

Project Summary for IAL Website

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Project Title:	Understanding and promoting work skill learning among lower-income employees
Project Number:	IAL GA17-03
Year of Approval:	2018
Funding Source:	WDARF
Objectives and intended outcomes of the project:	Identify strategies through which voluntary learning among lower-income workers can be promoted
Project Team	
Principal Investigator:	Marko PITESA
Summary of Project (up to 300 words)	
<p>The current project was designed to better understand barriers to learning among lower-income workers, and to devise policies that can promote learning among this population. In Stage 1, we tested the idea that a lack of material resources in itself makes voluntary learning of new work skills less likely (Studies 1a and 1b). To understand what organisations and societies can do about this problematic effect, we tested three ways in which the effect could be attenuated, each targeting one of the theoretically-identified pathways: 1) <i>Learning Importance Channel</i>, 2) <i>Self-Regulation Channel</i>, 3) <i>Openness Channel</i> (Study 1c). We found that openness to experience is the most potent intervention in attenuating the effect of low income on learning. We implemented the same intervention in the field in Stage 2. The results showed that the intervention is effective in promoting learning in the field, as well as attenuating the problematic effect of low income. Finally, in Stage 3, we found evidence of the generalizability of the findings through a follow-up survey among workers from a range of industries and contexts.</p>	
Summary of Project Findings, Deliverables and Impacts (up to 500 words)	
<p>The findings from this project have significantly advanced our understanding of the psychological factors influencing learning among lower-income workers, offering clear insights on how openness to experience can mitigate barriers arising from socioeconomic disadvantage. A notable contribution has been the identification of openness interventions as practical, scalable, and broadly effective methods for enhancing voluntary skill development within organizations.</p> <p>As part of the project deliverables, we created a comprehensive open-science repository accessible via the Open Science Framework. This repository includes detailed study materials, anonymized data sets, analytic codes, and key research outcomes. The transparency afforded by this repository has facilitated scholarly dialogue and laid groundwork for further empirical research on socioeconomically disadvantaged workers.</p> <p>The project’s emphasis on the psychological dynamics of lower-income workers has significantly influenced subsequent academic work, inspiring a growing research stream focused on the psychological experiences and barriers faced by lower-income employees. By highlighting previously overlooked psychological dimensions such as openness to experience as a critical lever for fostering skill acquisition, this project has drawn scholarly attention to understudied socioeconomic segments within organizational</p>	

psychology. Subsequent scholarly articles inspired or informed by this line of inquiry have furthered understanding of how financial vulnerability shapes workplace behaviors, work evaluations, and career trajectories.

The industry impact, stemming from collaborations initiated during the project period, involved dialogues with leading companies in sectors employing large numbers of lower-income workers. Initial exchanges with companies indicated the practical value of the insights generated through this project. These conversations laid the groundwork for heightened awareness among human resource leaders about the barriers lower-income workers face and the practical relevance of psychological interventions targeting skill acquisition. Industry practitioners, particularly from the automotive manufacturing and private security sectors, have shown interest in adopting elements of the research to improve employee training and development programs.

The research insights were presented at top international forums such as the Academy of Management Annual Meeting, influencing discourse on organizational practices and workplace learning policies, particularly for disadvantaged employee groups. The project thus achieved an impact by shaping the narrative on the importance of interventions as a promising route for enhancing voluntary skill learning among lower-income employees.

In sum, the project has delivered substantial scholarly insights, provided practical pathways for promoting workforce development, and influenced the direction of research in organizational psychology with a stronger focus on lower-income employees. By placing this often-overlooked demographic at the heart of organizational research, the project has contributed meaningfully to both academic thought leadership and potential policy transformations within organizations aiming to foster inclusive skill development.