Training and Development: A Critical Analysis of the Work of David Ashton and Allan Felstead

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ABSTRACT

This paper critically examines the contributions of Ashton and Felstead to the discourse on training and development, with particular emphasis on their insights into workplace learning, informal learning, and national skills policies. Drawing from seminal works such as the workplace skills agenda and the impact of informal learning on productivity, the study highlights their argument that effective skills development requires an integrated approach combining formal training with workplace-based, experiential learning. Ashton and Felstead's research challenges the traditional dominance of formal training models by demonstrating the pervasive and often more impactful role of informal learning in enhancing productivity, adaptability, and employability. The review also explores their contributions to understanding labour mobility, transferable skills, and the alignment of training strategies with both organisational goals and macroeconomic policies. Their work provides valuable guidance for Human Resource Management (HRM) practitioners and policymakers by underscoring the need for evidence-based training strategies that bridge organisational needs with national skills frameworks. Methodologically, the paper draws on a thematic synthesis of Ashton and Felstead's key publications, integrating critical discourse analysis with policy review. The findings reveal that sustainable skills development depends on recognising workplace learning as a dynamic, socially embedded process rather than a static, one-off event. The paper concludes by recommending the integration of formal and informal learning strategies, promotion of transferable skills, and stronger policy-practice linkages. These recommendations aim to create a more resilient workforce capable of thriving in an evolving global economy.

KEYWORDS: *Ashton, Felstead, workplace learning, informal learning, training and development, skills policy, HRM.*

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly dynamic economy characterized by rapid technological advances, globalization, and evolving organizational structures, both public and private sectors confront major challenges in maintaining a skilled workforce. As employers focus on innovation, flexibility, and productivity, the importance of effective training and development has gained wide recognition. Scholars such as David Ashton and Alan Felstead have investigated the complex relationship between workplace learning and organizational performance, calling attention to the role of formal and informal training interventions in supporting skill formation and adaptability (Ashton & Felstead, 1995).

Ashton and Felstead (1995) argue that the traditional emphasis on classroom-based training underestimates the frequency and impact of informal workplace learning those day-to-day experiences, peer guidance, and context-specific problem-solving activities that occur on the job. They contend that informal learning often represents a significant share of skill acquisition in many sectors and should be valued alongside formal training systems. This reframing is particularly relevant in organizations challenged by resource constraints, tight production schedules, and rapidly shifting demands.

Beyond theoretical innovations, implementing integrated training and development strategies carries

concrete practical implications. Employers benefit from enhanced productivity, agility, and alignment between workforce capabilities and job requirements, while employees gain job satisfaction, confidence, and career progress (Billett, 2014). In contexts like the UK, where Ashton and Felstead's work is grounded, national skills policies have increasingly emphasized lifelong learning and workplace-based development as pillars of competitiveness in post-industrial economies (Felstead et al., 2005).

This paper explores Ashton and Felstead's contributions within the broader debate on effective training and development strategies. It recognizes their unique emphasis on bridging the formal–informal divide and situating learning firmly in work contexts. The emphasis on organizing training as part of a socio-technical system rather than isolated classroom sessions—is one of their enduring legacies (Ashton & Felstead, 1995). The rationale for this study lies in the translation of these theoretical insights into policy and practice. By examining how learning environments, managerial support, and workplace culture influence the uptake and outcomes of training efforts, we can understand what makes skill development meaningful in practice. Moreover, engineering strategies that integrate informal learning can lead to more resilient organizations—especially in the face of crises, digital transformation, and demographic shifts. Further, this paper aims to bridge the gap between macro-level policy frameworks and micro-level workplace practices, exploring how Ashton and Felstead's findings can inform corporate training designs, HR frameworks, and sectoral training initiatives. Their insistence that training efforts must be embedded in daily routines, aligned with real tasks, and supported by managerial systems provides a path toward designing developmental strategies that are both effective and sustainable (Felstead *et al.,* 2005).

In an era where knowledge work and service sectors dominate, ensuring that training and workplace learning strategies reflect real-world operational contexts is crucial. Ashton and Felstead's work remains highly relevant for contemporary debates on upskilling, digital adoption, inclusive career progression, and productivity-enhancing interventions in both developed and developing economies. By critically engaging with their framework and drawing connections to newer research and policy reforms, this seminar paper aims to illuminate the current relevance of their contributions—and to advance the conversation about how training and development can be reconceptualized for modern organizational needs.

Objectives of the Study
The primary objective of this paper is to critically examine the theoretical and practical contributions of David Ashton and Alan Felstead to the field of training and development. Specifically, the paper seeks to:
1. Analyse the conceptual framework developed by Ashton and Felstead (1995) on workplace learning and its implications for organizational performance.
2. Evaluate the relevance of their arguments in contemporary human resource development discourse, considering current economic, technological, and policy contexts.
3. Explore practical strategies for embedding training and development into everyday work practices, drawing from both their work and more recent scholarship.

Conceptual Foundations
Definitions and Scope of Training and Development
Training and development (T&D) is a critical component of human resource management, aimed at improving the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of employees to enhance organizational performance. *Training* is typically defined as a planned effort to facilitate the learning of job-related competencies, including knowledge, skills, and behaviors, with the goal of applying them in the work context (Noe, 2020). In contrast, *development* refers to activities that prepare individuals for future roles and responsibilities, often focusing on long-term personal and professional growth rather than immediate job performance (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020).

The scope of T&D has broadened over the years due to globalization, technological advancements, and the evolving nature of work. Ashton and Felstead (2005) emphasize that workplace learning is no longer confined to formal, structured programs but increasingly incorporates informal and experiential learning. This includes on-the-job training, mentoring, coaching, e-learning, job rotation, and collaborative projects.

Furthermore, T&D plays a strategic role in organizational competitiveness. By aligning learning initiatives with business objectives, organizations can foster innovation, adaptability, and employee engagement (Salas et al., 2012). In modern workplaces, training is not only about addressing skill gaps but also about building capabilities that enable employees to respond to dynamic market conditions. As a result, T&D has become an ongoing process rather than a one-off intervention, reflecting a shift towards continuous learning cultures (Marsick & Watkins, 2018).

Theoretical Perspectives in Workplace Learning

Several theoretical frameworks underpin T&D practices, providing insights into how individuals acquire and apply knowledge in workplace contexts.

1. Behaviorist Perspective

The behaviorist approach, rooted in the works of B.F. Skinner, emphasizes observable changes in behavior as the result of conditioning. In workplace learning, this translates to structured training programs that use reinforcement—such as rewards or recognition—to encourage desired behaviors (Skinner, 1974). Behaviorist-informed training is common in compliance programs, safety training, and task-specific skill acquisition, where clear performance criteria and measurable outcomes are essential (Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001).

2. Cognitive Perspective

The cognitive perspective focuses on the mental processes involved in learning, including memory, perception, and problem-solving. From this viewpoint, training should be designed to facilitate information processing, encourage critical thinking, and promote knowledge retention (Anderson, 2010). Strategies such as scenario-based learning, simulations, and reflective practice are often employed to enhance cognitive engagement.

3. Social Learning Theory

Proposed by Bandura (1977), social learning theory emphasizes that people learn not only through direct experience but also by observing others. In the workplace, this underpins approaches such as mentoring, peer learning, and communities of practice. By modeling effective behaviors and fostering collaborative environments, organizations can leverage social dynamics to enhance learning outcomes.

4. Experiential Learning Theory

Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model posits that learning occurs through a cyclical process involving concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. This theory supports hands-on training approaches, job rotations, and project-based learning, where employees learn by doing and reflecting on their experiences.

5. Human Capital Theorvcy

From an economic standpoint, human capital theory (Becker, 1993) suggests that investments in employee training yield returns in the form of increased productivity, innovation, and organizational performance. This perspective underscores the importance of viewing T&D as a strategic investment rather than a cost, influencing organizational policies on workforce development.

6. Constructivist Perspective

Constructivism, associated with Vygotsky (1978) and Piaget (1970), asserts that learners actively construct knowledge through interaction with their environment and social context. Workplace learning from a constructivist lens emphasizes problem-solving, collaborative projects, and learning environments that allow employees to draw from their prior knowledge and experiences. Integrating these theories into workplace learning design ensures that training programs cater to diverse learning styles and contexts. For example, combining behaviorist methods for foundational skills with constructivist approaches for complex problem-solving can create more holistic learning experiences (Illeris, 2018). Training and development encompasses a wide range of activities aimed at enhancing both current job performance and long-term career potential. Its conceptual foundation draws from multiple learning theories, each offering valuable insights for designing effective workplace learning interventions. Organizations that adopt a blended approach—aligning formal, informal, cognitive, and social learning strategies—are more likely to foster adaptable, skilled, and engaged workforces capable of thriving in a constantly evolving business landscape.

The Intersection of Training, Learning, and Organisational Performance

Training and learning are critical drivers of organisational performance, with extensive research showing that a skilled and knowledgeable workforce directly contributes to efficiency, innovation, and competitive advantage. Training refers to structured activities designed to improve specific job-related skills, while learning encompasses the broader process through which employees acquire, retain, and apply knowledge (Noe et al., 2021). When effectively aligned, training facilitates both individual and organisational growth, translating into measurable performance outcomes.

The relationship between training, learning, and organisational performance can be understood through the lens of Human Capital Theory, which posits that investment in employee development enhances their productivity and, consequently, the organisation's value (Becker, 1993). In practice, organisations that adopt continuous learning cultures often experience improved employee engagement, reduced turnover, and higher adaptability to change (Saks & Burke, 2012). This is because learning extends beyond formal training sessions to include on-the-job experiences, coaching, mentoring, and self-directed learning, thereby creating a sustainable performance advantage.

Furthermore, training and learning initiatives influence organisational performance by fostering innovation. As Ashton and Felstead (2018) note, training enables employees to apply new techniques, adapt to technological advancements, and improve work processes. This adaptability is crucial in dynamic business environments where performance depends on both operational efficiency and the ability to innovate. Studies have also shown that organisations with robust learning systems achieve better financial outcomes due to improved decision-making and problem-solving capabilities (Salas *et al.,* 2012).

However, the intersection of these three elements is not automatic; it depends on strategic alignment. Training must be tailored to organisational goals, and learning should be embedded into everyday work practices to ensure skill transfer and retention. Without this alignment, training efforts may result in limited impact on actual performance (Goldstein & Ford, 2020). Hence, performance measurement—through productivity metrics, quality improvements, and employee feedback—is essential to evaluate the effectiveness of training and learning programs.

The synergy between training, learning, and organisational performance lies in their mutual reinforcement: training provides the foundation, learning ensures the sustainability of skills, and performance reflects the tangible outcomes. Organisations that strategically integrate these elements create a high-performance culture capable of thriving in competitive and ever-changing environments.

Training and Development: Ashton & Felstead's Framework

Ashton and Felstead's contribution to *Human Resource Management: A Critical Text* (Storey, ed., 1995) presents a nuanced framework for understanding the dynamics of training and development in the workplace. Their chapter not only maps the evolution of training practices in the UK but also critiques prevailing assumptions about skills, organisational learning, and the relationship between workplace structures and employee development. At its core, the framework underscores that training is not a neutral activity—it is shaped by economic, organisational, and social contexts that influence both access to and outcomes from workplace learning.

Overview of "Training and Development" Chapter (Storey, ed., 1995)

In their chapter, Ashton and Felstead (1995) analyse training through a socio-economic lens, emphasising that the development of human capital is influenced by broader structural forces rather than being solely the result of organisational benevolence or individual ambition. They challenge the traditional notion of training as a purely technical intervention, arguing that it reflects strategic decisions influenced by labour market demands, competitive pressures, and workplace hierarchies. One of the central points in their analysis is the uneven distribution of training opportunities. Drawing on UK Labour Force Survey data, they show that training tends to be concentrated among full-time employees, higher-skilled workers, and those in larger firms, while part-time, lower-skilled, and temporary workers are less likely to receive structured training (Ashton & Felstead, 1995). This suggests that training is often used as a means of reinforcing existing organisational structures and workforce segmentation, rather than as a universally accessible tool for development.

Furthermore, Ashton and Felstead place strong emphasis on the changing nature of work in the late 20th century. They link the rise of flexible labour markets, technological change, and global competition to shifts in training patterns, particularly the increasing demand for adaptable, multi-skilled workers. In doing so, they integrate concepts from Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1993) with more critical perspectives on workplace inequality and power relations.

Key Themes: Transferable Skills, Organisational Structures, and Training Patterns
Transferable Skills

One of the most prominent themes in Ashton and Felstead's framework is the concept of transferable skills—abilities that can be applied across a range of jobs and sectors. They argue that the increasing pace of technological change and organisational restructuring has elevated the importance of skills such as problem-solving, communication, and adaptability (Felstead et al., 2002). Transferable skills enhance worker mobility and employability, aligning with lifelong learning agendas promoted by governments and policy bodies.

However, Ashton and Felstead caution that the rhetoric of transferable skills often masks inequalities in access. While such skills are celebrated in policy discourse, in practice they are more likely to be developed by workers who already enjoy secure employment and higher levels of education. This creates a self-reinforcing cycle in which those with initial advantages gain more from training, widening skill gaps within the workforce (Keep & Mayhew, 2010).

Organisational Structures

The framework also examines how organisational structures—hierarchies, departmental boundaries, and

job design—influence the availability and nature of training. Centralised, hierarchical organisations often adopt formalised training programmes delivered in structured formats, while flatter, more decentralised organisations may rely on flexible, on-the-job learning approaches. Ashton and Felstead highlight that organisational commitment to training is often strategic rather than altruistic. Firms invest in training primarily when it serves to enhance productivity, meet regulatory requirements, or secure competitive advantage. Consequently, training provision can be uneven across departments and roles, reflecting the firm's strategic priorities rather than a uniform skills development agenda (Storey, 1995; Ashton & Sung, 2002).

Training Patterns

In terms of training patterns, Ashton and Felstead distinguish between sector-specific and cross-sectoral trends. They observe that industries undergoing rapid technological change, such as manufacturing and financial services, invest more heavily in continuous training, while traditional, low-tech sectors may adopt a more static approach. Training intensity is also shaped by firm size—larger organisations often have dedicated training departments, whereas smaller firms rely on informal, ad hoc methods (Felstead et al., 2010). They also note gendered and occupational differences in training provision. Women in part-time roles and employees in routine, low-autonomy jobs are less likely to receive structured training, reflecting both organisational priorities and broader labour market segmentation (Ashton & Felstead, 1995).

Informal Versus Formal Learning in Workplace Contexts

A distinctive aspect of Ashton and Felstead's framework is the recognition of both **formal** and **informal** learning as critical components of workplace development.

Formal Learning

Formal learning refers to structured, planned activities designed to meet specific training objectives. This includes classroom-based courses, workshops, online training modules, and certification programmes. Formal training is typically employer-sponsored and often leads to recognised qualifications. According to Ashton and Felstead, formal learning plays a crucial role in ensuring compliance with industry standards, meeting regulatory requirements, and addressing skill shortages in a targeted manner.

However, they caution that formal programmes are sometimes too rigid and may not fully align with rapidly changing workplace needs. Additionally, they are more accessible to employees in core roles, with

contingent and peripheral workers often excluded from such opportunities (Felstead et al., 2010).

Informal Learning

Informal learning occurs organically through everyday work activities—problem-solving, shadowing, peer collaboration, and self-directed experimentation (Marsick & Watkins, 1990). Ashton and Felstead stress that informal learning often constitutes the bulk of skill acquisition in the workplace, especially in smaller firms or sectors with limited training budgets.

The advantage of informal learning lies in its immediacy and relevance: employees learn in real time while performing tasks, which facilitates knowledge retention and application. However, its unstructured nature means that it is harder to measure, evaluate, and replicate across the organisation. Moreover, access to high-quality informal learning depends heavily on workplace culture, managerial support, and opportunities for collaboration (Billett, 2004).

Balancing Formal and Informal Approaches

Ashton and Felstead advocate for a balanced approach that recognises the complementary roles of formal and informal learning. While formal training ensures consistency and compliance, informal learning fosters adaptability and innovation. They argue that effective training strategies integrate both, creating learning-rich environments where employees have structured opportunities to acquire skills and flexible space to apply and expand them. This integration is especially critical in knowledge-intensive industries, where the half-life of skills is shrinking and continuous adaptation is essential for maintaining competitiveness (OECD, 2019). Employers who successfully blend these approaches tend to build more resilient and high-performing workforces.

Critical Review and Empirical Insights
Learning at Work: Themes from Workplace Learning Literature

A pivotal exploration into the conceptualization of workplace learning is found in the *Workplace Learning: Main Themes and Perspectives* working paper by Lee, Fuller, Ashton, Butler, Felstead, Unwin, and Walters (2004). This ORCA-hosted study highlights multiple paradigms through which learning at work is understood, signalling the transition from a narrow view confined to formal training towards a broader appreciation of integrated, informal, and socialized learning in workplaces. Key themes include:

➢ **Distributed Definitions of Learning**: The paper underlines that the term "learning" is interpreted

variously—ranging from formal knowledge acquisition to informal, incidental learning—across academic, managerial, and policy discourses (Lee et al., 2004).

➤ **Role of Organisational Structure and Agency**: Ashton's contributions emphasize that hierarchical job structures and workplace policies actively shape learning opportunities. For example, senior roles often come with access to structured training and cross-departmental exposure, whereas lower-level positions may offer limited upward mobility in terms of learning (Ashton cited in Lee et al., 2004).

➤ **Contextual Complexity of Learning**: Learning is framed as embedded within social and institutional contexts rather than being the sole responsibility of the individual. Organizational culture, supervisory support, and reward systems collectively influence whether and how learning takes place (Lee et al., 2004).

This theme underscores the necessity of viewing learning at work holistically—incorporating formal training, informal peer exchange, managerial facilitation, and organisational norms into one systemic perspective.

The Impact of Informal Learning on Productivity
Fuller, Ashton, Felstead, Unwin, Walters, and Quinn (2003) conducted a seminal study for the UK's Department for Trade and Industry, examining how learning that is unplanned, contextually embedded, and workplace-based—affects business productivity. Key findings include:

➤ **Positive Productivity Link**: Organizations exhibiting robust informal learning cultures—through everyday problem-solving, peer collaboration, and hands-on skill development—consistently reported enhancements in performance metrics such as error reduction, improved service quality, and enhanced adaptability (Fuller et al., 2003)

➤ **Learning Metaphors Matter**: The study identified metaphors like "learning as construction" and "tacit learning" to explain how informal learning is internalized and applied within practical workflows (Fuller et al., 2003)

➤ **Best Practices Identified**: Case studies across diverse sectors revealed that companies encouraging collaborative learning, peer mentoring, and shared problem-solving consistently outperformed peers with rigid, formal training models (Fuller et al., 2003)

These findings empirically validate Ashton & Felstead's theoretical emphasis on the transformational impact of everyday learning—demonstrating that productivity gains are not solely derived from formal training but from continuous, integrated learning within work routines.

Training, Skills, and Labour Mobility
Green, Felstead, Mayhew, and Pack (2000) explored how training influences labour mobility, assessing both individual expectations and firm-level implications. Their findings highlight:

➤ **Transferable Skill Benefits with Caveats**: While most workplace training confers transferable skills, its influence on mobility is nuanced. Approximately 60% of training episodes showed **no significant impact** on mobility, suggesting that not all training leads to job movement (Green et al., 2000). The remaining cases were evenly split between those facilitating movement and those reinforcing retention

➤ **Mobility Reducing Factors**: Training that is firm-specific, employer-sponsored, or explicitly linked to corporate objectives tends to reduce turnover, as workers feel a stronger alignment with organizational goals (Green et al., 2000)

➤ **Strategic Implications**: These findings suggest that organizations can strategically use training to retain talent when they invest in company-specific skill development, while broader transferable training may enhance employee employability but can increase turnover risk.

Policy and Practice Implications
The work of Ashton and Felstead on training and development offers valuable guidance for shaping both organisational and national policy directions. Their insights into the relationship between workplace learning, skills acquisition, and performance provide a foundation for designing interventions that enhance workforce capabilities and adaptability. This section explores implications at the organisational level, within national skills strategies, and for human resource management (HRM) practice.

Training Strategy at Organisational Level
At the organisational level, training strategies must be integrated into broader business objectives, ensuring that learning is not treated as an isolated activity but as a key driver of performance (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020). Ashton and Felstead's framework emphasises the importance of aligning training initiatives with the specific skill demands of organisational structures and the evolving nature of work (Ashton & Felstead, 1995). This requires moving beyond one-off training events towards continuous learning cultures where

formal and informal learning complement one another (Marsick & Watkins, 2015).

Employers are encouraged to recognise the productivity benefits of workplace learning by embedding learning opportunities into daily operations. For example, job rotation, mentoring, and project-based assignments can foster skill transfer and adaptability (Noe et al., 2017). Furthermore, digital learning tools and blended learning models provide flexibility, enabling employees to upskill in response to changing technologies and market conditions (Salas et al., 2015).

Implications for National Skills Policies
From a policy standpoint, Ashton and Felstead's work underscores the need for national skills frameworks that are responsive to labour market dynamics. Policymakers should prioritise lifelong learning pathways, ensuring individuals have continuous opportunities to reskill and upskill in response to industrial shifts (Keep et al., 2006). This requires coordinated investment in vocational education, apprenticeships, and adult education programmes.

Government policy can play a catalytic role in bridging the gap between education systems and industry needs by fostering partnerships between employers, training providers, and academic institutions (UKCES, 2014). For instance, sector-specific training councils can ensure that skill standards reflect technological advancements and emerging occupational demands. In addition, financial incentives—such as tax breaks or training subsidies—can encourage employers, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), to invest in structured training programmes (OECD, 2021).

The notion of transferable skills, highlighted by Ashton and Felstead, also has strong policy implications. Equipping workers with generic competencies such as problem-solving, communication, and adaptability increases their labour mobility and resilience in volatile economies (Felstead et al., 2015). This aligns with the broader economic goals of improving national productivity and competitiveness.

Reflections for HRM and Practitioner Engagement
For HRM practitioners, Ashton and Felstead's analysis reinforces the strategic role of training and development in talent management. HR professionals are tasked with designing competency frameworks that integrate technical and soft skills while fostering engagement and retention (Ulrich et al., 2017). Importantly, they must also evaluate training effectiveness, using performance metrics and employee feedback to ensure return on investment (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006). Practitioners should be proactive in balancing formal training initiatives with mechanisms that recognise and leverage informal learning. Peer learning networks, communities of practice, and collaborative platforms can stimulate knowledge sharing and innovation within organisations (Wenger et al., 2002).

Moreover, in light of increasing workforce diversity and remote working patterns, HRM strategies should adapt to support inclusive learning environments that address varying learning styles, access needs, and cultural contexts (Beechler & Woodward, 2009). Such inclusivity not only enhances individual development but also supports organisational agility. The intersection of Ashton and Felstead's research with organisational practice, policy formulation, and HRM strategy reveals that effective training and development requires multi-level alignment. Organisational leaders must commit to learning cultures, policymakers must ensure systemic support for skills growth, and HRM practitioners must act as facilitators of both structured and emergent learning. The integration of these perspectives is essential for sustaining workforce competence in an era of rapid technological and economic change.

Contributions of Ashton & Felstead to Training & Development Discourse
David Ashton and Alan Felstead have significantly influenced contemporary understandings of workplace learning and training by shifting the focus from traditional, formal training models to more integrated approaches that recognize the role of everyday work in skill formation. One major contribution is their critique of the "learning organisation" concept. In early work, Ashton, Felstead, and colleagues (1997) highlighted the gap between the aspirational ideal of a learning organization and the empirical realities in UK workplaces. They emphasized that abstract concepts often fail to capture the fragmented, contextual nature of real-world workplace learning (Raper et al., 1997).

Another foundational contribution is the Working as Learning Framework (WALF), developed in later work, which systematically links the micro-level tasks employees perform to broader organizational pressures and contexts (Felstead, Fuller, Jewson & Unwin, 2005). R\ather than isolate training from daily work, this framework stresses a holistic view—showing how learning is an embedded component of job design, workflow, and organisational culture.

Ashton and Felstead also emphasize the value of informal learning learning that happens through daily interactions, social networks, and problem-solving

rather than formal courses. In their study for the UK DTI, Fuller, Ashton, Felstead, Unwin, and Walters (2003) demonstrated that organizations fostering informal learning showed measurable increases in productivity—improving quality, reducing errors, and adapting faster to change. Further extending their contributions, Ashton and Felstead collaborated with Francis Green in examining skill deficiencies in the British workforce, particularly intermediate-level skills (e.g., clerical, technical roles). They flagged policy limitations that overly focused on university-level upskilling while neglecting mid-tier skills critical for maintaining economic competitiveness (Ashton, Felstead, & Green, 2000). This critique paved the way for more inclusive and granular understandings of national skill needs.

Their work has also reshaped how researchers conceptualize learning. In *"Surveying the Scene: Learning metaphors, survey design and the workplace context"*, Ashton, Felstead, Fuller, and others explored the metaphors of "learning as acquisition" versus "learning as participation", arguing that the latter better captures the relational, socially embedded nature of workplace learning (Felstead et al., 2005)

Together, Ashton & Felstead's contributions have had profound implications:

➢ **Theoretical clarity**: They enrich training theory by integrating organisational structure, social interaction, and everyday practice into learning frameworks.

➢ **Policy influence**: By emphasizing informal learning and transferable skills, they challenge policymakers to support broader, more equitable learning strategies that go beyond formal qualifications.

➢ **Organisational practice**: Their research suggests that training interventions should not be one-off events but embedded into workflows and job design, enhancing productivity through integrated learning.

Conclusion
The works of Ashton and Felstead have made a significant contribution to the discourse on training and development by offering a nuanced understanding of the relationship between workplace learning, organisational performance, and national skills strategies. Their analysis bridges the gap between formal and informal learning, illustrating that both forms are integral to skill acquisition and performance improvement. By situating workplace training within broader socio-economic and organisational contexts, they challenge overly narrow

conceptions of training as simply job-specific skill delivery. Furthermore, their research highlights the critical role of transferable skills in enhancing labour mobility, adaptability, and employability—factors increasingly important in rapidly changing labour markets. The recognition that informal learning is often more pervasive and impactful than formal training reframes the role of HRM and learning policy at both organisational and national levels. Ultimately, Ashton and Felstead's work underscores the need for integrated strategies that align organisational objectives with employee development needs while also contributing to wider skills policy debates.

Recommendations
Based on Ashton and Felstead's insights, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Integrate Formal and Informal Learning Strategies** – Organisations should recognise and harness informal learning as a complement to formal training programmes, embedding learning into everyday work processes.

2. **Promote Transferable Skills Development** – Training initiatives should be designed to equip workers with both job-specific and cross-functional skills to enhance adaptability in dynamic work environments.

3. **Strengthen Links between Skills Policy and Workplace Practice** – National policymakers should engage with employers to ensure that skills strategies reflect real workplace needs and support long-term economic competitiveness.

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