

**A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION OF SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING IN  
SENEGAL,  
WEST AFRICA AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMAN RESOURCE  
DEVELOPMENT**

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the current status of self-directed learning by SME leaders in Senegal, West Africa, and then to identify some of the human resource development (HRD) implications. This qualitative study collected data through two sets of interviews. First, eight leaders who were either the owner or manager of SMEs in Senegal were interviewed through questions that focused on the four factors that Confessore (1992) identified as necessary for autonomous learning: (a) desire, (b) resourcefulness, (c) initiative, and (d) persistence. Results were then discussed while incorporating the importance of understanding some of the basic elements of Senegalese culture and the impact that the French educational system has had on the country. There were three HRD Senegalese professionals who participated in the second set of interviews that provided additional insights into potential HRD implications in the country of Senegal. Results from both sets of interviews suggest that the Senegalese as a whole possess the Confessore's four factors needed for autonomous learning, but they are extremely weak in the area of self-efficacy, providing an important opportunity for HRD leaders to help the Senegalese develop their businesses and their country. An important question for self-directed learning emerges: if people are found to be self-directed learners, yet fail to utilize the knowledge gained because of a lack of self-efficacy, is there a benefit to self-directed learning?

*Keywords:* SME, Senegal, West Africa, HRD, Confessore, autonomous learning

## **Introduction**

Merriam and Caffarella (1998) explain that adult learners are actually more engaged in self-directed learning than they think. Self-directed learning has been given a shallow meaning that simply connotes self-study in the minds of many, but it is actually very complex in its nature; therefore, it is crucial for teachers to learn how to incorporate it into their pedagogy (Silén & Uhlin, 2008). Self-directed learning is

a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies and evaluating learning outcomes. (Knowles, 1975, p. 18)

Hays (2009) simply explains that self-directed learning may be understood as “a process by which individuals manage their own learning by developing and then addressing personal learning objectives. The ability to go through this process of self-directed learning may also be thought of as a personal attribute that enables people to psychologically be ready for self-directed learning (Hornig-Ji, 2011).

This study seeks to investigate the self-directed learning status of Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) leaders in Senegal, West Africa and then draw some potential Human Resource Development (HRD) implications. The purpose of HRD is to develop the human capital to enhance the individual and the organization (Gilley & Egglund, 2002). Culture, religion, and the current state of development also need to be considered in this investigative study which utilizes two groups of participants to gain information through interviews. The second portion of the study then discovers and analyzes how HRD practitioners should tailor their learning programs so that they work well in the Senegalese culture.

## **Factors Necessary for Self-Directed Learning**

Ponton, Derrick, and Carr (2005) posit that “because of the hypothesized importance of the psychological dimension for self-directed learning and the dearth of research connecting this dimension with concomitant behaviors, recent work focuses on autonomous learning as a manifestation of the learner's autonomy” (p. 117). Confessore (1992) explains that in order for self-directed learning to happen, one must manifest the following four factors: (a) desire, (b) resourcefulness, (c) initiative, and (d) persistence. These four factors are used in this study as the factors necessary for one to be considered a self-directed learner. These factors are interrelated as desire is the first starter that begins the cognitive process in which the path from resourcefulness to persistence is taken as one shows initiative (Ponton et al., 2005).

## Initial Interviews with Entrepreneurs in Senegal

There have not been many studies performed in Africa as it is frequently “referred to as the ‘forgotten continent’ in which most international actors do not have a vested interest. “Sub-Saharan [Africa] is the poorest and least developed [area] in the world” (Scheipers & Sicurelli, 2008, p. 607). Therefore, this study in the Sub-Saharan country of Senegal utilizes qualitative research techniques which are best suited to generate theory and explore new areas of research (Patton, 2002).

There were eight participants in the initial set of interviews with SME leaders in Dakar, Senegal. The industries represented varied and included education, technology, commercial printing, and trading. Five of the participants were men and three were women. All of the interviews took place at the entrepreneur’s place of business and none of the participants were paid for their involvement in this study, which was limited to one 30 minute interview.

The initial set of interviews was developed from Confessore’s (1992) four factors that were necessary for self-directed learning and are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Interview Table

Self-Directed Learning Factor	Question
Desire	<p>How would you describe your desire to learn?</p> <p>What have you given up in order to learn more?</p> <p>How has your desire to learn changed in the past ten years?</p>
Resourcefulness	<p>What learning opportunities have you been able to access?</p> <p>Which of those would you have thought to have been out of your reach?</p> <p>How have you worked to continue to learn?</p>
Initiative	<p>What learning opportunities were you coerced into by family or another force?</p> <p>What learning opportunities have you sought for yourself?</p> <p>Why did you seek those learning opportunities?</p>
Persistence	<p>What learning endeavors have been the most difficult?</p> <p>Did you continue? Why?</p> <p>Did you start studying at a university? Did you finish?</p>

In addition to the interview questions that were matched to Confessore's (1992) list of self-directed learning factors, the following questions were utilized in the interviews: (a) how do you define learning, (b) where can it take place, (c) how does it take place, (d) are you currently learning something, what and how, (e) what do you think are the weaknesses of the educational system in Senegal, (f) how does that affect organizations and personal learning, and (g) what changes could be made to help facilitate adult learning here in Senegal?

All eight of the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The interviews were then coded thematically. Seven manifest codes resulting from the coding process were helpful in analyzing the data gained through the interviews.

### **Data Gained through the Interview and Coding**

The interviews were coded into what became seven manifest codes: (a) ideas on learning (including cultural norms), (b) desire, (c) resourcefulness, (d) initiative, (e) persistence, (f) weaknesses and change areas for learning in Senegal, and (g) strengths of Senegalese learning. The data gained through the interviews for each of the codes was very similar, indicating that the saturation point was reached with the eight interviews. The data and the summary of the data for each of the seven manifest codes are presented below.

#### **Ideas on Learning (Including Cultural Norms)**

The Senegalese place a very high value on learning, viewing it as a way to become successful in life. An entrepreneur who has three photo processing and portrait studios explains that learning is "necessary to succeed in life. Learning occurs so that somebody is able to develop something, coming to a place of being able to actually create and start something." This entrepreneur continued to explain that the business landscape regarding photo processing is changing in Senegal, and, because of self-directed learning, the company has shifted some of its focus to selling computers and other technological devices that will allow the company to continue to flourish in the coming years.

The Senegalese also believe that learning can take place in both formal and informal settings, which was articulated by one Senegalese: "There is formal learning in the classroom of books. There is informal learning that you get through experience with people." The Senegalese who were interviewed place a very high importance on informal learning. A school director stated, "Learning for me is to know, see, and gain from the experience of others. It can take place everywhere, with the family, or on the street with people we talk with because they have different experiences." This indicates a very relational type of learning that results from the socio-cultural perspective on how one learns. Data from the interviews indicated that the Senegalese value informal learning more than formal learning in many circumstances because of its practical nature, while formal learning in Senegal was viewed as very impractical.

## **Desire**

The Senegalese participants in the study all described an intense desire to learn more because they viewed it as the main avenue to advance in the job market and also to be personally transformed. A young director of an electronic store shared a strong desire to learn English because it is the avenue by which she can advance in the workplace. The director continued to explain that her desire to learn in the past ten years “has increased because I need to learn more to go further” and that she needed experience to accompany the learning. Another Senegalese explained the desire to learn even more poignantly as it was described as a “constant thirst for transformation. It is not just knowledge, but it is something that can transform your life and others’. I always want to learn because I see myself under construction.”

## **Resourcefulness**

The Senegalese are also very resourceful in their learning. The job market is so difficult in the country that college and graduate degrees are necessary to find employment which would be considered an entry level job in the States which would not require higher education. With that in mind, many of the participants in the study indicated that they have taken night classes or other educational courses to complete university and master degrees. One director of a new e-commerce business mentioned that she had graduated with an undergraduate degree in exportation, and then a master’s degree in marketing and a second master’s degree in international commerce. She knew that it was necessary to keep adding to her CV in order to stand out from others who are seeking employment in the country.

It is not uncommon for poor families in Senegal to pay for the education of the oldest child in the hopes that the child will be able to get a good job to provide for the family. A director of an electronic store explained that her family was poor but that they made many sacrifices for her to go to university. The entire family used all of their resources to support her in her formal education and she did not want to disappoint them. One young man who directs a small school explains this point very clearly:

I chose to do high school and the other learning areas myself. I wanted to do more, but I had to start working to help my family. I am the oldest son of my mother. That means something here. If you are the oldest, there are many things that you need to do. I need to help my little brothers, sisters, and parents. I have to help my siblings to go school. At the end of every month (when I receive my pay) I have to help the family and sacrifice for them. My mother is the second wife and my father is old and retired.

With so many of the Senegalese living in poverty, they are a very resourceful people in many areas, including learning. Almost all of the respondents mentioned at one point the importance of learning from others informally, a manner of learning that is available to all Senegalese as it does not depend on their social status.

## **Initiative**

The data produced in the area of initiative reflects the logical thought progression that leaders of SMEs need to show initiative in order for their business to grow and for them to learn. Some of the participants indicated that they did not start showing much initiative in their learning when they entered adulthood for various reasons. The director of a school explained the difficulty he had in learning from a young age:

Really, it is hard for me to talk about because I did not live with my parents, but I went to live with a family member. I had many problems. I did everything I could to not return to the people that I was living with. They made me go to school. I was good at French literature, but they did not let me continue. They wanted me to study science. If I would have continued with French literature, I would have been great, but I was not allowed. I did not do well with that. I did everything to rebel.

The director of the school continued to explain that things did not go well until later in life when he married into a good family that gave him a second chance in life, and he has been learning and working hard since that time.

A small business owner indicated initiative from the beginning of adulthood by explaining that he chose everything that he learned, including high school and sought learning opportunities because: "I see what is going on. I am ambitious. I see what is going on and I want to advance." The Senegalese who participated in the study, who have been successful in the marketplace, all indicated a personal initiative in learning because they were not forced by their families to attend school as it was their choice. It is not surprising that the Senegalese show a great deal of initiative as the average work productivity in Senegal is higher than many other African countries (Echevin & Murtin, 2009).

## **Persistence**

The initiative indicated in the interviews by the participants was something that seemed to really permeate their lives because of their persistence in continuing to learn. It was interesting that seven out of the eight participants finished their university degree, as the one participant who did not finish cited financial difficulties as the reason why he was not able to obtain his degree. It is also important to realize that a very high percentage of participants in the study finished their university studies because so many students start and do not finish their degrees. The theme that emerged regarding persistence was that if somebody quit learning, they would quickly fall behind in the competitive market and therefore lose opportunities for their business. None of the respondents wanted to fall behind, so that was a chief motivation in being persistent in learning and gaining knowledge through formal and informal means.

## **Weaknesses and Areas of Potential Change for Learning in Senegal**

There were three main weaknesses identified in the formal learning system in Senegal in the interviews. First, it was mentioned that girls are often at a disadvantage as they are not sent to school as often as the boys. Michel (2009) explains that many times girls work in houses as maids at a very young age while the boys go to school. This is a significant problem that the government has been addressing, but it still needs to improve as the mentality of the Senegalese changes and develops so that girls will receive the same formal educational opportunities as boys.

Second, the low quality of the teachers was mentioned several times as a weakness. The teachers for elementary school are not required to have a college education and only have to attend six months of training. This results in kids who go to school for many years but still do not know how to read and write. Some participants in the study indicated that if a family has the means to send their children to a private school, then it is a much better option.

Third, the French educational system does not fit in Senegal or work very well. One young leader summarized the opinions of several of the participants by explaining that:

The educational system makes you learn fifteen things, and then when you go to college, you have to focus on one thing. We learn too many things that are not really important and will not help us. I would rather choose something earlier on to focus on, maybe one area so that we are able to follow it and really learn something well. For me, that aspect of the French system was difficult.

Another leader expressed his frustration by explaining that many of the things in the French system are simply not practical and that the Senegalese do not benefit from it. Lees (1994) explains that the French educational system has “fostered a particularly individualistic, isolating style of teaching and learning. Normally, teachers lecture while students take notes and copy of dictations” (p. 79). This type of education does not fit the Senegalese culture and is a weakness that can be improved upon by training teachers to use more informal and active learning techniques in the classroom that are more culturally appropriate.

## **Strengths of Senegalese Learning**

Although the Senegalese in the study were generally frustrated with the French educational system, they did find some strengths in their educational programs. First, the theme of learning about other cultures was present because the Senegalese enjoy learning about other countries and other possibilities of life in areas of the world that are more developed. Second, many participants indicated that there are very good teachers in the private schools who are adept at using the French system and then contextualizing it. Finally, the Senegalese government supports the university by paying for the tuition of all of the Senegalese students, plus giving them money for room and board. This was

viewed as a great strength that allows the poor to have an opportunity to study and receive a formal education.

### **Summary of the Data Gained through the First Set of Interviews**

Three important themes permeated the data gained through the interviews. First, the Senegalese place a very high importance on being a self-directed learner because it has a direct correlation to success in life. Second, formal educational opportunities are very important to one's education and formation, but those opportunities are not available to all people, making informal learning a very important part of one's way of learning. The Senegalese believe that learning opportunities are present in almost every aspect of life, even at simple times such as waiting for a bus. This provides all people, regardless of one's social status, the opportunity to be a self-directed, continual learner. Finally, the formal educational system in Senegal for the young people is too broad, difficult, and impractical. It should be more focused on things that will help people develop their interests and prepare them for opportunities for employment.

The Senegalese who participated in the study were found to exhibit many of the traits that Confessore (1992) posits as necessary for self-directed learning, but they did not feel prepared to do the work that was in front of them. This is an important question that simply cannot be answered by explaining that their education was not very good. Perhaps the reason that the Senegalese do not feel good about their education and learning, even though they exhibit all four of Confessore's factors needed to become a self-directed learner, is because of a lack of self-efficacy. This proposition will be discussed in further detail later, but it is important to understand that teachers who desire to create self-directed students must first possess an understanding of Confessore's factors (Carr & Ponton, 2000) and even exhibit those factors in their own lives.

### **Impact of Cultural Factors on HRD Implementation**

It is important to know why the Senegalese repeatedly felt like they were not prepared for the work that they are doing, even though many have received extensive formal training. In order to understand some of the possible answers to this problem and how HRD practitioners may be able to help the Senegalese grow and develop their businesses, it is necessary to have an understanding of the impact that cultural factors can have on HRD implementation and also the learning process on a particular cultural group.

Marquardt, Berger, and Loan (2004) define culture as a way of thinking, acting, and living that is shared by members of a group and that older members pass on to new members. Culture shapes the group's and each member's conscious and subconscious values, assumptions, perceptions, and behavior. Culture, therefore, affects every part of HRD. It must be thoroughly understood and incorporated into HRD efforts in order to achieve maximum results.

Marquardt et al. identify nine cultural factors that are important for HRD practitioners to understand before they begin work with people from another culture: (a) religion, (b)



language, (c) education, (d) economics, (e) politics, (f) family, (g) class structure, (h) history, and (i) natural resources/ geography. These factors are important to understand as one examines the current status of HRD efforts in Senegal as well as possible opportunities to introduce HRD in Senegal. Hofstede (2007) explains that if Western methods of leadership and management do not work in another culture, it is not the fault of the people in the other culture, but rather the principles that are being used by the outsider that are not properly contextualized.

HRD practitioners cannot simply take HRD programs and place them into other cultures without making significant changes. People from the West often assume incorrectly that globalization has suppressed culture and made all people similar, while in reality culture runs much deeper than the effects of globalization and plays a very important role in life (Hofstede, 1984). This study seeks to examine how Senegalese culture impacts the way that HRD endeavors should operate in the country of Senegal.

### **Summary of Marquardt, Berger, and Loan's (2004) Cultural Analysis of North Africa and the Middle East with its HRD Implications**

Marquardt et al.'s (2004) cultural analysis with HRD implications of North Africa and the Middle East represents good data that may be used to compare the data gained through the interviews because of the Islamic tie that Senegal has to those cultures. The following points summarize Marquardt et al.'s (2004) cultural analysis of North Africa and the Middle East, along with some of its HRD implications:

- Islam permeates everything that people do in these cultures, having a great impact on businesses.
- Arabic is not only their spoken language but also the language of the Koran.
- One of the most important learning experiences is to memorize the Koran.
- Girls are educated separately from the boys and often learn different subjects and roles.
- Oil revenues have made many of these countries very rich.
- Family life is explained in the Koran, and those teachings are followed.
- Muhammad taught that teachers have the highest profession and should be respected. However, the teachers should also develop relationships with the students. Sometimes men are not allowed to be in the classroom with women.
- The Koran teaches that you should not speak badly of somebody, so people in organizations do not speak about others in a negative manner.
- The Arabs enjoy incorporating numerous ceremonies into every aspect of life.

People from the West who are working in Senegal assume that because it is 94% Muslim (Central Intelligence Agency, 2011), that Islam will have the same effect on the people that it does in other parts of the world like North Africa and the Middle East. Westerners who work in business development and HRD are much more familiar with the Middle East and North Africa because of their level of development. However, as Senegal continues to develop, it is important to understand the nuances of how culture and Islam affect HRD endeavors.

## **Interview Data from Senegal on Cultural Factors**

This section presents the interview data gained from the second set of interviews with HRD professionals in Senegal. Additionally, information about the participants, the interview questions, and an analysis that includes a comparison to North Africa and the Middle East are also included.

### **Participants**

There were three participants in the second set of interviews who were all Senegalese, working in HRD type programs in Senegal. The participants were all between the ages of 35 and 45, and there were two men and one woman. The first participant owns his own consulting business. The second participant works in human resources for a large mining organization in the interior of Senegal. The third participant directs a support business that aids small businesses with seminars and office space.

### **Interview Questions**

The first set of questions in the interview was about general HRD roles:

- How are teachers viewed in Senegal?
- How is business training viewed?
- How does Islam impact the way that the Senegalese view teachers?
- How are women teachers viewed?
- How are women viewed in the business place?

These questions focus on how the Senegalese view teachers, business training, and women in business, while also addressing their view on the way that Islam affects their culture.

The second set of questions focused on the analysis and design of learning programs:

- Do Senegalese speak much about their weaknesses or the weaknesses of others in their organization, even if it is to help develop a learning program? Why? How is this impacted by culture or religion?
- If you were planning a four hour training time, how much time would you allow for social/ break time, small group interaction, and teaching by the teacher?

This second set of questions was designed to dig a little deeper into the way that culture affects personal sharing and the management of time in training programs.

The third set of questions was targeted at understanding the development and delivery of learning programs in Senegal:

- Do the best teachers talk the whole time or interact with students?
- What is the best way to interact with the students?

- Do paper exercises, drawings, role-playing, or games with competition work? Why?

These questions examine the manner in which the Senegalese prefer to interact with teachers and instructors and are very important when one creates an HRD program.

The fourth and final set of questions in this interview focused on HRD program administration and environment:

- Do Senegalese make decisions quickly? Why?
- Should there be a special time to recognize important people and to celebrate at the end of the training? Why?
- Should training occur during Ramadan?
- What would be the best time to have training?

The final set of questions is more practical in nature and is important in the planning and implementation phases of HRD programming.

### **Data Gained from Interviews**

The data gained from the three interviews is presented below. The data were divided into seven thematic groups for this paper: (a) view of teachers, (b) view of HRD, (c) view of women in business, (d) openness in teaching settings, (e) desired teaching style, (f) religion, and (g) decision making.

**View of teachers.** The responses indicate that teachers and business trainers are very well respected in Senegal, based on responses such as:

- “Teachers of all kinds are elevated to a high social status, but Islam does not impact the way that they are viewed.”
- “Teachers who interact with the students are the ones that are most liked. The best way to interact with the students is through discussion and sharing experiences.”
- “You need to know that teachers are really respected here. The students look up to them and want to learn from them.”
- “Teachers are overall very well respected.”

The responses imply that teachers are very well respected in Senegal, like in North Africa and the Middle East, but the two participants specifically indicated that the Senegalese respect their teachers because of their position and ability, not because of an Islamic influence. This is an important difference to understand in this data because it has implications that will be discussed later in terms of HRD implementation.

**View of HRD.** Senegalese organizations currently do not focus on developing their employees according to the data gained through the interviews. One respondent

indicated that the organizations are afraid that if they develop their employees, then they will have to pay them more. Other responses that speak towards HRD are:

- “Right now, most organizations in Senegal do not have an emphasis on developing their people. I have worked for American companies and it is not the same here. There are not development plans for people in organizations. The Senegalese government has created a fund to pay for 75% of an employee’s development but they do not use it because it is not in their spirit.”
- “The employees want to develop.”

The leaders of Senegalese organizations must learn the value of HRD for the organization in order for them to support HRD endeavors. Business leaders and owners do not have the spirit to instill HRD practices because they fear that the employees will be developed and leave for a competitor or demand a higher salary.

Business leaders in Senegal must learn that one of the positive results from increasing the self-directedness of employees is that it provides the employees the tools to navigate the turbulent situations of the global marketplace. Problems then become opportunities instead of creating mass confusion because the employees feel confident in learning and adapting, even in difficult circumstances (Vaill, 1996). Therefore, even though the employees might indeed need to receive a higher salary, the hope is that they will be more productive and creative as they are developed and help the organization to become more profitable.

**View of women in business.** Women are viewed as equal, if not superior to men in the workplace. This thinking is very different from that of other Muslim nations because of the strong influence of traditional African religions and the African culture. The responses included the following statements:

- “I think that the Senegalese do not think about the difference between men and women in business. It does not surprise people when women are the directors of businesses.”
- “Educated people respect women as much or more than men, but those who are not educated here do not respect women.”
- “Women do really well in business and they are more serious than men. People trust women more than men. Women are great directors.”
- “Women in business are often more serious than men in business. I have not seen any discrimination because everywhere I have worked I have been in a position of authority and responsibility where I have received the same salary that the men received.”

**Openness in teaching settings.** The Senegalese participants indicated that their culture is reserved, and it is frowned upon to talk about oneself very much, including one’s strengths or weaknesses. However, the following statements provide insights into the Senegalese culture:

- “Business owners will always talk about the weaknesses of others and point out their faults. When they are in a program they will share more openly if they have a good attitude.”
- “Business owners have a tendency to not talk openly about their weaknesses or the business because of the Senegalese culture. In developed countries information about organizations is open. Here, it is hidden.”

HRD practitioners need to make sure that they are not putting the Senegalese in positions where they are expected to talk about themselves or their organization too much because that is viewed as pride, something that the Senegalese detest.

**Desired teaching style.** The Senegalese participants in this study and from the first set of interviews shared that the French teaching style has had a great impact on their learning. However, because they do not particularly care for that style of learning, they are open to discussions and other creative means of learning, even if it is a little uncomfortable to them at first. This openness to teaching styles is reflected in the following statements:

- “The Senegalese would be open to role-playing or paper exercises during training if they trust the teacher and believe that it might help them. It is different though [from America].”
- “Teachers should not lecture for more than 30 minutes without a break or a time of interaction. Small groups are very important.”
- “The Senegalese are not used to practical exercises and role playing in the classroom because we learned our whole life to learn things and to memorize all of the points. We don’t really learn, but that is what we had to do. That continues today and it is something to overcome.”
- “The best teachers are the ones that help students talk. They should make sure that there is a time to brainstorm and share because it really helps.”
- “I have seen some teachers use role playing and games as they teach. Some of the good business schools do that here now because the directors spent time in America. The role playing is very important and the system that uses them is simpler than the French system that does not work and is based on memorization.”
- “The best teachers are the ones that discuss many things. The teachers that talk the whole time are not liked by the students. However, if you ask too many questions it can backfire as the Senegalese don’t like too many questions in their culture.”
- “It is important to honor the students and the teacher at the end of a course as recognition is important in the Senegalese culture.”

As evidenced by this last statement, the Senegalese also believe that it is important to recognize people formally. This means that HRD practitioners need to recognize special guests, instructors, and graduates of the program. They also desire to have practical training that really helps them. Brookfield (1986) explains that many training and educational programs simply do not meet the practical needs of the students even though

they may be strong theoretically. The Senegalese understand this problem and appreciate teaching styles that help make the materials practical to their situations and needs.

Long (2002) presents ten energizing principles that teachers can use in classroom settings that would prove helpful for HRD practitioners in Senegal as they work to equip teachers and trainers with the necessary tools to teach effectively: (a) the teaching context is oriented toward activity, (b) there are opportunities for the students to exercise control, (c) the students believe that the goals of the lesson are useful, (d) the goals are presented at an appropriate level, (e) feedback is given, (f) the classroom environment is nonthreatening, (g) humor and other activities to release anxiety are used frequently, (h) the lessons allow the students to apply previous experiences and knowledge to problem solving, (i) students have the opportunity to express themselves in many different styles, and (j) students address attitudes that may serve as distractions. This would suggest that teachers use a more blended teaching style, which has been recently implemented in emerging markets in Asia with success (Ya-Ting, Bonk, & Kyong-Jee, 2009).

**Religion.** Although the Senegalese are 95% Muslim, religion does not affect their culture in the same way that it affects cultures in North Africa and the Middle East. Secularism has impacted the Senegalese organizations more than Islam as the following statements indicate:

- “Islam doesn’t impact us as much as secularism that wants to grow. That doesn’t mean that we have left Islam though.”
- “An example of our modernity as educated people is that we now only take one wife because we are following the Western way.”
- “Islam does not affect the way that the Senegalese think about teachers.”
- “It is better to not do seminars during the month of Ramadan because people are tired.”

Camara and Seck (2010) explain that:

The official statistics, however, do not accurately convey the reality of religious life in Senegal. Islam and Christianity are infused with indigenous religious beliefs and traditions. Senegal’s first president, famed poet L.S. Senghor, who was a Catholic raised by missionaries, testified about the continued existence of indigenous faith in both Christian and Muslim African men and women. (p. 860)

The Islam that is present in Senegal is very different from the Middle Eastern and North African Islamic cultures. One stark contrast is that the activities of healers and sorcerers are frowned upon by Islamic orthodoxies but are found in the center of the Islamic folk practice in Senegal (Camara & Seck, 2010). One of the reasons that so many of the people call themselves Muslims is that during the time of colonialization the graveyards were marked as either Christian or Muslim, thereby not providing people with an indigenous belief system a place to be buried (Camara & Seck, 2010). This caused the Senegalese to make a choice between Christianity and Islam, and many choose Islam because Christianity was viewed as the white man’s religion.

Senegal is one of the few Islamic countries that actually includes secularism in its constitution (Camara & Seck, 2010), providing further proof of the secular nature of the Senegalese people, indicating a stark difference from the Islam in North Africa and the Middle East. The secular business environment is important to understand when creating HRD programs. From a practical, planning viewpoint, it is necessary to remember Islam in Senegal as the people participate in Islamic holidays and Ramadan, and a good HRD practitioner will be ready to adapt to those differences as well.

**Decision making.** The decision making process in Senegal was not viewed favorably by the respondents. Leaders are known for taking a long time to take action and averting responsibility when decisions do not work out well, as indicated by the following responses:

- “The Senegalese take a long time to make decisions because they have to talk to everybody in the organization and there are many problems because the leaders do not make the decisions so that they can avoid responsibility.”
- “It is sometimes hard for organizations to make decisions because of the bureaucracy.”

There are opportunities for HRD practitioners to work with leaders in Senegal to increase their self-efficacy so that they will be more comfortable making decisions, while also training them in the ways to make a wise decision.

### **Grow’s Self-Directed Learning Model Applied to Senegal**

The information gained through the two sets of interviews provides important data that can be used to implement successful HRD programs in Senegal. One existing tool that is useful in the Senegalese context in advancing self-directed learning is Grow’s (1991) Staged Self-Directed Learning Model (SSDLM). The SSDLM is valuable because it simplifies the categorization process for learners into four, easily distinguishable stages (see Table 2). Basically, Grow asserts that learners begin at stage one, when they are a dependent learner. The goal of education should be to bring students to stage four, where learners become self-directed so that they are able to motivate themselves in life-long learning (Grow, 1991; Ponton & Carr, 1999). HRD practitioners in Senegal can use this model to understand how employees at each stage have different needs and should be treated in different manners, similar to the way that situational leadership encourages leaders to treat followers differently in different situations.

The formal education system in Senegal is based upon the French system, which is almost completely based on the first stage of Grow’s (1991) model, dependent learning. However, as indicated in the first set of interviews, the Senegalese are very involved in informal learning and have the ability to become self-directed learners in spite of the French educational system that was imposed upon them. Therefore, this tool can be used by the HRD practitioner to match the stage of the learners with the teaching style that is being employed for greater results. The process of leading employees to self-directed

learning takes time because the “students need challenges, support and feedback in their struggle to become self-directed learners and thus require ongoing attention from faculty” (Silen & Uhlin, 2008, p. 462).

Table 2: The Staged Self-Directed Learning Model (Grow, 1991, p. 129)

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Student</b>	<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Stage 1	Dependent	Authority, coach	Coaching with immediate feedback. Drill. Informational lecture. Overcoming deficiencies and resistance.
Stage 2	Interested	Motivator, guide	Inspiring lecture plus guided discussion. Goal-setting and learning strategies.
Stage 3	Involved	Facilitator	Discussion facilitated by teacher who participates as equal. Seminar. Group projects.
Stage 4	Self-directed	Consultant, delegator	Internship, dissertation, individual work or self-directed study-group.

This focus on developing the self-directedness of employees is very important to the organizations. Vargas-Hernández and Noruzi (2010) explain that the intellectual capital of the employees may be considered the hidden value of an organization, but regrettably many organizations do not understand its worth or its nature. Moreover, leaders are not even aware of the worth of their own knowledge and intellectual capital. Organizations are frequently so absorbed on profit margins that they totally overlook knowledge creation, which can really be the most vital source of competitiveness of organizations in the international marketplace (Vargas-Hernández & Noruzi, 2010).

Vargas-Hernández and Noruzi (2010) state that because “organizational knowledge is at the crux of sustainable competitive advantage, the burgeoning field of intellectual capital is an exciting area for both researchers and practitioners” (p. 185). Grow’s (1991) SSDLM is not only a useful tool for educators as they help students prepare for life-long learning, but it is also a useful tool for managers of organizations in Senegal who wish to help employees realize their own personal potential, thereby also helping the organization.

### **Self-Efficacy: The Greatest Need for HRD in Senegal**

Araeen (2010) explains that Africa is in many ways still trying to find its identity and recover from the colonialist time period that threw Africa into a state of confusion.



Alemazung (2010) explains that:

The defining contact between Africa and the West originated with the slave trade which saw the capture and forceful transportation of millions of African across the Atlantic to work in plantations in the Americas. This was immediately followed by the colonization of the continent whereby, the Europeans implemented various political, economic, and social policies that enabled them to maintain or extend their authority and control over different territories in Africa. The colonization of Africa also indicates the colonial masters' (stronger partner) exploitation of African colonies (weaker partner), especially the resources, to strengthen and enrich the economies of Western nations. Colonialism, thus, had and still has a far reaching effect (colonial legacies) on the continent because of its indirect impacts on the political, social, economic and cultural life of ex-colonial societies—neo-colonialism. (p. 63)

These effects are still being felt in Senegal and need to be addressed.

Through an analysis of the two sets of interviews, it is surprising how the Senegalese exhibit to varying degrees all four of Confessore's (1992) factors of self-directed learning, but they are not experiencing the results that one would expect from those learning activities and lifestyles. The problem is tied to a lack of self-efficacy in the lives of the Senegalese that has tricked them into believing that they are not capable of becoming successful and attaining their goals.

Bandura (1991) states that self-efficacy is the most central and pervasive mechanism of human agency because it is concerned with "people's beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over their own level of functioning and over events that affect their lives" (p. 118). These beliefs "influence how people feel, think, motivate themselves, and behave (Bandura, 1991, p. 118).

The idea of adding self-efficacy to Confessore's (1992) list of necessary factors for self-directed learning was suggested by Ponton, Carr, and Derrick (2004) because of its mediating relationship between motivation and conation. Ponton et al. provide a good theoretical foundation for the assertion that even though the Senegalese who are leading successful SMEs, their lack of self-efficacy is what is holding their organizations and the country back.

Ponton et al. (2005) hypothesize that HRD practitioners and educators can help employees and students grow in self-efficacy by helping them to understand the results of the activities that they choose to engage in through self-monitoring. The choices that one makes in life are a reflection of their desire to learn and their self-image, so the HRD practitioner should keep reinforcing to the employee as they learn to actively monitor their decisions that they are becoming a lifelong, self-directed learner (Ponton et al., 2005).

Grow's (1991) model is also a helpful tool that may be used to increase a learner's self-efficacy in Senegal as the HRD practitioner considers various cultural nuances necessary in the program because the model serves as a guide for the process. Grow explains how many frustrations can occur in learning when the teaching style does not meet the student's level of development. Therefore, as HRD practitioners meet the Senegalese where they are as they understand the important cultural factors, the results from HRD programs should also increase the self-efficacy of the Senegalese.

### **Benefits of Implementing Self-Directed Learning**

If the self-directed learning characteristics that the Senegalese have displayed can be augmented by an honest appraisal of their self-efficacy that produces the confidence to utilize the things that they learn through HRD training, they will be able to progress in many different areas. One large area of potential growth may be found in horticultural exports because Senegal's climate allows the country to harvest during Europe's off-season. Matsumoto-Izadifar (2009) explains that there is great potential in horticultural exports, but they are underexploited due to private entrepreneurs in the country lacking necessary marketing skills. Almost 90% of the food supply in Senegal is generated by simple farmers who make up approximately 60% of the population in Senegal (Willems, 2009). The country is going through rapid and significant labor changes as its traditional means of labor used to be fishing, but an overfishing of the ocean by other countries has required that many people change jobs and learn new skills (Lewis, 2010).

### **Conclusion**

Many opportunities for growth exist but are just waiting to be realized, and self-efficacy is the key for the Senegalese to unlock those doors. Diawara and Mughal (2011) found that there was a direct correlation in Senegal between education and employment level. Diagne (2007), a Senegalese scholar, echoes the importance of progressing in learning among the Senegalese because those who are educated have a better quality of life as education opens doors for practical opportunities. An important question for self-directed learning emerges: if people are found to be self-directed learners, yet fail to utilize the knowledge gained, is there a benefit to self-directed learning?

Additionally, in light of the findings of this study, further investigation should be made into how the indigenous religious belief systems have impacted Senegalese organizations. Camara and Seck (2010) explain that the reality of religious life in Senegal is that people will call themselves Muslim but in reality they are animists. African mentalities are still at the heart of the Africans and are buried deep within them, even in the minds of the intellectuals (Kusiak, 2010). These African mentalities include beliefs about witchcraft and sorcery which, though denounced by Islam, occur often in Senegal (Camara & Seck, 2010). These religious beliefs are important cultural factors that impact organizations that are working in Senegal and need to be better understood by HRD practitioners.

Business and training, especially informal training, often occur in a very different manner in Senegal than in Western countries. As further studies examine the development of

Senegal, it is important to also ask what the rest of the world may learn from the Senegalese. Perhaps the Senegalese emphasis on peace and honor may prove to be important organizational factors that need to be cultivated in the Western organizations.

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