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EXAMINING THE INFLUENCE OF ON THE JOB TRAINING ON HR FUNCTION DELIVERY: A REFLECTIVE CASE STUDY OF A STUDENT PLACEMENT AT A FINTECH ORGANIZATION IN PUNE

Suraj Ravindra Kale[1], Aarya Nagpurkar[2], Mrunalini Khandare[3]

School of Business (MBA), Indira University, Pune, India
Author - suraj.kale@indirauniversity.edu.in[1] and aarya.nagpurkar@indirauniversity.edu.in[2]
Faculty Mentor - Corresponding Author: mrunalini.khandare1@indirauniversity.edu.in[3]

ABSTRACT :

On the job training (OJT) is widely used in management education to connect classroom learning with workplace practice. However, much of the published evidence examines institution level programs or formal training systems in large organizations, rather than an individual learner's experience in a small, resource constrained firm. This paper documents a 45 day OJT placement completed by an MBA student specializing in Human Resources at Taxblock Professional Services Pvt. Ltd., a Pune based financial technology firm. A single participant reflective case study design was adopted, informed by Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory and Bandura's Social Learning Theory [1, 2]. Data were drawn from fortnightly learning diaries, direct participation in Talent Acquisition, Employee Engagement, and Payroll Support, and reviews of non confidential process records. The material was examined using inductive thematic analysis. During the placement, the trainee supported recruitment for five roles, screened more than 600 applications, and contributed to 12 hires, of whom seven were onboarded during the placement. The trainee also coordinated five recurring employee engagement initiatives and supported attendance verification for approximately 120 employees per cycle. Four themes emerged: functional proficiency through supervised repetition, adaptive problem solving under ambiguity, professional behaviour learned through observation, and process gaps that constrained efficiency. The case suggests that mentor led OJT can support functional learning even without a formal training curriculum. At the same time, lightweight tools, including an applicant tracking system, a written onboarding checklist, an engagement calendar, and clearer links between attendance and payroll processes, may reduce avoidable inefficiencies. The paper recommends that OJT evaluations assess institutional structure and workplace delivery separately.

Keywords: On the job training; experiential learning; human resource management; reflective case study; small and medium enterprises; internship

1. Introduction

On the job training (OJT) is a supervised process through which a learner develops the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to perform a role in a real workplace [3]. In management education, OJT, internships, cooperative education, and other forms of work integrated learning are intended to connect classroom concepts with professional practice [4]. This connection is especially important in Human Resource Management, where tasks such as recruitment, employee engagement, attendance verification, and payroll support require practical judgement, communication, and coordination.

Much of the literature on workplace training focuses on formal programs in large organizations or on settings where competency checklists and training procedures are already established [1, 4]. Less attention is given to how learning takes place in small and growing organizations, where training may depend on informal guidance and the judgement of a reporting manager. Such workplaces can provide meaningful exposure to live HR activities, but learners may also need to manage ambiguity when written procedures or dedicated systems are unavailable.

This paper examines a 45 day OJT placement completed by an MBA student specializing in Human Resources at Taxblock Professional Services Pvt. Ltd., a Pune based firm operating in tax technology and financial compliance. The trainee participated in Talent Acquisition, Employee Engagement, and Payroll Support under the guidance of an industry mentor. The placement did not include a formal training curriculum, written task checklists, or a dedicated applicant tracking system.

The study has two objectives. First, it describes the functional and professional learning reported by the trainee and interprets it through established learning theories. Second, it identifies workplace processes that shaped the learning experience and informed practical recommendations for the host

organization. As a reflective case study of one placement, the paper aims to provide contextual insight rather than claim that the findings apply to all organizations.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Experiential and Social Learning

The study draws on two complementary theories. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory describes learning as a cycle involving concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation [1]. In the placement, concrete experience occurred through activities such as screening applications, coordinating engagement initiatives, and verifying attendance. The trainee then reflected on these experiences in fortnightly learning diary entries. The resulting reflections helped identify recurring challenges and develop practical recommendations. These recommendations represent an attempt to apply learning to future workplace situations.

Bandura's Social Learning Theory explains how people acquire behaviours by observing others, particularly credible or experienced models [2]. In this placement, the reporting manager demonstrated how to assess borderline applicants, communicate with candidates, escalate sensitive attendance discrepancies, and prioritize work under time pressure. The trainee observed these practices before applying similar approaches with increasing independence. This process was especially relevant because written guidance was limited.

2.2. Structured and Unstructured OJT

Structured OJT generally includes planned learning objectives, defined procedures, written checklists, and a mentor who follows an agreed training plan. Unstructured OJT relies more heavily on informal task allocation, observation, and guidance from colleagues [4]. The placement examined here can be understood as a hybrid. At the institutional level, the university specified the duration, reporting expectations, and academic mentor supervision. At the organizational level, tasks were assigned through day to day coordination, without a formal training curriculum, written onboarding checklist, or dedicated applicant tracking system. This distinction is important because the placement had a formal academic framework even though workplace learning was delivered informally.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework for interpreting the OJT experience

Institutional requirements and workplace context → Mentor guidance and task participation → Reflection on experience → Development of functional and professional skills → Identification of process gaps and practical recommendations.

The framework summarizes the relationship examined in this case. It is an interpretive model for the present study, not a statistically tested causal model.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The study used a single participant reflective case study design. This approach supports an in depth account of a bounded experience in its real organizational setting, particularly when the purpose is contextual understanding rather than statistical generalization [5]. The case comprised the trainee's 45 day placement, including assigned tasks, interactions with the reporting manager, reflections, and work outputs.

3.2. Participant and Setting

The participant was a full time MBA student specializing in Human Resources at the School of Business, Indira University, Pune. The placement took place over 45 days between May and July 2026 as part of the academic OJT requirement. The host organization, Taxblock Professional Services Pvt. Ltd., is described in this paper as a Pune based, technology enabled tax and financial compliance firm. One industry mentor supervised the trainee's workplace activities, while a faculty mentor provided academic guidance.

3.3. Placement Activities

The placement covered three HR sub functions: Talent Acquisition, Employee Engagement, and Payroll Support. During the initial period, the trainee completed tasks under closer review, including application screening. As familiarity increased, the trainee took greater responsibility for coordinating engagement activities and conducting an initial review of attendance records before the manager's final review. The university required fortnightly progress reporting and learning diary submissions. The host organization did not use formal training modules, written task checklists, or a learning management system for this placement.

3.4. Data Sources

Three sources informed the reflection: (i) fortnightly learning diaries and progress reports submitted under the university's OJT framework; (ii) notes

recorded during direct participation in HR activities; and (iii) non confidential, aggregate process records, including recruitment trackers and attendance summaries. Aggregate counts are presented descriptively. No individual candidate, employee, or salary level information is included in the paper.

3.5. Analytical Approach

Because this is a qualitative case study, the paper does not test statistical relationships between independent and dependent variables. Instead, it considers how training delivery, mentor guidance, and changing task complexity related to the trainee's reported task proficiency and professional adaptability. The material was examined using an inductive thematic analysis informed by the six phase approach described by Braun and Clarke: familiarization, initial coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition, and reporting [6]. The trainee author conducted the initial analysis, and the faculty mentor reviewed the coded extracts and proposed themes for interpretive fit.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

The paper presents a reflective account of the author's own academic placement and reports only general process descriptions and aggregate figures. The author states that verbal permission to describe non confidential HR processes was obtained from the industry mentor. Before journal submission, the authors should confirm with the university whether formal ethics review or an exemption statement is required. The final manuscript should also be checked against the host organization's confidentiality requirements and any applicable publication policy.

4. Results

4.1. Overview of Placement Activities

Table 1 summarizes the trainee's reported activities and approximate work volumes across the three HR sub functions. These figures are descriptive and were drawn from the process records available during the placement; they were not independently audited.

Table 1. Summary of OJT activities by HR sub function

HR sub function	Key activities	Reported volume
Talent Acquisition	Application screening, shortlisting, interview coordination, and onboarding support for five roles: Marketing Executive, Marketing Intern, Business Development Executive, Finance Intern, and Tax Advisor.	600+ applications screened; approximately 125 shortlisted; approximately 65 interviews coordinated; 12 hires, of whom 7 were onboarded during the placement.
Employee Engagement	Coordination of daily meditation sessions, International Yoga Day, Seasonal Appreciation Day, birthday celebrations, and overtime support arrangements.	Five recurring initiative types; reach of roughly 100 employees.
Payroll Support	Fortnightly attendance verification, discrepancy follow up, and support for the handover of attendance information for salary processing.	Approximately 120 employees per cycle; support reported across three payroll cycles.

4.2. Thematic Findings

Theme 1: Functional proficiency through supervised repetition

The learning diary described initial uncertainty about judging which applicants should progress to shortlisting. With repeated practice and manager feedback, the trainee reported greater confidence and was able to complete familiar tasks with periodic rather than continuous review. A similar pattern was observed in attendance verification and event coordination. This progression is consistent with Kolb's view that experience and reflection can support the gradual development of competence [1].

Theme 2: Adaptive problem solving under ambiguity

Some tasks did not have a written procedure. Examples included resolving an attendance discrepancy close to a payroll deadline and reprioritizing work when an engagement activity coincided with a recruitment deadline. The trainee typically consulted the mentor, applied an agreed solution, and reflected on the experience afterwards. These examples indicate that workplace learning involved not only following instructions but also making decisions when procedures were incomplete.

Theme 3: Professional behaviour learned through observation

The trainee's reflections highlighted the influence of observing the reporting manager's approach to candidate communication, sensitive attendance issues, and prioritization under time pressure. The trainee gradually adopted similar communication and escalation practices. This supports the relevance of Bandura's Social Learning Theory to informal workplace learning [2].

Theme 4: Process gaps that constrained efficiency

The recurring process challenges concerned the absence of a centralized applicant tracking system across concurrent recruitment drives, a written onboarding checklist, a pre planned employee engagement calendar, and a streamlined connection between attendance verification and payroll handover. These gaps increased the need for manual follow up and made task prioritization more difficult when deadlines overlapped. The observations point to process improvement opportunities rather than evidence that any single tool would automatically resolve all delays.

4.3. Recruitment Activity Funnel

The recruitment records summarized for the placement indicate more than 600 applications screened, approximately 125 candidates shortlisted, around 65 interviews coordinated, and 12 hires. Seven of the 12 hires were onboarded during the placement period. Because the starting figure is reported as more than 600 and the intermediate figures are approximate, conversion rates should be treated as indicative rather than exact.

Figure 2. Recruitment activity funnel

Applications screened: 600+ → Candidates shortlisted: approximately 125 → Interviews coordinated: approximately 65 → Hires: 12 → Hires onboarded during placement: 7.

This funnel presents the reported volume at each stage. The stages reflect different activities and should not be interpreted as a fully audited recruitment conversion analysis.

4.4. Relationship Between Themes

The themes were interconnected. Process gaps increased the need for adaptive problem solving because the trainee often had to respond to situations that a standard procedure or integrated system might otherwise have addressed. At the same time, the manager's informal guidance partly compensated for the lack of written procedures. Mentorship therefore supported learning, but it could not fully replace consistent process documentation. The case suggests that effective guidance and lightweight systems can serve complementary purposes.

5. Discussion

The case illustrates that formal training infrastructure is not the only route through which learning can occur during OJT. Consistent mentor engagement, opportunities to perform real tasks, and reflection on experience appeared to support the trainee's development across three HR sub functions. This is broadly consistent with experiential and social learning perspectives [1, 2]. However, because the evidence comes from one trainee's reflective account, the findings should be understood as contextual observations rather than proof of a general causal relationship between OJT design and performance.

A central contribution of the case is the distinction between institutional structure and organizational delivery. The university established the placement duration, reporting cadence, and academic supervision. In contrast, the host organization relied on informal task allocation and manager guidance. OJT evaluations may therefore benefit from assessing these dimensions separately instead of describing a placement as simply structured or unstructured.

The findings also suggest several proportionate improvements for a growing organization. A simple recruitment tracker with clear ownership and stage definitions could improve visibility across vacancies. A one page onboarding checklist could help ensure that recurring steps are completed consistently. An annual or quarterly engagement calendar could support earlier coordination. Finally, a clearly documented attendance verification and payroll handover process could reduce repeated clarification. These are practical suggestions arising from the case, not tested interventions; their effectiveness would need to be assessed after implementation.

5.1. Practical Recommendations

Process area	Suggested lightweight improvement	Expected practical benefit
Talent Acquisition	Use a shared recruitment tracker with vacancy, candidate stage, next action, and owner fields.	Improved visibility and fewer missed follow ups.
Onboarding	Create a one page checklist covering documents, approvals, joining communication, and completion status.	More consistent completion of recurring onboarding steps.
Employee Engagement	Prepare a quarterly or annual calendar with dates, owners, and resource requirements.	Earlier planning and fewer scheduling conflicts.
Payroll Support	Document the attendance review, discrepancy escalation, approval, and payroll handover steps.	Clearer accountability and fewer repeated clarifications.

5.2. Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, it concerns one trainee in one organization over 45 days, limiting transferability to other settings. Second, the primary source was a self authored reflective diary, which may be affected by recall and self presentation bias. The trainee also conducted the initial thematic analysis, creating a risk of interpretive bias, although the faculty mentor reviewed the proposed coding and themes. Third, the trainee's exposure to the three HR sub functions was not necessarily equal in depth or duration. Finally, the process figures are approximate and were not independently audited. The study does not measure changes in organizational performance or establish that the placement caused specific outcomes.

5.3. Directions for Future Research

Future research could compare placements across several small and medium sized organizations to determine whether the distinction between institutional structure and workplace delivery is observed in other contexts. Interviews with trainees and mentors, alongside document review, could provide additional perspectives beyond the trainee's diary. Longitudinal studies could also assess whether organizations that adopt lightweight process improvements experience measurable changes in recruitment tracking, onboarding completion, engagement planning, or payroll handover accuracy.

6. Conclusion

This reflective case study examined a 45 day MBA OJT placement in the HR function of a Pune based FinTech organization. The trainee's account indicates that supervised repetition, mentor modelling, and reflection supported functional and professional learning despite the absence of a formal workplace training curriculum. At the same time, manual coordination and limited process documentation created avoidable friction. The case highlights the value of assessing academic oversight separately from the way training is delivered by the host organization. For small and growing firms, modest measures such as a recruitment tracker, an onboarding checklist, an engagement calendar, and a documented payroll handover process may offer a practical starting point. These recommendations require follow up evaluation before their impact can be established.

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Declarations

Ethics approval: The study is a reflective account of a mandatory academic placement. The authors should confirm with the university whether ethics review or a formal exemption statement is required before submission.
Consent: The author reports obtaining verbal permission from the industry mentor to describe general, non confidential HR processes. The host organization's publication and confidentiality requirements should be confirmed before submission.
Data availability: The learning diary contains organization related information and is not publicly available. Only aggregate, anonymized counts are reported in the manuscript.
Conflicts of interest: The authors declare no competing interests beyond the academic placement and mentorship relationship described in the paper.
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