Adaptive Learning Facilitation as an emerging conceptual proposition and demonstrates how workplace learning can strengthen employee capability, organizational capacity, and public service effectiveness.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Public-sector organizations face increasing demands arising from administrative reforms, technological developments, expanding service-delivery responsibilities, and growing citizen expectations [1], [2]. Meeting these demands depends substantially on the knowledge, skills, and adaptability of public employees, whose performance influences the quality, responsiveness, and effectiveness of public services delivered to citizens [2].

Consequently, capacity development has become an important priority for governments seeking to strengthen organizational effectiveness, enhance institutional performance, improve public service delivery, and better respond to citizens' needs and expectations [2]-[4].

Formal training programmes, workshops, and professional development activities remain common approaches to capacity development. However, formal training alone cannot address all learning needs that emerge in daily work [5]-[7]. Public employees frequently encounter new situations, unexpected problems, and evolving work requirements that demand ongoing learning, adaptation, and the continuous development of professional expertise beyond formal training opportunities [7]-[9].

Informal workplace learning (IWL) occurs through work activities, social interaction, problem solving, and reflection outside formally structured educational programmes [7], [10], [11]. Embedded in everyday work, IWL develops through employees' engagement with workplace tasks, colleagues, and organizational challenges [12]. Employees acquire knowledge not only through individual experience but also through collaboration, observation, mentoring, knowledge sharing, feedback, and reflection [7], [13], [14]. Although organizations continue to invest in formal training and professional development programmes, a substantial proportion of employee learning occurs informally through work experiences and daily activities [8], [11]. Opportunities for learning are influenced by workplace relationships, organizational practices, and access to meaningful work experiences [12], [13], [15]. Consequently, workplace learning is shaped by both employee participation and the workplace environment in which work is organized and experienced [12], [13].

Managers play a central role in supporting workplace learning. Previous studies have identified workplace participation, coaching, feedback, supportive leadership, and learning-oriented work environments as important factors contributing to employee learning and development [16]-[20]. Through work design, delegation, guidance, feedback, and challenging work assignments, managers influence employees' opportunities for workplace learning and capability development [16]-[18]. Managers also foster trust, psychological safety, and positive workplace relationships that encourage employees to seek advice, share knowledge, and learn from experience [21], [22]. Coaching, feedback, and appropriate levels of autonomy further support the development of employee confidence, competence, and professional judgement [14], [17], [23], [24]. Collectively, these practices reflect learning-oriented leadership, which emphasizes creating opportunities for learning, encouraging knowledge sharing, and supporting employee development within everyday work [16], [18], [19].

Managers are often expected to support employee development while responding to operational demands, resource constraints, and organizational requirements. Workplace learning research suggests that workload pressures, staffing shortages, limited resources, and competing priorities can influence employees' participation in learning activities and access to developmental support [12], [14]. Organizational structures, workplace conditions, and individual differences among employees may also shape learning and development processes [12], [13], [20], [25]. Access to information, technology, learning resources, and supportive workplace relationships can facilitate employee learning, whereas formal procedures and hierarchical structures may restrict communication and knowledge sharing [12], [13]. Employees also differ in their motivation, confidence, and willingness to engage in learning [24], [25]. Managers therefore need to adapt learning-supportive practices to changing organizational conditions and employee needs [19], [25].

Despite growing research on workplace learning, important gaps remain. Most studies have been conducted in private-sector organizations, educational institutions, and human resource development settings [15], [17], [18]. Public-sector organizations have received comparatively less attention despite facing increasing service demands, resource constraints, and administrative accountability requirements [2], [26]. Existing studies have often examined managerial practices, workplace conditions, and learning processes separately, providing limited understanding of how managers facilitate workplace learning as part of their everyday responsibilities and how such facilitation contributes to organizational capacity in public-sector settings [17], [18]. Less is also known about how managers sustain learning opportunities under staffing shortages, competing priorities, and organizational constraints, particularly within public-sector and decentralized governance settings [14], [19], [25].

Beyond individual employee development, workplace learning contributes to the broader capacity of public-sector organizations to adapt and perform effectively. As employees develop professional knowledge, skills, and competence through everyday work experiences, organizations may benefit from improved coordination, problem solving, knowledge sharing, innovation, and service delivery [4], [26], [27]. In decentralized governance settings, workplace learning therefore has implications not only for individual development but also for organizational effectiveness, institutional capacity, and the quality of public services provided to citizens [2], [28], [29].

Cambodia's sub-national administrations provide a useful setting for examining these issues. Since the implementation of decentralization and deconcentration reforms, sub-national administrations have assumed increasing responsibilities for local governance, public service delivery, and local development [30], [31]. These expanding responsibilities have increased demands for employee competence, organizational capacity, and service performance [31]. At the same time, many administrations continue to face challenges related to human resource capacity, technical expertise, resource availability, and growing administrative workloads [31], [32]. Recent assessments also underline continuing demands for improved responsiveness, accountability, and service delivery

at the local level [33]. Understanding how managers support employee learning in this context can therefore provide valuable insights into how workplace learning contributes to employee development, organizational capacity, and public service performance within decentralized governance settings.

To address these gaps, this study adopts a qualitative exploratory approach to examine managerial facilitation of informal workplace learning within Cambodia's sub-national administrations. Qualitative inquiry is particularly appropriate for exploring how workplace learning is experienced, interpreted, and facilitated within specific organizational contexts [34], [35]. By focusing on managers' experiences and perspectives, the study seeks to develop an integrated understanding of how workplace learning is supported and sustained under everyday organizational conditions and constraints, and how such practices may contribute to employee development, organizational capacity, and public service delivery.

The purpose of this study is to explore how managers facilitate informal workplace learning within Cambodia's sub-national administrations. Specifically, the study aims to: (1) examine the managerial practices that support informal workplace learning, (2) identify workplace conditions that facilitate employee learning and development, and (3) explore how managers sustain learning opportunities under organizational and institutional constraints. The study contributes to workplace learning literature by providing empirical evidence from a decentralized public-sector context that has received limited scholarly attention. It develops an integrated understanding of managerial facilitation by examining how managers create learning opportunities, foster supportive workplace environments, support employee capability development, and respond to organizational constraints. In doing so, the study offers insights into the role of workplace learning in strengthening organizational capacity and supporting public service delivery. Building on these findings, the study introduces Constraint-Adaptive Learning Facilitation as an emerging interpretive concept for understanding managerial support for workplace learning in resource-constrained public-sector settings.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1 Research Design and Research Location

This study employed a qualitative exploratory design to examine how managers facilitate informal workplace learning within Cambodia's sub-national administrations (SNAs) [34]-[36]. A qualitative exploratory approach was appropriate because the study sought to understand managerial experiences, practices, and interpretations of workplace learning within their real organizational context.

Cambodia's SNAs were selected as the research location for four reasons. First, SNAs have assumed increasing responsibilities for local governance, public service delivery, and local development under decentralization and deconcentration reforms [31], [37], [38]. Second, these expanding responsibilities have increased demands for employee competence, organizational capacity, and service performance at the local level [31]. Third, many SNAs continue to face capacity-development challenges, including staffing limitations, resource constraints, workload pressures, and evolving administrative responsibilities. Fourth, managers in these institutions play a central role in supervising officials, assigning work, providing guidance, coordinating tasks, and supporting employee development. They are therefore well positioned to provide insights into how workplace learning is facilitated and sustained under everyday organizational conditions and constraints. This context provides a particularly relevant setting for examining managerial facilitation of informal workplace learning within decentralized public-sector organizations.

2.2 Participants and Sampling

Participants were selected through purposive sampling because they held managerial positions involving employee supervision, administrative coordination, work delegation, and responsibility for staff development [39]. The study involved 14 semi-structured interviews with 16 managerial participants drawn from capital, provincial, municipal, district, and khan administrations. Twelve interviews were conducted individually and two were conducted as group interviews. Participants included governors, deputy governors, administrative directors, deputy administrative directors, and office chiefs.

The participants were selected because their roles required direct involvement in workplace learning and employee development processes, including assigning responsibilities, providing guidance and feedback, supporting knowledge sharing, coordinating work activities, and responding to organizational constraints. Participants had between 3 and 20 years of administrative experience and occupied positions with varying levels of managerial responsibility. This variation enabled the study to capture perspectives from different administrative levels and organizational contexts. Consistent with qualitative inquiry, emphasis was placed on the richness, relevance, and diversity of participants' experiences rather than statistical representation [40]. Table 1 presents the participant profile.

Table 1. Participant Profile

Position	Number of Participants	Main Organizational Role	Relevant Administrative Experience
Governors	4	Overall leadership, decision-making, supervision, and coordination	5–20 years
Deputy Governors	4	Sectoral oversight, coordination, and staff guidance	5–20 years
Administrative Directors	3	Administrative management, work assignment, supervision, and reporting	5–15 years
Deputy Administrative Directors	3	Operational coordination, staff support, and follow-up	5–10 years
Office Chiefs	2	Direct supervision, technical coordination, and day-to-day staff support	3–10 years
Total	16		

Table 2. Interview Composition

Interview Type	Number
Individual interviews	12
Group interviews	2
Total interviews	14

2.3 Interview Procedure and Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which allowed participants to describe their experiences while ensuring that key research topics were consistently explored across interviews [35], [41]. The interview guide was developed based on the study objectives and relevant literature on informal workplace learning, managerial facilitation, and learning-oriented leadership.

The data collection process followed six sequential steps. First, formal permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Ministry of Interior (MOI). Following approval, the Ministry informed selected capital, provincial, municipal, district, and khan administrations about the study and facilitated access to potential participants. Second, eligible participants were identified based on their managerial responsibilities for employee supervision, administrative coordination, and staff development. Third, potential participants were contacted and provided with information regarding the study purpose, voluntary participation, confidentiality procedures, and expected interview duration.

Fourth, informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Fifth, interviews were conducted in Khmer using a semi-structured interview guide covering managerial practices, workplace learning opportunities, employee development, and organizational constraints. A total of 14 interviews were conducted, including 12 individual interviews and 2 group interviews involving 16 managerial participants. Interviews lasted approximately 45-60 minutes and were audio-recorded with participants' permission. During the interviews, participants were encouraged to elaborate on their experiences and clarify responses when necessary to ensure accurate understanding of their perspectives.

Sixth, interview recordings were transcribed verbatim in Khmer and subsequently translated into English. To enhance accuracy, translated transcripts were checked against the original Khmer transcripts and audio recordings before analysis. Figure 1 summarizes the overall research procedure.

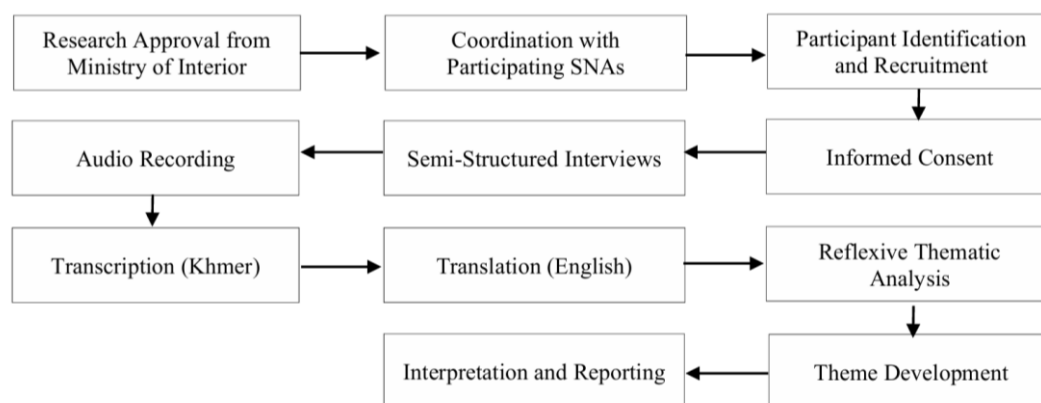


Figure 1. Research Procedure

2.4 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke [42]-[44]. This approach was selected because it provides a flexible and systematic method for identifying, interpreting, and reporting patterns of meaning within qualitative data. The analysis followed six iterative phases: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report.

The researcher first read and reread the interview transcripts to become familiar with the data and identify meaningful patterns related to managerial facilitation of informal workplace learning. Initial codes were then generated inductively from the interview transcripts. Meaningful segments of text were assigned descriptive codes reflecting participants' experiences, practices, and interpretations. Similar codes were subsequently compared, grouped, and refined into broader categories representing recurring patterns of meaning across the dataset.

For example, interview excerpts describing delegation of responsibilities, assignment of challenging tasks, participation in problem solving, and learning through practical experience were initially coded separately and later grouped into broader categories related to learning through work participation. Similar procedures were applied throughout the dataset to develop candidate themes that captured common patterns across participants' accounts.

The candidate themes were reviewed and refined through repeated comparison with the original transcripts to ensure that they accurately reflected participants' experiences and addressed the research objectives. During this process, some themes were combined, refined, or redefined to improve conceptual coherence and distinction between themes. The final analysis resulted in four themes: structuring opportunities for learning, creating a supportive learning climate, developing employee capability through work participation, and managing constraints to informal workplace learning.

2.5 Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

Several strategies were used to enhance the trustworthiness of the study [35], [43]-[45]. Credibility was strengthened through repeated engagement with the data, comparison of perspectives across managerial positions and administrative levels, and careful checking of translated transcripts against the original Khmer transcripts and audio recordings. Variation in managerial positions, administrative levels, and interview formats enabled comparison of perspectives across participants and organizational contexts.

A form of member checking was conducted during the interview process. Participants were invited to clarify, elaborate on, and confirm key points during the interviews to ensure accurate understanding of their experiences and perspectives. Peer review was undertaken through discussion of emerging interpretations and themes with academic supervisors during the analytical process. Reflexive notes, analytic memos, and an audit trail consisting of coding records and theme-development notes were maintained throughout the study to document analytical decisions, enhance transparency, and strengthen dependability. Ethical approval was obtained through the relevant institutional review process. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study. Participants were identified using codes rather than personal names.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

The study identified four interrelated themes describing how managers facilitate informal workplace learning within Cambodia's sub-national administrations, such as (1) structuring opportunities for learning, (2) creating a supportive learning climate, (3) developing employee capability through work participation, and (4) managing constraints to informal workplace learning.

3.1.1 Structuring Opportunities for Learning

Structuring opportunities for learning emerged as a central aspect of managerial facilitation of informal workplace learning. Participants described how managers intentionally create learning opportunities through role clarification, developmental supervision, delegation of responsibility, access to learning opportunities, and knowledge-sharing activities. Rather than treating learning as a separate activity, managers embedded learning within everyday work processes and organizational routines.

Participants frequently explained that learning begins with helping employees understand their responsibilities and how their work contributes to broader organizational objectives. Role clarification and developmental supervision were described as mechanisms through which employees learn to perform their duties, navigate administrative procedures, and respond to workplace challenges. An administrative director explained that effective learning depends on employees understanding their roles, stating that *"the key issue is how we help them understand what their role actually means"* (P02). Similarly, a municipal governor described regular meetings as a means of reinforcing responsibilities and communicating organizational priorities:

"I have maintained monthly review meetings so that officials can understand their work responsibilities and receive updates on new issues" (P05).

Role clarification was also supported through formal structures and ongoing communication. One administrative director explained that employees are guided through clearly defined responsibilities and work procedures, noting that *"we also have detailed descriptions of roles and responsibilities" (P04.2)*. Meetings, work reviews, and supervisory discussions were frequently used to communicate expectations and translate them into daily work practices.

Participants also portrayed supervision as an ongoing developmental process. Managers frequently referred to providing guidance, monitoring work progress, and assisting employees when challenges emerged. One administrative director explained:

"When the Governor provides instructions and indicates that a task must be done first, I will initially give the instruction directly to the official concerned" (P01).

The same participant also explained the role of follow-up and support during implementation:

"We must still follow up and monitor whether the work results align with what we expect. If they do not, we make adjustments and provide corrections accordingly" (P01).

Participants viewed these interactions as opportunities for learning rather than simply mechanisms for monitoring performance. Through ongoing guidance and follow-up, employees gain practical knowledge, improve work practices, and develop confidence in carrying out their responsibilities.

Managers also served as sources of practical knowledge and workplace expertise. Employees frequently sought advice from supervisors when dealing with unfamiliar situations, complex administrative tasks, or work-related difficulties. As one deputy governor observed:

"Leaders also guide and teach them" (P11).

Similarly, a deputy administrative director noted that *"officials frequently come to seek advice or different kinds of guidance" (P11)* when they encounter challenges in their work. Participants explained that managers often use workplace challenges and mistakes as opportunities to explain procedures, share experiences, and help employees improve future performance. Learning therefore occurs through discussion, problem solving, and the sharing of experience-based knowledge.

In addition to clarifying roles and providing developmental supervision, managers frequently emphasized delegation as a mechanism through which employees learn through direct participation in work. Rather than assigning tasks solely to distribute workloads, managers viewed delegation as a means of developing employees' competence, confidence, and sense of responsibility. Several managers explained that delegation enables employees to learn through direct engagement with work. An administrative director described how authority and responsibility are intentionally assigned to staff, noting that *"they constantly delegate both authority and responsibility to the division directors, especially to me in my role as Administrative Director, to organize and manage the work" (P01)*. The participant further explained that delegation is accompanied by accountability, stating that *"I delegate tasks to them so that they can carry out the work, while I am responsible for monitoring and supervising the implementation" (P01)*. Participants described delegation as creating opportunities for employees to gain practical experience within a framework of managerial oversight.

Autonomy emerged as a feature of the workplace environment that supported learning and development. A provincial administrative director explained:

"What I give them is autonomy. This means that when I assign a task, I provide support and allow each unit to take ownership" (P02).

The participant further noted that leaders intentionally avoid overly prescriptive approaches because *"each person has their own autonomy" (P02)*. Such practices allow employees to exercise judgment, assume ownership of their work, and develop confidence through experience.

Several managers described delegation as a gradual developmental process through which employees build competence over time. A municipal administrative director explained that employees are encouraged to complete tasks independently rather than relying on supervisors to perform the work on their behalf:

"We do not sit and write documents for them. Instead, we assign them to prepare the documents themselves" (P04.2).

Participants explained that repeated engagement with work responsibilities helps employees become more capable and independent in managing their duties.

Delegation was also associated with decision-making opportunities. An office chief explained that authority is delegated according to established organizational structures, noting that *"I do delegate decision-making to subordinates according to the hierarchy" (P03.1)*. Another participant explained that employees should possess *"sufficient authority and qualifications to make decisions" (P03.2)*. Participants viewed decision-making responsibilities as opportunities for learning because they require employees to analyze situations, exercise judgment, and assume responsibility for outcomes.

Delegation did not imply the absence of supervision. Managers remained available to provide guidance, answer questions, and monitor progress when necessary. Delegation therefore operated within a framework of support and accountability, enabling employees to learn through experience while maintaining organizational effectiveness.

Beyond learning through everyday work responsibilities, managers also sought to broaden employees' access to formal and semi-formal learning opportunities. Several participants explained that managers actively encourage employees to participate in learning opportunities whenever they become available. A municipal governor noted that *"when there are training programs available, we encourage and push our officials to participate" (P04.1)*. Similarly, a khan governor explained that *"if they want to pursue further learning, we also help facilitate that" (P07)*. These accounts indicate that managers actively support employee participation in developmental activities rather than leaving learning entirely to individual initiative.

Access to learning opportunities was often extended beyond those who were formally designated to participate. One administrative director explained:

"When there are courses on public financial management reform, invitations are usually extended only to the deputy governor in charge and the finance department. However, in the interest of learning, I am willing to act differently. I want them to learn" (P02).

This account illustrates how managers intentionally expand participation beyond conventional administrative arrangements to expose a wider range of employees to new knowledge and experiences.

Several participants also viewed continuing education and longer-term professional development as avenues for professional growth. A deputy governor explained that scholarships and educational opportunities are provided to help officials strengthen their competencies and prepare for future responsibilities (P11). Likewise, a deputy administrative director described the range of learning opportunities available to employees, stating that *"there are many learning opportunities here, both internally and internationally"* and that *"there are also many scholarship opportunities abroad, both short-term and long-term" (P14)*.

Managers also described the need to identify employee learning needs and create conditions that enable participation. In some cases, participation was supported through administrative assistance, scheduling flexibility, or resource allocation to help employees take advantage of available opportunities. Expanding access to learning therefore involved not only making opportunities available but also reducing barriers that might limit participation.

Learning opportunities were further supported through meetings and knowledge-sharing activities that enabled employees to exchange experiences, discuss challenges, and learn from colleagues across organizational units. Rather than serving solely administrative or coordination purposes, meetings provided opportunities for employees to share knowledge and develop a broader understanding of organizational work.

Several participants explained that regular meetings provide opportunities for employees to learn beyond the boundaries of their own roles and responsibilities. A provincial administrative director described how monthly meetings are intentionally organized to promote learning across organizational units:

"Every month, I bring all officers together so that they can understand the work of different offices and learn from one another" (P02).

The participant further explained that these meetings help employees understand *"the roles, duties, and importance of each office" (P02)*. By bringing together officials from different units, managers create opportunities for cross-functional learning and broader organizational understanding.

Participants also described meetings as forums for sharing information, reviewing work progress, discussing emerging issues, and learning from collective experience. A municipal governor explained:

"I have steadily maintained monthly review meetings so that officials can understand their work responsibilities and receive updates on new issues" (P05).

Similarly, another municipal governor reported that regular administrative meetings are maintained even during busy periods because they provide opportunities to communicate expectations, discuss work-related concerns, and reinforce shared understanding across the organization (P04.1).

Meetings also served as forums for collaborative problem-solving. A municipal governor explained that when challenges arise, “they gather everyone involved and discuss the problems together” (P04.1). Likewise, a khan governor noted:

“If there are issues, we can call meetings to discuss and resolve them” (P07).

These discussions allow employees to exchange perspectives and identify practical solutions collectively.

Meetings also supported collective decision-making and shared learning. An administrative director explained that “*we hold meetings to consult and make decisions collectively*” (P04.2). Such practices enable employees to contribute ideas, learn from different viewpoints, and develop a deeper understanding of organizational issues. Managers therefore use meetings not only to coordinate work but also to promote knowledge sharing and learning across the organization.

Learning opportunities were embedded within everyday work through role clarification, developmental supervision, delegation, access to learning opportunities, and knowledge-sharing activities. Through these practices, employees acquired practical knowledge, developed confidence, and assumed greater responsibility in their work. Participants also described how learning supported coordination, problem solving, and the implementation of organizational tasks.

3.1.2 Creating a Supportive Learning Climate

Creating a supportive learning climate emerged as an important dimension of managerial facilitation of informal workplace learning. Participants consistently emphasized that learning is influenced not only by work assignments and developmental opportunities but also by workplace relationships and the broader social environment in which employees perform their work. Trust and psychological safety, managerial support, and teamwork and mutual support were frequently described as conditions that encourage employees to seek guidance, share experiences, and engage in learning activities.

Participants explained that trust is demonstrated through confidence in employees’ abilities and the willingness to provide them with responsibility. An administrative director from Daun Penh Administration explained that leadership entrusted him with significant responsibilities in managing administrative work and that he similarly extends trust to his subordinates, stating that “*I likewise place trust in them, across each office. It is not possible for me to handle everything personally*” (P01). Likewise, a provincial administrative director explained that “*senior leaders trust managers to make decisions and assess employee capabilities appropriately*” (P02). These accounts suggest that trust is reflected not only in workplace relationships but also in managerial practices that provide employees with opportunities to learn through responsibility and experience.

Participants also described the importance of creating environments in which employees feel secure while carrying out their work. One office chief explained:

“I also expect that leaders will guide me in a way that makes me feel secure, confident, and clear in carrying out my work” (P03.2).

Several participants noted that fear of making mistakes can discourage initiative and limit learning. In response, managers described adopting supportive approaches when errors occur. A municipal governor explained:

“I do not focus on blaming officers when work has been done incorrectly” (P06).

Similarly, a deputy administrative director noted that:

“We do not place blame on officials. Instead, we help one another and work together to resolve issues” (P12).

These practices indicate that mistakes are treated as opportunities for learning and improvement rather than occasions for punishment. Participants explained that such approaches encourage employees to take initiative, experiment with new ways of working, and seek assistance when difficulties arise.

Trust and psychological safety were further reinforced through open communication and accessible leadership. Employees were encouraged to express their views, raise concerns, and seek clarification when needed. A municipal governor emphasized that:

"None of the officials are restricted from expressing their views, so everything is open" (P04.1).

Similarly, an administrative director explained that employees are encouraged to raise requests and concerns directly during meetings, creating opportunities for dialogue and shared problem-solving (P01). These practices enable employees to participate more actively in workplace discussions and learning processes.

Leadership accessibility also emerged as an important feature of the workplace environment. A municipal governor described an open-door approach, explaining:

"I always tell my officials that my office door is open to everyone, and they can come to meet me at any time" (P05).

Likewise, a khan governor noted that:

"If there are any issues, they can come and talk to me" (P07).

Several participants further explained that communication extends beyond formal meetings through telephone calls, messaging applications, and informal conversations, providing employees with timely access to support and guidance when challenges arise. Such accessibility creates opportunities for continuous interaction, discussion, and learning within the workplace.

Beyond trust and psychological safety, participants highlighted the importance of managerial support in fostering employee development. Employees were more likely to engage in learning when their efforts were valued, their contributions were acknowledged, and support was available when challenges emerged. Several participants explained that effective support begins with understanding employees' individual circumstances, needs, and motivations. An administrative director explained that supporting employees requires an understanding of their individual preferences and motivations, stating:

"I need to understand each official's preferences and motivations" (P01).

Similarly, another administrative director noted that support should be provided to all employees regardless of their capability or performance level, explaining that:

"Support is provided to all officials, whether they are highly capable, less capable, diligent, or less motivated" (P02).

Managers therefore appeared to adapt their support to the diverse needs and circumstances of employees.

Beyond providing practical assistance, managers also supported employee development through encouragement, recognition, and positive reinforcement. Participants explained that encouragement is often provided through everyday interactions to help employees build confidence and remain engaged in their work. A deputy governor explained that:

"Employees are encouraged to take responsibility for their work, develop new competencies, and continue improving their performance" (P08).

Recognition also served as an important form of support. A deputy administrative director explained that:

"Recognition and verbal encouragement are also important" (P13).

Participants observed that employees become more motivated when leaders acknowledge their contributions and encourage continued improvement. Several managers further described support as a means of reinforcing initiative and professional growth. A deputy governor observed that:

"Employees who demonstrate initiative often exhibit leadership potential and should be supported in their development" (P10).

Participants explained that employees are encouraged to pursue learning opportunities, strengthen their capabilities, and assume greater responsibility within their areas of work.

Supportive leadership was also reflected in the ways managers respond to concerns and difficulties. Participants explained that when employees encounter problems or submit requests, leaders attempt to provide assistance and identify solutions. A municipal governor described a commitment to employee well-being, stating:

"I always consider the well-being of my officials. I share both hardships and benefits with them" (P05).

Participants explained that such practices strengthen workplace relationships and reinforce employees' confidence that support will be available when needed.

While trust and managerial support create conditions that encourage learning, participants further emphasized teamwork, solidarity, and mutual support as important mechanisms through which learning occurs in practice. Learning occurred not only through interactions with supervisors but also through collaboration among colleagues. Several participants explained that teamwork is a deliberate leadership approach rather than an incidental outcome of organizational work. An administrative director stated:

"For me, I choose teamwork as the core approach" (P02).

This perspective reflects a belief that learning is strengthened when employees work collaboratively rather than individually. By encouraging teamwork, managers create opportunities for employees to exchange knowledge, learn from different experiences, and develop a shared understanding of organizational responsibilities.

Supportive workplace relationships also contributed to workplace learning. An office chief described maintaining relationships with staff that extend beyond formal administrative roles, explaining that communication often resembles interactions among family members rather than strictly hierarchical relationships (P03.2). Similarly, a municipal governor described regularly visiting different departments and interacting directly with officials to strengthen relationships across the organization (P05). These practices help create environments in which employees feel comfortable seeking assistance and learning from one another.

Several participants described solidarity as an organizational value that strengthens cooperation and collective learning. One office chief stated:

"The most important factor is internal solidarity" (P03.1).

Likewise, a municipal governor observed that:

"Internal solidarity and unity within the organization are equally important" (P06).

Participants explained that strong interpersonal relationships encourage cooperation, facilitate knowledge sharing, and help employees work collectively toward common organizational goals.

Managers also described mutual support as a means of addressing workplace challenges. A municipal governor explained that when employees encounter difficulties, they are encouraged to bring issues forward so that solutions can be identified collectively rather than individually. As the participant noted:

"When they are unable to proceed, they bring the issue back to their superiors in order to find a solution together" (P06).

Similarly, participants described workplace cultures in which employees readily seek advice from colleagues and supervisors when facing unfamiliar situations or complex tasks. These interactions create opportunities for shared learning and collaborative problem-solving.

Employees routinely supported one another in carrying out their work. An administrative director explained that when officials have questions, they are encouraged to seek assistance and receive support from colleagues and supervisors (P04.2). Such practices contribute to a collaborative work culture in which knowledge is exchanged through everyday interactions rather than confined to formal training activities.

Trust, psychological safety, managerial support, and teamwork created conditions that encouraged employees to seek guidance, share experiences, and learn from one another. Participants described how open communication, accessible leadership, and mutual support enabled learning to occur through everyday workplace interactions. These relational conditions helped employees address challenges, exchange knowledge, and work collaboratively toward shared organizational objectives.

3.1.3 Developing Employee Capability Through Work Participation

Developing employee capability through work participation emerged as a central dimension of informal workplace learning. Participants consistently described learning as developing through active engagement in workplace activities rather than through formal training alone. Employees acquired knowledge, skills, confidence, and professional competence by performing work responsibilities, exercising judgment, solving problems,

collaborating with others, and reflecting on experience. Learning was therefore viewed as an integral part of everyday work rather than a separate activity.

Several participants explained that learning occurs when employees are given opportunities to perform work directly and assume responsibility for assigned tasks. A municipal administrative director explained:

“We give them opportunities to perform their roles” (P04.2).

Employees developed competence by carrying out responsibilities themselves rather than relying solely on instructions from supervisors. Through repeated engagement with workplace tasks, employees become increasingly familiar with procedures, expectations, and organizational requirements.

Responsibility and autonomy created important opportunities for learning through work participation. An administrative director explained how authority and responsibility are delegated to allow employees to organize and manage work within their areas of responsibility. As the participant stated:

“They always delegate both authority and responsibility to the Directorate, especially to me in my role as Administrative Director, to organize and manage the work” (P01).

Similarly, another administrative director explained that ownership develops through autonomy, stating:

“What I give them is autonomy. This means that when I assign a task, I provide support and allow each unit to take ownership” (P02).

Participants noted that opportunities to make decisions, exercise judgment, and take responsibility for outcomes help employees develop initiative, confidence, and professional competence.

Participants further explained that workplace learning develops through practical experience accumulated over time. A municipal governor observed:

“It happens through experience. We often work directly with them, and after repeated correction and guidance, they gradually understand” (P04.1).

Learning developed incrementally through continued engagement in work activities. One municipal governor similarly noted that after performing similar tasks several times, officials generally no longer require close supervision and are able to manage their work more effectively (P06). Participants therefore viewed experience as an important source of learning that enables employees to strengthen their competence and confidence through repeated practice.

Workplace challenges frequently served as opportunities for learning. Learning occurred through addressing real administrative issues, coordinating with different stakeholders, adapting to changing circumstances, and identifying practical solutions to emerging problems. A municipal governor explained that officials learn while working with district authorities, commune administrations, citizens, utility providers, and other stakeholders during project implementation (P06). As one office chief observed:

“On-the-job learning is essential” (P03.1),

Particularly because many aspects of public administration can only be fully understood through direct experience. Participants explained that through addressing workplace challenges and identifying solutions, employees develop a deeper understanding of organizational processes and strengthen their ability to respond effectively to future situations.

Although practical experience provided the foundation for learning, participants emphasized that capability development was further strengthened through collaboration, consultation, and feedback from colleagues and supervisors. Managers described learning as occurring through interactions with colleagues, supervisors, and other stakeholders who possessed different experiences, expertise, and perspectives.

Several participants explained that employees learn from more experienced colleagues and supervisors. Reflecting on his own professional development, an administrative director explained:

“I did not have formal qualifications in that field, but what I was able to do was, first, to learn through self-study and, importantly, to learn from senior colleagues around me” (P02).

The same participant further noted that many senior civil servants were willing to teach, guide, and support younger officials when they wanted to learn or understand new tasks (P02). These interactions provide

opportunities for employees to acquire practical knowledge and develop competence through the experience of others.

Participants also discussed the role of consultation and collaborative interaction in workplace learning. A municipal governor explained that learning often occurs through exchanging views, integrating local realities, and consulting with others to identify appropriate approaches to implementation (P06). Similarly, employees were described as routinely seeking guidance from colleagues and supervisors when facing unfamiliar situations or complex tasks. Such interactions expose employees to different perspectives and practical experiences that support learning and problem-solving.

Collective discussions and cross-unit exchanges further emerged as mechanisms for facilitating learning. An administrative director explained that monthly meetings are organized so that officials can better understand the work of different offices and learn from one another. As the participant stated:

“Every month, I bring all officers together so that they can understand the work of different offices and learn from one another” (P02).

Through these interactions, employees gain insights into the responsibilities and challenges of other organizational units, broadening their understanding beyond their own roles.

Feedback also served as an important source of learning and improvement. Participants explained that supervisors regularly review work, provide guidance, and discuss areas for improvement. An administrative director noted:

“We must still follow up and monitor whether the work results align with what we expect. If they do not, we make adjustments and provide corrections accordingly” (P01).

Similarly, a municipal administrative director explained that work is reviewed and returned to employees for revision when necessary, allowing them to learn from mistakes and improve the quality of their work (P04.2).

Constructive and supportive feedback was viewed as particularly effective for learning and improvement. A khan governor explained:

“I advise them on how to handle it properly in the future and not repeat the same issue” (P07).

Rather than focusing on blame, managers described feedback as a means of helping employees learn from experience, strengthen their capabilities, and improve future performance. Through collaboration, consultation, and constructive feedback, employees gain access to knowledge, perspectives, and practical guidance that help them refine their work practices, address challenges more effectively, and strengthen their professional competence over time.

Employee capability developed through active participation in work, practical experience, collaboration, consultation, and feedback. Participants described learning as an ongoing process through which employees strengthened their knowledge, skills, confidence, and professional competence while carrying out their everyday responsibilities.

3.1.4 Managing Constraints to Informal Workplace Learning

Managing constraints emerged as an important aspect of facilitating informal workplace learning within Cambodia’s sub-national administrations. Participants explained that learning occurs within organizational environments characterized by workload pressures, staffing limitations, resource constraints, organizational arrangements, and competing performance demands. Rather than preventing learning altogether, these conditions influenced how learning opportunities were created, accessed, and sustained in everyday work.

Several participants described workload and staffing pressures as persistent challenges. A municipal administrative director explained that *“there are few staff, but a lot of work” (P04.2)*, whereas a municipal governor reported that *“staffing levels had declined because of retirements, deaths, and limited replacement recruitment despite increasing responsibilities” (P05)*. Participants noted that some offices operate with only a small number of officials responsible for a wide range of functions. Under such circumstances, employees often prioritize immediate operational demands, leaving limited time for reflection, knowledge sharing, and developmental activities. One municipal governor further observed that officials who are relied upon heavily may become *“tired and very weary” (P04.1)*, highlighting the tension between learning through work and excessive workload.

Resource and technology limitations were also identified as barriers to learning and performance. An administrative director explained that employees require appropriate working conditions and essential materials to

perform their duties effectively (P02). However, several participants noted that organizational resources are not always sufficient. One office chief stated:

“The resources provided from higher levels are not sufficient” (P03.2).

Another observed that:

“What is supplied to officials is still insufficient” (P03.1).

Participants also described the growing importance of technology, including computers, internet access, and digital communication tools, while acknowledging that some employees continue to face challenges in adapting to increasingly technology-enabled work environments (P05; P07).

Participants further described organizational and structural conditions that may constrain workplace learning. Work within sub-national administrations is guided by formal regulations, established hierarchies, and clearly defined responsibilities. As one office chief explained:

“We must still respect hierarchy, roles, and functions” (P03.1).

Although such arrangements support coordination and accountability, they may sometimes limit flexibility or slow communication. Several participants further noted challenges associated with organizational restructuring, staff transfers, and situations in which employees are assigned responsibilities outside their areas of expertise (P05). These circumstances may reduce access to specialized knowledge and require employees to adapt to unfamiliar roles and responsibilities.

Participants additionally emphasized the challenge of balancing organizational performance requirements with employee learning and development. Managers explained that they are expected to achieve work targets, maintain service delivery standards, and fulfill administrative responsibilities while supporting employee learning. An administrative director noted that supervision involves monitoring performance, assessing work results, and providing corrective guidance to ensure that expected outcomes are achieved (P01). Participants described efforts to integrate learning into routine work processes through supervision, work assignments, and performance reviews rather than treating learning as a separate activity. These accounts suggest that managers continually balance immediate operational demands with longer-term employee development objectives.

In addition to organizational conditions, participants emphasized the importance of employee motivation and engagement. Managers noted that learning depends not only on organizational support and developmental opportunities but also on employees' willingness to participate actively in the learning process.

Several participants observed that not all employees place the same value on learning and development. An office chief explained:

“Some do not clearly understand the importance of the training” (P03.1).

Similarly, some employees paid limited attention to learning opportunities or showed little interest in professional development. The availability of learning opportunities alone did not guarantee participation. Employees also needed to perceive learning as relevant and valuable to their work and professional development.

Participants further described challenges in sustaining employee engagement. A municipal governor explained:

“Some officials are difficult to engage, no matter how much guidance is provided” (P05).

The participant further noted that some employees are reluctant to invest effort in developing themselves despite the availability of support and learning opportunities. Participants described challenges in encouraging participation among employees who were less interested in professional development or less willing to engage in learning activities.

Several participants described personal willingness as shaping how employees engage with workplace learning opportunities. One governor stated:

“An officer must personally have the willingness to learn and to accept learning” (P06).

Participants explained that employees who demonstrate initiative and openness to learning are generally more likely to benefit from workplace learning opportunities. Organizational constraints and employee

engagement shaped how learning opportunities were accessed and sustained. Participants described workload pressures, resource limitations, organizational arrangements, and differences in employee motivation as factors influencing participation in workplace learning and development.

Table 3. Summary of Themes, Subthemes, and Illustrative Quotations

Theme	Subthemes	Illustrative Quotation
Structuring Opportunities for Learning	Role clarification and developmental supervision; delegation and autonomy; access to learning opportunities; meetings and knowledge sharing	“We give them opportunities to perform their roles” (P04.2).
Creating a Supportive Learning Climate	Trust and psychological safety; employee support and encouragement; teamwork, solidarity, and mutual support	“None of the officials are restricted from expressing their views, so everything is open” (P04.1).
Developing Employee Capability Through Work Participation	Learning through work participation; learning through experience, collaboration, and feedback	“On-the-job learning is essential” (P03.1).
Managing Constraints to Informal Workplace Learning	Navigating organizational constraints; sustaining employee motivation and engagement	“There are few staff, but a lot of work” (P04.2).

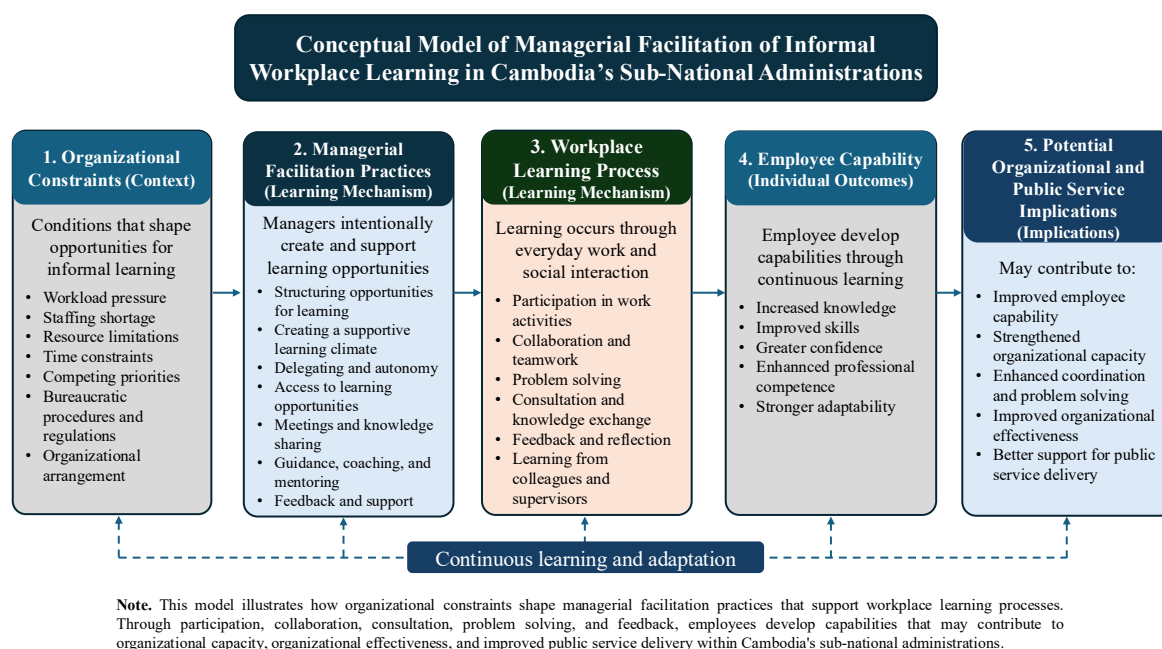


Figure 2. Conceptual Model of Managerial Facilitation of Informal Workplace Learning in Cambodia's Sub-National Administrations

3.2. Discussion

Managerial facilitation of informal workplace learning within Cambodia's sub-national administrations extends beyond formal training and conventional supervisory functions. Learning is embedded in everyday work activities and shaped by both organizational support and employee participation [7], [11], [12]. Managers facilitate learning through delegation, communication, guidance, collaboration, and developmental support, enabling employees to acquire knowledge and competence while performing their daily responsibilities [16]-[18]. This role aligns with recent public-sector perspectives that emphasize continuous workplace learning and capability development as important mechanisms for strengthening organizational adaptability and performance [46].

Work participation serves as a primary mechanism for employee development. Professional competence develops through direct engagement with workplace responsibilities, practical experience, decision-making, and problem solving. This result is consistent with Billett [12] and Eraut [7], who argue that professional learning is situated within everyday work activities and develops through participation in practice. Rather than relying primarily on formal training programmes, employees acquire competence through carrying out responsibilities, responding to workplace challenges, and interacting with colleagues and supervisors. Similar patterns have been

reported in studies highlighting the importance of informal learning for developing context-specific knowledge and professional capability [8], [47].

Workplace relationships also play an important role in supporting informal workplace learning. Trust, psychological safety, communication, teamwork, mentoring, coaching, and mutual support encourage employees to seek guidance, exchange knowledge, and learn from experience. This finding is consistent with studies emphasizing that supportive workplace relationships create environments in which learning can occur more effectively [21], [22]. Beyond supporting learning, these relational processes represent forms of organizational social capital. Trust, communication, collaboration, mentoring, and coaching create relational resources that facilitate knowledge sharing, collective problem solving, and cooperation among employees [48]. Recent evidence similarly shows that collaborative workplace relationships strengthen informal learning behaviours and contribute to employee development and organizational performance [49]. In public-sector organizations, such relational resources also strengthen institutional trust and support organizational effectiveness.

Informal workplace learning contributes to organizational capacity development by strengthening employees' knowledge, skills, confidence, and professional competence. As employees acquire practical expertise and become more capable of addressing workplace challenges, organizations strengthen their ability to perform administrative functions, solve problems, and adapt to changing demands. This relationship is particularly important within Cambodia's decentralization reforms, where sub-national administrations are expected to assume increasing responsibilities for governance, public service delivery, and local development. Recent international evidence similarly demonstrates that public organizations in developing and transitional governance contexts increasingly rely on workplace learning, knowledge sharing, and continuous capability development to address capacity constraints and changing service-delivery demands [46], [50]. Employee learning and organizational performance are therefore closely interconnected.

Workplace learning nevertheless occurs within environments characterized by workload pressures, staffing shortages, resource limitations, and competing organizational priorities. These organizational conditions shape employees' opportunities to participate in learning activities and influence how managers support employee development [13], [14], [25]. Managers respond to these constraints by embedding learning within routine work processes, encouraging collaboration, and integrating developmental support into everyday supervision. Similar observations have been reported in studies describing how managers integrate learning and performance demands within resource-constrained organizational environments [19]. Learning and performance therefore operate as complementary rather than competing objectives. Workplace challenges themselves become opportunities for learning when employees have access to guidance, feedback, and support.

Organizational constraints, managerial facilitation practices, workplace learning processes, and developmental outcomes were closely interconnected. Organizational constraints shaped the context within which learning occurred, while managerial practices such as supervision, delegation, communication, support, and knowledge sharing created opportunities for learning. Through participation in work activities, collaboration, consultation, feedback, and problem solving, employees developed knowledge, skills, confidence, and professional competence. These individual capabilities may contribute to broader organizational outcomes, including strengthened organizational capacity, enhanced collaboration, improved organizational effectiveness, and better support for public service delivery [26], [28]. Within decentralized governance contexts, such outcomes support broader objectives of bureaucratic reform, institutional strengthening, and responsive public administration [26], [29]. This relationship highlights the importance of managerial facilitation as a mechanism linking employee learning with organizational capacity and public-sector performance.

3.3 Limitations, Impact, and Suggestions for Future Research

Several limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings. First, the study focused exclusively on managers within Cambodia's sub-national administrations. Although managers occupy a unique position as both facilitators of employee learning and recipients of guidance from senior leaders, the findings principally reflect managerial interpretations of learning facilitation and may not fully capture how such practices are experienced by employees. Future studies should incorporate employee perspectives to provide a more comprehensive understanding of informal workplace learning processes and to examine the extent to which managerial intentions align with employees' learning experiences.

Second, the study relied mainly on interview data. Although participants provided rich accounts of their experiences, additional data sources such as workplace observations, organizational documents, and learning-related records could provide further insights into how learning facilitation practices are enacted in everyday organizational settings. The inclusion of multiple data sources would strengthen contextual understanding and provide opportunities for data triangulation in future studies.

Despite these limitations, the study contributes to workplace learning, public administration, and governance research. The findings demonstrate that managerial facilitation of informal workplace learning involves not only the creation of learning opportunities but also the development of supportive workplace relationships characterized by trust, communication, collaboration, mentoring, and mutual support. These

relational processes represent important forms of organizational social capital that facilitate knowledge sharing, collective problem solving, and organizational learning. By strengthening employee capability and organizational capacity, informal workplace learning may contribute to organizational effectiveness and support public service delivery within decentralized governance contexts.

The findings are particularly relevant to decentralized governance contexts where public organizations operate under resource constraints while facing increasing service demands. Supporting informal workplace learning through delegation, coaching, communication, and collaborative problem solving may strengthen employee competence and enhance organizational adaptability. Such practices can contribute to broader objectives of bureaucratic reform, institutional strengthening, and public-sector capacity development.

Future research should incorporate the perspectives of employees, supervisors, and senior leaders to provide a more comprehensive understanding of informal workplace learning. Comparative studies across different levels of government and public organizations may further illuminate contextual influences on learning processes. Quantitative and mixed-methods studies could also test the relationships among managerial facilitation, employee capability, organizational effectiveness, and public service outcomes identified in this study.

4. CONCLUSION

This study explored how managers facilitate informal workplace learning within Cambodia's sub-national administrations. The findings indicate that managerial facilitation extends beyond traditional supervisory responsibilities and involves structuring opportunities for learning, creating supportive workplace conditions, developing employee capability through participation in work, and responding to organizational constraints that influence learning opportunities. Managers support learning not only through delegation, guidance, and feedback but also through workplace relationships characterized by trust, communication, collaboration, mentoring, and mutual support.

The study contributes to workplace learning and public administration literature by providing a contextually grounded understanding of how informal workplace learning is supported in decentralized public-sector settings. Employee learning and organizational performance emerged as closely interconnected processes. By strengthening employee knowledge, skills, confidence, and professional competence, informal workplace learning may contribute to organizational capacity, organizational effectiveness, and support for public service delivery. In contexts characterized by increasing responsibilities, resource constraints, and changing governance demands, these outcomes support broader objectives of institutional strengthening, bureaucratic reform, and responsive public administration.

The study also illustrates the interconnected relationships among organizational constraints, managerial facilitation practices, workplace learning processes, and developmental outcomes. Building on these relationships, it proposes Constraint-Adaptive Learning Facilitation as an emerging interpretive concept for understanding how managers support workplace learning under resource-constrained conditions. Future research should incorporate employee perspectives, additional data sources, and comparative public-sector contexts to further examine the relationships among managerial facilitation, employee capability, organizational effectiveness, and public service outcomes.

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