Corporate Digital Literacy Mandates: Using SDT-Based Strategies to Circumvent "Quiet Quitting" Syndrome

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Abstract—Envision an employee showing up faithfully every day for work but cognitively checked out every minute (i.e., quiet quitting). This article adapts a futurist perspective to describe the adult education pedagogy of experiential learning in juxtaposition to the limitations of behaviorist employee training incentives. The authors conceptually apply Spiral Dynamic Theory-based (SDT-based) predictive strategies to capitalize on the assumptions of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation themes among contemporary adult workers. The field of Adult and Continuing Education caters its teaching and learning to people who are 25 years of age and older. As employees, they bring to the corporate work environment a unique set of skills and life experiences that require pedagogical delivery that is innovative and motivating. Research shows that older adults are often technology averse. Therefore, scaffolding the employee's use of technology and social media as expectations of the work tasks could help improve low digital literacy and increase self-efficacy. This paper offers SDT as an instrument for adult training and professional development design.

Keywords—affective experiential learning, behaviorism, corporate social media, quiet quitting, Spiral Dynamic Theory

1 Introduction

Learning environments and concepts are integrally connected to how adults engage and problem-solve within social contexts and organizations. Marsick and Watkins [1] emphasize the importance of innovation-and-organizational knowledge perspectives that give attention to how adults store, retrieve, and manage knowledge by "finding ways to harvest the tacit knowledge embedded in routines and processes." Hence, learning organizations made up of individuals are "socially created"; these collections of people work together, playing a primary role in changing how they respond to challenges within and outside of any institution [2]. Learning for adults also includes the cultural perspectives that position them to utilize organic processes to make meaning as they co-create knowledge. By introducing the concept of culture, we can more deeply examine how it informs, facilitates, or impedes learning and team building. Deep analysis of technology's role in learning organizations alongside the convergence of

changing demographics requires optimal approaches and strategies for adult learners and their psychosocial development [3].

1.1 Reimagining concepts in adult learning

This article explores the authors' interpretative experiences relative to the role of traditional adult learning philosophical perspectives and theories to juxtaposition them to contemporary human resource development conditions using the Spiral Dynamic Theory (SDT) framework. We engage with the concept of complexity and diversity as we operationalize *affective*[1] collaboration strategies for teams of adult learners, taking into consideration the developmental change that occurs in the process. We privilege the social context of delivering online learning in this discussion, focusing on teaching, and how the experience evolves in the corporate workspace [4]. The examination of how adult educators use innovation in their delivery of pedagogy and praxis while considering how autonomy (self-directed learning) and collaboration are essential methods for team and group work [5, 6] among adults is discussed. Additionally, we recognize that the inclusion of *life experience* and embodied ways of knowing have increasingly become critical aspects of how adults want to learn in innovative ways [7].

Crentsil, Gschwandtner, and Wahhaj [8] provide valuable insight into how technology aversion among adults might be overcome when examining its impact on small-scale farmers who were more influenced by issues of ambiguity associated with risk-taking in their use of technology. The ambiguity relative to new farming processes became a primary variable that inhibited Ghanaian farmers from adopting innovative technologies. This suggests that cognitively meeting adults at their level of complexity relative to problem-solving is crucial for integrating technology into their daily life and work.

Piaget [9] developed a stage theory to provide models for cognitive development—primarily among children—finding that as one matures, new capacities for problem-solving and knowledge acquisition allow for more complex and accurate real worldviews. However, the final stage of his theory, formal operational thinking, served as the beginning of adult thinking. Neo-Piagetian paradigms [10] built upon the concept of formal operational thinking, leading to a more emergent understanding of adults' thinking and developmental problem-solving over time. In making a case for what Piaget believed, von Glasersfeld [11] describes the theorist's model of human existence as that of *Radical Constructivism*. The neo-Piagetian held that Piaget's theory of knowledge required a reorganization of ideas about knowledge stating:

> It is not a question of merely adjusting a definition here and there or rearranging familiar concepts in a somewhat novel fashion. The change that is required is of a far more drastic nature. It involves the demolition of our everyday conception of reality and, thus, of everything explicitly or implicitly based on naïve realism; it shakes the very foundations on which 19th-century science and most 20th-century psychology have been built [11].

[1] *Affective* collaboration and strategies, for our purposes, involve moods, feelings, and attitudes that can emerge during team/group student work due to the diverse SDT ontological worldview(s) of the adult learner(s) and the social context that locates the graduate-level education.

Adult learning and development scholarship identify linkages between how well adults can navigate complexity and ambiguity using models of hierarchical cognitive thinking [3, 12, 13, 14, 15]. Moreover, the evidence suggests that dynamic changes in the ability to problem-solve among adults require a forward change in their psychosocial realities [16, 17]. This change results from meeting particular conditions (Table 1) that lead to higher-order thinking and consolidation of SDT worldview(s) change.

1.2 Spiral dynamic theory

The theoretical framework guiding our discussion and this conceptual article is based upon the idea of expanding levels of human existence—termed SDT—that direct the thinking and problem-solving capabilities among individual adults, organizations, and larger societies [16]. We use this knowledge to inform our delivery of adult learning pedagogy to groups and collaborative teams.

SDT has its origins in the scholarship of Clare W. Graves [15, 17, 18]—a psychologist and Professor Emeritus—who retired in 1978 from Union College in New York. Graves initially described the theory advanced as his Emergent Cyclical Level of Existence Theory (ECLET), grounded in his interdisciplinary research that bridged the adult biopsychosocial systems disciplines at Union College. Graves contended that adult learning and development was an open-ended system of emergent thinking and evolving worldview constructs [13, 15, 18]. However, he was initially discouraged about the ECLET due to witnessing a colleague (Abraham Maslow) being *torn to pieces* about his theory on the hierarchy of human needs due to underdeveloped data at an APA seminar in the 1950s [18]. Graves vowed he would never subject himself to such humiliation and have his research be strongly maligned in the field due to weak empiricism. Hence, he retained several incomplete manuscripts until he died in 1986. Therefore, Grave's scholarship was not as highly published and implemented until it was taken up and shepherded by his protégés in the late 20th century [16]. Nevertheless, Graves [18] used the rejection experienced by Maslow to fine-tune his theory. He later goes on to state that:

> Maslow came around to my point of view. If you look at some of his later writings, you will see that he accepted both the cyclical idea that there are more than one kind of expressive system and more than one kind of belonging system and that the systems were open-ended [19].

As Grave's protégés Don Beck and Chris Cowan continued to advance his scholarship—the latter of whom mentored and trained one of the authors of this article in the use and application of SDT—Brown [13, 20] has refined several of the worldview constructs. The resulting evolution of the prior frameworks helps make the application of the emergent model (offered in this presentation) useful in examining adults' thinking and values-based responses in connection to cultural diversity [65] and even more specifically, work environments.

Table 1. Six stages are required for SDT worldview level movement

The Chronological SDT Change States	Conditions Needed for Problem Resolution
1. Change Potential (Open/Closed)	The change potential for the adult must be met through the acquisition of new insights. Some adults will remain resistant to change, becoming static in their ability to problem-solve or advance in ontological reality.
2. Solutions	The problem is recognized cognitively, and an understanding of the need to address the problem is made clear.
3. Dissonance	The disturbance generated by the solution stage subsequently triggers a regressive movement in how to solve the problem.
4. Insight	New clarity and insight are introduced into the thinking about the problem that halts the regression movement as strong enlightenment points that facilitate change are realized.
5. Barriers are removed or neutralized	Non-interference for the change to occur or properly timed aid is provided to the adult leading to assistance with overcoming the problem.
6. Consummation of change	The adult experiences an SDT worldview level jump to consolidate the change in thinking and resolve the problem.

Note: During the consummation of change (Step 6), quantum leaps can occur in the SDT worldview typologies stages, disrupting the normal progression of change and problem-solving ability. However, such leaps are very unstable and typically result in a regression downward to a more optimal SDT worldview level change stage [12, 18].

Memes the transferable units of culture. Although Clare W. Graves [18] never explicitly used the term *meme*, a unit of culture that transfers from person to person through non-genetic human imitation [21], his conceptualization of the term was present in his research on how thinking and problem-solving capacities evolved from one stage (worldview construct) to the next on the ECLET spiraling framework. His protégés later advanced the theory of the movement up the framework as a dynamic spiral of value memes (i.e., ^{v}MEME[2]) of increasing cognitive complexity [16]. Additionally, movement along the framework is induced by problem resolution, as shown in Table 1.

Hierarchical and evolving worldview constructs. Brown [3, 20] provides some descriptive details about the unique worldview constructs that exist in the framework. The diagram (Figure 1) uses a mnemonically color-coded system to distinguish each worldview construct that begins with low-order simplistic thinking and then progresses upward in a zig-zag fashion toward more complex taxonomies of higher-order thinking and problem-solving abilities.

The adult learners to whom we deliver the SDT training and professional development are provided with initial in-session orientations to become familiar with

[2] ^{v}MEME(s) represent ontological Spiral Dynamics organizing principles and values embedded within a taxonomy of emergent worldviews and hierarchical cognitive problem-solving abilities. The ^{v}MEME is mimetically influenced and therefore functions as a type of meta-meme within the SDT framework [13].

SDT and its taxonomy. Then they are asked to self-assess their positionality on the SDT framework using case study scenario exercises to guide their evaluations. Throughout the sessions, the instructor makes continuous nonformal assessments by observing the trainees as individuals and in their group collaborations. The assessment tools and strategies assist the session facilitator to identify optimal project team grouping recommendations that align with the emergent SDT model.

The horizontal worldview constructs (Figure 1) experience the most conflict while the thinking among the immediately vertical neighboring system tends to maintain the most harmonious collaborations. The following descriptions are associated with each of the color-coded ᵛMEME with conceptions of teal and coral currently at the hypothesis stage of investigation:

Basic instinctive. The beige A/N coded *value meme* system is representative of a precultural existence. Wherein the case of the individual, he would possess low self-awareness. The thinking is driven by physiological imperatives and the simple purpose of staying alive [13, 22]. The locus of control is internal, and the thematic orientation is individualistic.

Magical mystical world. The purple B/O coded *value meme* system is concerned with safety and security through kinship ties. This worldview system believes in obeying the desires of magical-mystical spiritual beings and divine authority figures (e.g., priests, Shamans, tribal elders). The purple-coded is marked by fantastical thinking, tribalism, and traditionalism. The locus of control is external, and the thematic orientation is collectivist.

Power impulsive. The red C/P coded *value meme* system is the egocentric memetic worldview often marked by imperatives of domination by force and intimidation. It is represented by thinking and actions that are impulsive. The perception in thinking holds that life is a jungle where there exist the haves and the have-nots. The driving force is to be among the haves. The locus of control is internal and individualistic.

SDT Constructivist Theoretical Framework Model

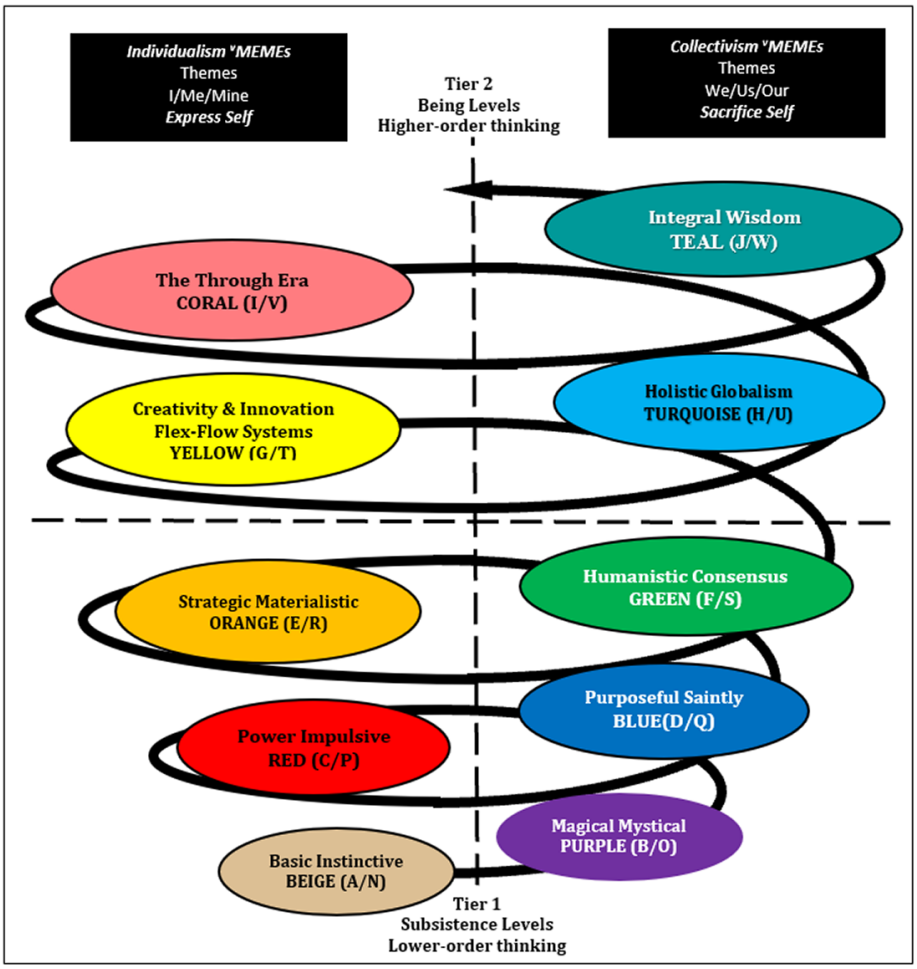


Fig. 1. This figure displays the oscillating zig-zag movement up the spiral representing the changes in SDT worldview constructs, thinking, and problem-solving abilities (reproduced with permission [3]

Purposeful and saintly living. The blue D/Q coded *value meme* system represents honor and a good versus evil memetic worldview. This thinking believes that we are assigned to a specific place in life and must accept our lots in life as predestined. This thinking can be marked by dogmatic absolutism where calls for sacrifice are urged to bring order and stability to a chaotic space. The thinking can be paternalistic and authoritarian with goals for obtaining the betterment of everyone. Rules are to be followed and are often non-negotiable. The locus of control is external and collectivist.

Strategic materialism. The orange E/R coded *value meme* system is marked by manipulation and a memetic worldview that values autonomy and independence. Winning and competition are prevailing values of this system. Using scheming tactics

and cunning strategies to obtain desired outcomes is a driving force. Gaining high achievements that bring praise and material possessions is viewed as the most optimal reward. The thinking is grounded in logic and a reasonable calculated certainty for success. The locus of control is internal and individualistic.

Humanistic consensus. The green F/S coded *value meme* system F/S is the relativistic memetic worldview that believes in human dignity and consensus building in contrast to religious edicts. There is an effort to explore the personal *inner self* in cooperation with the inner self-discovery also being made by others. The thinking in this value meme system prioritizes the life of community, unity, and harmony, as the group seeks to share societal resources for the benefit of all. The locus of control is external and collectivist.

Creativity & innovation/flex-flow systems. The yellow G/T coded *value meme* system represents the first of the more complexity-oriented constructs (i.e., Tier 2 worldviews). In the literature, the yellow value meme represents a departure from the preoccupations of subsistence living found with the Tier 1 constructed thinking. Yellow marks the first worldview of Tier 2 *being levels* where the problems of subsistence living are clearly understood even though they are not necessarily under control [1, 13]. The SDT yellow value meme thinking welcomes paradoxes and uncertainty. It accepts a flex-flow [13, 20] perspective that appreciates the layered dimensions of human nature and societies. The locus of control is internal and individualistic.

Holistic globalism dichotomies. The turquoise H/U coded *value meme* thinking represents the second of the Tier 2 constructs. This system reflects the globalism memetic worldview marked by its ability to more easily negotiate complexity and recognize patterns more immediately than seen operating under the prior lower six, Tier 1 ^{v}MEMEs. Its priorities include the pursuit of the good for all living things, and the thinking views the world as a single dynamic organism possessing its own type of independent human energy of *mind.* Turquoise thinking is more driven by purpose versus achieving harmony with other persons. The locus of control is external and collectivist.

The through era. The coral I/V coded *value meme* system reflects the worldview that privileges the use of perspectives that merge human biology and technology, thinking it to be the most optimal approach to adult existence. At this level, adults have advanced in their problem-solving abilities as they are no longer burdened by subsistence living. As a result, there is a freeing up of the capacity for higher-order thinking to engage more complex problems of the human condition. This construct is among the last two value meme constructs currently included in the [12] SDT model and is in developing formulation. The research limitation for the Coral and Teal constructs is constrained due to the impediments for the author to secure access to a sufficient sample of individuals holding to these types of adult thinking patterns. Coral thinking represents "a secular vision of unlimited technoscientific progress" where notions of God and faith are integral [22]. The locus of control is internal and individualistic.

Integral wisdom and human insight. Like the prior coral I/V coded *value meme* system, the teal J/W coded value meme system represents a construction based upon theoretical propositions by the author using interpretive observational pilot research and adult development literature [23, 24]. Note that at the Tier 2 level of the SDT framework, the differences between collectivist orientations juxtaposition

individualistic worldview orientations begin to become less pronounced. The tensions and disagreements between the horizontal conflict patterns among the adults engaged in Tier 1 level thinking led to more significant stagnation concerning problem-solving between diametrically oppositional perspectives [13, 16]. However, the Tier 2 teal J/W system departs more gently from the prior coral systems of adult thinking introducing a more tempered reliance on technology and mechanization to resolve complex human problems. The locus of control is external and collectivist.

2 Review of the adult learning literature

Constructivism theory views learning as constructing new knowledge that includes social, cultural, and experiential components with early roots dating back to Socrates and his teaching method of allowing his followers to challenge their ideas [25]. Jean Piaget is attributed with developing the modern theory of Constructivism; however, many well-known contributors, such as John Dewey, Lev Vygotsky, and Seymour Papert, have also informed the theory's development. Constructivism purports that learners interpret new information through personal, contextual lenses and build upon existing knowledge and previous experiences to construct a new understanding of their world [26]. Constructivism centers on the learner's characteristics of self-direction and experience to create new knowledge. It reflects real-life problem-solving and supports the general principles of adult education and lifelong learning [27, 28].

2.1 Experiential learning

As mentioned, Constructivism involves a synthesis of multiple theorists from Dewey [29] to Piaget [9] and Vygotsky [30], who profoundly affected Kolb's [31] Experiential Learning theory. The latter theory emphasizes the significance of experience in the adult learning process, and it views learning as a more holistic and integrated process that combines experience, perception, cognition, and behavior [32]. Experiential Learning is the construction of knowledge and meaning from real-life incidents or simply learning by doing and undergirded by individual reflection [33].

Experiential Learning fosters new neurological connections in the brain, thus helping adults learn new things [34]. Brown [13], as an element of the SDT framework, advances the concept of transferable *mental units* of culture termed *memes*. She goes on to recognize that in the field of adult education, there is a "Growing body of knowledge on adult development and how cognition—that can be dynamic and evolving—contributes to the adults' problem-solving capacities and their abilities to negotiate environmentally complex social contexts and thinking" [13, p. 206].

Therefore, the role of experience and neuroplasticity[3] can operate as key variables for examining how adults learn and develop. SDT offers an interpretive model for how adult learners engage in adaptive complex critical thinking in new and innovative ways based on the connections formed (or uncoupling) that occur during group collaborations.

[3] A general umbrella term that refers to the brain's ability to modify, change, and adapt both structure and function throughout life and in response to experience.

Nevertheless, Schenck and Cruickshank [35] offer criticism of the Kolb [31] model due to its cyclical nature and its inability to adapt to newer research. We advance that SDT introduces a contemporary lens of epistemology that bridges the need for a newer way to examine adult learning using an integral view of the body, mind, and spiritual ways of knowing within dynamically changing social contexts [3, 20].

3 Social media in the corporate environment

The use of social media and digital technology has left an indelible mark on adult learning environments in our society, with both positive and negative outcomes [36]. The employee educational strategy for corporations has pivoted away from traditional lecture-oriented approaches to digitally based knowledge delivery [37]. Leading the way in adult learning innovation are social media informal learning formats heavily influenced by the corporation's social media strategy. Corporate educators have adopted the principles of social learning to improve collaborative learning, increase learner flexibility, and reduce costs by using standardized web-based learning environments such as *Twitter* and *Instagram* [38].

Many organizations recognize the potential of digital literacy for its rapid access to consumers and leverage their employees in their social media strategy [37, 39]. This plan of action allows employees to increase brand knowledge and connections with potential customers hence becoming key market influencers. Therefore, through directives from upper leadership, a company policy may require employees to express positive messages through social tweets and posts on behalf of the organization. Such actions can serve to positively influence brand awareness and improve market reach at minimum costs [39, 40, 41].

However, the personal characteristics normatively associated with adult learners, such as self-directedness, self-efficacy, adapting to new social contexts, personal autonomy [42], and the application of lived experience in creating new knowledge by employees, may be absent. Approaches to injecting social media as a work requirement may risk producing the opposite effect of positive branding when behaviorist tasks reduce affective learning and enthusiasm among workers [43]. Therefore, corporations must be mindful in their attempts to infuse employee social media skills and usage into the organizational culture [25, 36].

3.1 Case study

In this case analysis, a multinational technology company positioned *digital brand ambassadorships* as a way for employees to increase collaboration with customers and colleagues. The learning strategy was an opportunity to improve the worker's social skills. It also served to enhance digital identity and increase brand awareness online. The company used a behavioralist approach in implementing the initiative, requiring brand ambassadors to 1) tweet multiple times weekly, 2) participate in *LinkedIn* discussions, and 3) post on *Instagram*. The employees who served in leadership roles were assigned the titles of *Brand Ambassador* and were responsible for their departments or functional groups. A measurement tool was used to track employee social media participation

and a departmental scorecard was published for senior management and departmental leadership to inspect every Monday. The monitoring tool also provided statistical data used in the employee evaluation process.

The company provided each employee access to a multi-dimensional digital application with pre-built tweets to support the initiative and facilitate process efficiency. The application offered various categories of content that included organizational updates, product launches, upcoming tradeshows and conferences, executive blogs and briefs, and philanthropic events. However, employees still needed to acquire a baseline knowledge of social skills and practices not directly supported by a formal learning program offered by the company as part of the initiative's launch. The employees who served in leadership roles were assigned the titles of *Brand Ambassador* and were responsible for their departments' participation. Most employees acquired basic skills through informal learning channels such as viewing online tutorials on *YouTube*, colleague mentoring, and on-the-job independent practice.

Although the corporate marketing department developed limited training material, each department's responsibility was to ensure digital and social education among its employees to the obtaining of self-efficacy. Many older employees struggled with building digital proficiency at the pace needed to achieve their weekly posting quotas. This challenge created frustration and anxiety and thrust employees into a competitive environment instead of a collaborative, knowledge-sharing community [43]. The company missed the opportunity of integrating adult learning pedagogy into teaching employees how to effectively acquire and use social media skills to improve personal digital competency and expand interpersonal relationships in the workplace and in producing harmony with the emerging external online work context.

4 Behaviorist training approaches in professional development

Noted psychologist B. F. Skinner [44] is well-known for his contributions to the field of adult education through his advancing of the philosophical perspective of behaviorism. Practitioners whose professional concentration emphases are in the areas of Human Resource Development (HRD) are much acquainted with traditional practices that draw upon behaviorist pedagogy used for training and employee professional development [45]. As an academic exercise, and for the scope of this article, we examine behaviors and training that result from stimuli used to change the activities of workers through the reinforcement systems of incentivizing rewards and disincentivizing penalties if targets were not met within a newly implemented online corporate working environment for lower-level employees.

Skinner saw human action as being dependent on the consequences of previous actions, a theory he called the principle of reinforcement [46]. Under conditions of reinforcement, he theorized that, if the consequences of an action are negative, it is more likely that the action will not be repeated. Conversely, however, if the outcomes of actions taken by the subject are positive and perceived as good by the authority providing instruction about the new learning, the probability of the action being repeated becomes inevitable [47].

The behaviorist perspective also overlaps with the humanist adult education perspective [48] where the adult actor is centered within the learning experience. However, in the case of the former, behaviorist instruction is far less self-directed. Therefore, important elements of autonomy that are viewed as one of the key principles of adult education (i.e., andragogy) are less pronounced [49].

Nonetheless, Skinner further discusses the administrative difficulties encountered by those leading adult instruction. He goes on to describe the phenomenon of individual variances [50] and how adult educators might negotiate these differences. More specifically, Skinner makes the case for providing a supportive environment for the worker holding that positive reinforcement rather than negative reinforcement is the best way to influence adult behavior when teaching [51]. He also found it necessary to cope with individual variances most immediately among those adults where the objectives of effective learning or training were not being met [50]. Ideally, most workplace environments have been designed to promote specific employee behaviors, and employees must perform their tasks satisfactorily to receive rewards.

4.1 What is quiet quitting?

A generational difference is emerging among worker classes giving rise to a phenomenon known as *quiet quitting*, which was first used in an academic setting by economist Mark Boldger [52] at a Texas A&M economic symposium focused on Venezuela's waning ambitions among its worker class. A social media influencer name Zaiad Khan [53] made a Tik Tok video introducing the quiet quitting concept, and much like most socially constructed memes, the term became popular, causing it to go viral and spread like wildfire globally. In essence, quiet quitting is the concept of continuing to work but giving up the idea of going above and beyond the metrics of high work performance. The employee simply continues to fulfill assigned work-related tasks, but the worker has disengaged from notions of competition or ambitions for company advancement. The traditional symbols or other such on-the-job reward trinkets no longer serve as intrinsic forms of motivation [54] for the adult worker.

The employee simply is no longer adhering to the hustle attitude that so many of them had grown accustomed to believing by uncritically accepting memes that defined notions of what makes for positive work ethics. Under the concept of *quiet quitting*, the employee embraces the mentality that their worth as a person is not defined by their labor [55]. Moreover, people who have experienced a lack of loyalty from a company—when they work diligently for their employers but receive no loyalty in return—have little incentive to exceed requirements giving rise to the quiet quitting social phenomenon.

For example, if the national cost of living rate increases significantly but an employee receives a merit pay increase that is not in keeping with that inflation, then the employee may feel that they are not valued and succumb to the quiet quitting mindset. As an example, to avoid a more radical response—such as a general worker strike—during tenuous economic times, the employees operating under this social phenomenon simply reduce their production rather than terminate their employment. They have come to recognize that overworking themselves for promotions and incentive raises which are

likely not to materialize is untenable. As a result, workers negate and reject the *hustle culture*, in which their jobs dominate and take precedence over their lives.

Another example of quiet quitting is muting emails and notifications after work hours rather than working outside of the normal 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. workday. The employee is doing what they are paid to do and setting boundaries about work expectations versus when they are off work and exercising that they are within their right to be unwilling to do more or being exploited.

Now is the time for employers to effectively respond to this emerging trend. Corporate leaders must take on the role of behavioral engineer to methodically motivate and respond to organizational needs and change dynamics. Company leadership must be mindful of the importance of rewards and incentives necessary to achieve the desired output of productivity. Employee assessment tools are needed that monitor and gauge the risk of quiet quitting—before disincentivizing feelings of being undervalued are allowed to grow or become critical toward hampering long-term organizational success.

4.2 Benefits of affective adult learning theory

The authors contend that a well-organized plan using a constructivist adult education philosophical approach could have improved workplace collaboration, teamwork, and reduced employee anxiety caused by the social media initiative's launch in the case study. For example, by leveraging Kolb's [31] experiential learning theory in formal and informal adult education settings, employees could 1) engage in on-hand learning, 2) reflect on their experience, 3) build conceptual knowledge of the broader social media processes, and 4) incorporate new approaches to refine their learning and delivery activities [55]. Using a more constructivist approach guided by experiential learning with feedback loops would have allowed employees to value the benefits of using a social media platform and building digital literacy at a more individualized pace with greater flexibility.

Additionally, based on their organizational roles and responsibilities, there was an a priori taken-for-granted assumption that the social media *Brand Ambassadors* ranked high in the areas of self-directed learning. It was assumed that they could take responsibility for employees' autonomous learning due to their higher organizational status and help with their direct reports. However, a proper understanding and preparation of company leaders surrounding principles of adult self-directed learning theory could have provided an additional layer of support techniques for the ambassadors. For example, incorporating Grow's self-directed learning stages for interacting with the employees could better position leaders for proper evaluation of employee work performance developmentally in meeting company goals and objectives [25].

5 Long-term strategic planning

The use of social media in corporate environments will continue to expand, so the need for training and education will remain strong [36, 39]. As illustrated in the above company case study, adopting social media presents a complex learning curve for some employees—particularly for technology and social-media-adverse adult learners. Therefore, organizations would benefit from using adult learning pedagogy in worker

training to help capitalize on the life experiences of diverse adult learners and better understand how the newly acquired skills can benefit them professionally and personally via interacting with and sharing social content [38].

Social media platforms are well positioned as emerging tools to expand the modalities for corporate adult learning. They offer a venue for more novel and contemporary constructivist learning opportunities. For example, through enhanced human connection activities that leverage innovative social media tools, such as the voice capture platform of *Twitter Spaces*, the potential to harness increased engagement and high-quality informal adult learning is enhanced [56].

5.1 Ways of knowing and pragmatic collaboration

Adult Learning is expansive having a plethora of theories, modalities of pedagogy, and innovations for teaching and instructing adults. Hence, we hold that adult education and learning tend to be very organic, due in part to the role of life experience, and that learning generally is far more developed in humans than in any other living species [57]. Thus, the goal to sustain *affective* adult learning teams in employee training and professional development entails the coordination of human phenomena (e.g., moods, feelings, and attitudes) as we consider embodied ways of learning in online spaces [25].

Gallagher [58] describes an approach to meaning-making termed *enactivist* that involves mixing the brain and bodily processes. He held that cognition is not just in our minds but also in our bodies related to environmental factors. Therefore, enactivist interventions are designed to show that the mind is not exclusively in the head, nor would our responses to problem-solving be. SDT offers, per our proposal, an aperture to the mind-body domain to the complexity of adult learning.

Opposite to the approach of enactivist is pragmatism, which holds that the *truth* of beliefs, theories, or meaning-making happens via the practical success of their applications. SDT holds that beliefs are a part of our conscious and unconscious value systems. Thus, a practical application of a known truth (i.e., pragmatism) requires some level of predictability but does not necessarily offer prescriptive pathways for the adult learner when their practical truths are met by uncertainty or chaos. We suggest that the incongruence of knowledge and experience among employee collaborative teams could be mitigated by properly blending like-minded and diverse thinkers among working group teams [59].

Illeris [57] contends that four notable styles are associated with specific languages and geographical regions. They include the *Gestalt view*, *American behaviorism*, *Russian cultural-historical theory*, and *Piaget's Constructivism*. As technology has expanded from the late 20th century until the present, team dynamics have needed to evolve. Firstly, one must understand what elements comprise *affective* teams and group collaborations. According to Johnson and Johnson [6], a team is a kluge of interpersonal communications and actions molded to contend for an established goal. In formal adult learning contexts, students are often challenged to form various connections and schemes that lead to high-quality participation among team members. We hold that clear and informed application of the SDT levels, particularly those found in Tier 1, provides for conditions where one can see the scaffolding necessary to engage in problem-solving [13] that facilitates higher-order thinking among individual students and groups.

5.2 Managing diversity in online communities of practice

The literature provides evidence that *formal learning* is the pedagogical model that adults find most helpful in establishing policy assessments about access, curriculum preparation, resource management, and improvement of learning capabilities [60]. Moreover, adult learners in formal and nonformal settings tend to identify via socioeconomic, cultural, and lived experiences. Schugurensky and Myers [61] argue that lifelong learning is often centered on normative and ontological components. Hence, the potential for human disconnection via the overuse of innovative learning technologies, for the delivery of adult education can present emotional anxiety for educators and learners [62]. For example, in a virtual learning setting, some team members are more expressive, blunt, and free with their responses on discussion boards and chat rooms [6]. We suggest that an adequate preliminary evaluation and assessment of the individual employees' diverse worldviews can foster optimal innovation and *affective* team building using SDT to identify and foster sensory attributes [13, 65] that may match well between collaborators as they pursue mutually accepted corporate goals.

6 Conclusion

SDT interprets the individual, organization, and societal domains into an adult learning framework that demonstrates how behavior oscillates between dynamically changing worldviews [20]. Since technology is a crucial factor in each of these three domains, understanding its role in the lives of adult learners is important.

In the past, many technology-based learning programs emerged from a history of computer-based training aligned with behaviorism [63]. In today's adult learning environment, technology plays a crucial role in providing a learning framework for deeper personal learning while enabling real-world learning experiences through virtual environments [63].

We contend that a proper SDT assessment is necessary as a precursor for *affective* adult learning and development (diagnostic) or collaborative group formations. Assumptions that all learners' preferences for the delivery of pedagogy, technology, and organization/logistics [62] are valid concerns in adult education. Nonformal and emerging informal learning in local communities and online social media spaces—particularly during the COVID pandemic—have experienced our highest adult participant increases [64].

Adult learning principles maintain that adults learn best when they are allotted choices about their learning [42]. Our supposition and hypothesis to date hold that being able to collaborate well within teams and groups, for optimal adult learning to occur (especially when using innovative technologies), we intentionally include the *affective* dimensions of intercultural relations among diverse adult groups engage in corporate learning. Therefore, to curtail corporate economic losses due to maladaptive training that leads to worker attrition or the emergence of quiet quitting in the workplace environment, our recommendation would include the use of SDT-based assessments and strategies.

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