

How do Employee Readiness, Training Design and Work Environment Relate to Transfer of Training in Public Sector?

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ABSTRACT

Despite the increased investment in training, many cases have portrayed employees have inability to transfer of newly learned skills, knowledge and attitudes indicated for the job. As the employees in private sectors are threatened to issue of job insecurity if they remain unproductive, the Public Service Department of Malaysia already made provision the implementation of exit policy to their servants whose performance scores are below 60% or below the targeted Key Performance Indicator (KPI). Most workers have admitted the importance of the acquisitions of the newly learned skills and its transfer to the workplace thus has led much research being done on this issue since 1980 until to date presenting a serious concern in this issue. Building on previous research, this paper may provide a deeper understanding of the relationships between employee readiness, training design, work environment and transfer of training. Motivation to transfer is also believed to mediate these relationships.

KEYWORDS: Employee Readiness, Training Design, Work Environment, Motivation to Transfer, Transfer of Training.

INTRODUCTION

Human resources are treated as strategic weapons in the battle for competitive advantage. However, public sector employees have been given many complaints and grievances for their effectiveness and inefficiency even though the government has spent on training and development [1]. In 2007, it was reported 5,347 complaint cases directed to public sector employees and increased to 33.7% in 2008. With 6,388 cases in 2015 [2], it has represented low training transfer activities among the public sector employees. Additionally, Malaysia's labour productivity in 2013 was far behind the USA's performance in 1980 [3], yet during 2000 till 2015 period China, Singapore and Taiwan have scored higher productivity [4]. Malaysia has emphasized more initiatives in order to enhance the productivity. For instance, the government allocated RM539,770,000 for the total Approved Financial Assistance with 836,468 of the total Approved Training Places by Skilled Area in 2015 [5]. Through training and development, it is to prepare employees to adapt with dynamic environment which affecting the workplace. The cost allocated for training is very huge and this is in line with [6] as he noted that every year the billions of dollars will be invested in training. The American organizations have been reported spending over \$135 billion annually on training and \$ 1 billion being projected by the government of Great Britain for "Train to Gain" scheme which the cost is equal to 0.06% of gross domestic product in the period 2010 to 2011 [7]. The training was provided to workers so that they can enjoy for free learning whilst earning number of hours for paid time-off for training [8].

However, one of the challenges in training is to transfer the learned skills and abilities to the workplace. Numerous studies have regarded the transfer of training. Following [9], transfer of training is the application of training for the jobs and its maintenance of the acquired skills, knowledge and abilities at the workplace. Undeniably, transfer of training is deemed crucial for the effectiveness of training. As such, considerations must be given to training transfer so that it can be as a common culture in the workplace and would enable the growth of a nation's economy. In fact, the report of best practices in training transfer is still limited and often anecdotal [10]. In spite of the limited discussion in the literature regarding this issue in Malaysia [11], the employees have noticed the importance of the acquisitions of the newly learned skills and its transfer to the workplace.

Although scholars and researchers have accepted the "sticky idea" of the figure 10% as an average transfer rate which is not based on scientific evidence [12], [13] found that 87% of the worker's loss of skill within one month after the completion of sales training at Xerox and [14] identified only 42% of 110 executives transferred the knowledge and skills learned from business writing skills training to their jobs. In a longer period of time of study, it was found 40% of the learned skills from training immediately transferred, 25% remained within 6 months and 15%

within a year [15]. A study made by [16] also conveyed a similar view that teachers has rarely applied in an actual classroom situation of what's been gained from training. Thus, the identification of variables associated with transfer of training is very imperative to prove the worth of investment in this human resource development (HRD).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Training Transfer

Learning from everyday opportunities at work is most effective [17]. This learning will become beneficial if it is utilized by employees in their day-to-day activities. As such, in [18] defined transfer of training as trainees effectively and continually applying what they have learned in training to their jobs. Other researchers, in [19, 20] also detailed up that transfer of training as the extent to which employees are able to apply the knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired during any HRD intervention into the job context. Proper investment in resources, outstanding organization, training programs and materials and professionalism is stated as the all key factors for the transfer of training [21]. Review of several studies have found several factors leading to transfer of training such motivation to transfer [22, 23,24], the supervisor's role [25, 26, 27, 28], training design factor [29] and training framing [22].

Employee Readiness

Employee readiness is defined as the extent to which employees are ready or willing to attend and participate in training [30]. It is also identified as a necessary element in training to influence employee learning and has become the subject to be studied. Noted by [31], employee readiness for training is whereby they have the personal characteristics such ability, attitudes, belief and motivation. These characteristics are necessary in order for them to learn the content of the program and to apply it on the job, and the work environment that will enable learning and not interfere with performance.

An organization must concern employees' readiness factor in ensuring the workers attend the training and must use what have been acquired from training [32]. With the increasing challenges such as competition, technology, communication, development, general instability, mergers and reengineering due to the pace of change that has primarily been increased, properly handling the situation is required. Thus, participation in training will ensure the employees to learn as learning will occur in anywhere including in training [33].

Attitudes

Attitude is defined as an individual's view of the perceive of something or his or her behaviour towards it [34]. Attitude is believed to have significant impact in encouraging employees to learn and to transfer the new KSA to workplace. It is in line with [35] that identified individual's intention to perform the behaviour under consideration will be stronger when having more positive or favourable attitude and subjective norms toward behaviour and greater perceived behavioural control. When employees exhibit positive attitudes towards toward training and its transfer, they will have more behavioural intentions to learn in training, as well to apply the newly learned skill, knowledge and behaviour. The statement can support a study by [36] that stated effective training outcome will depend upon users with having a positive attitude toward training regardless of advancement level and the application of technology in the training. Thus, it is assumed that attitudes influence the transfer of training as proposed in the hypothesis below:

H1a: Attitude is positively related to training transfer.

Beliefs

The level of motivation and outcomes from job-related training can be gained depending on valence or how employees are attracted to participate and learn the development of skills in training. This will influence the improved skills and knowledge or expectancy so that it can meet the instrumentality or positive outcomes such as career development [37]. Accordingly, beliefs can influence employee readiness to be involved in the learning process [38]. This is due to existing beliefs, knowledge and experience of employees. Examples of beliefs are such what we believe about ourselves and our own abilities, about other people such trainers and peers, previous experiences gained from participation in training and also the knowledge content being learned from the course. A study by [22] found that when people are more trained to understand and realize their ability to learn computer skills, the more they will be willing to gain knowledge and to master the program. Consequently, it can enhance training transfer among the employees [23, 39,40]. Based on previous studies, it can be hypothesized:

H1b: Belief is positively related to training transfer.

Motivation to Learn

Individual's motivation to undergo and learn from training is a critical factor in transferring the skills [41]. Motivation for employees to learn is identified as the willingness of the employee to follow, participate and commit to learning activities in order to fulfil or meet the specified objectives [42]. As for [31], he referred motivation to learn as trainees' need to learn the training content. If employees received fair supports from supervisors while attending and committing training programs, it is considered as equity [43]. Having perception was fairly treated this in turn will influence motivation to learn. As a result, it will increase transferability among the employees. This transfer of training will happen when they put effort towards learning the content and applying what learnt from the training to actual work finally [44]. Thus, this study makes an assumption:

H1c: Motivation to learn is positively related to training transfer.

Abilities

Ability is referred as capacity of employees, both physically and mentally to perform certain tasks [31]. Based on a study by [45], they stated that cognitive ability will influence job performance and also able to learn in training programs. If trainees are lacking the cognitive ability that is necessary to perform job tasks, they will not be able to perform well. In certain extents, ability to learn will influence cognitive ability and job performance. Many studies have focused the importance of an employee's ability as well employee's motivation as the strategies for knowledge transfer [46, 47]. It is suggested by [48] that in order for abilities to learn to occur, motivation must exist. Employee's ability to apply or use the absorbed knowledge is higher when an employee has high motivation. Even though individuals may have high abilities to learn, the capacity to absorb and transfer knowledge would not happen. It is a must for the knowledge receiver to have both ability and motivation in absorbing new knowledge. In turn, a higher rating in the utilization of knowledge can be realized [49]. Accordingly, this study posits the following hypothesis:

H1d: Ability is positively related to training transfer.

Training Design

Training design is the process or systematic approach in developing training programs [18]. The process can set the stage for the development of training programs either the organization will use classroom learning environment, technology or blended learning. The design of training will require accurate information about the job so that it would help to identify learning objectives and relevancy of training content. According to [50], organizations should design training that gives opportunity to the workers to transfer learning as well promoting them about their abilities to apply and maintain the training content over time. It was also recommended that appropriate feedback regarding employee job performance following training activities must be provided to them. As for [51], they identified six factors in the training design that must take place such identification of learning needs, learning goals, content relevance, prominent instructional strategies and methods and self-management strategies. They believed these factors will be relevant in the application of employee capacity to learn and generalize and maintain the skills to the workplace. However, different learners may require different training design.

Error Management

Error management is one of the identified variables in exhibiting training transfer by [39] although only few studies have looked explicitly the processes that underlie the effectiveness of error management training, yet none of these studies provided with conclusive results [52]. With error management, it allows employees to anticipate or ready what can go wrong, and facilitate them with knowledge so that they will know how to handle any potential problems that may affect their performance [53]. This variable is classified under training design with behavioral modeling and realistic training environments and have found a consistent relationship with transfer of training. The finding can support a study by [54] that found employees with error management training and provided with error instruction will show greater transfer of training as compared to those who have received error training alone.

Employees should not be prevented from making errors or mistakes in the process of learning [54]. Such action will demotivate employees to apply the learned skills as they have set in their minds that they will be penalized as a result of making errors during this process. It is also noted that the positive role of errors is when it conforms to the statement of "one learns best from errors" [55]. Therefore, the following is hypothesized:

H1e: Error management is positively related to training transfer.

Perceived Importance

As the term of ‘useful’ defined as capable of being used advantageously [56, 57] realized that employees who perceive the importance of their training will be more motivated to attend and learn the capabilities. As a consequence, transfer of training will occur as demanded. According to [58], training objectives and contents should be communicated to the designated participants well ahead so that they can prepare themselves by avoiding ambiguity about the goal of the training program. It also helps them become more motivated and active in participation. Additionally, in [59] urged that training goals and materials should also be content valid or closely relevant to the transfer task. This would help the employees perceive the task learned during training to be crucial to their actual performance. Even a study by [60] identified that the content relevance as a primary factor for successful transfer in a cross-sectional transfer study of Thai manager. Therefore, the following proposition is suggested:

H1f: Perceived importance is positively related to training transfer.

Work Environment

Baldwin and Ford with their contribution to the development of Training Transfer Model in 1988 that until now is universally acceptable highlighted the environmental factors always been left behind in examining the predictors of training transfer. Training transfer can occur when there have the events that occur after they return to their workplace. These events can influence the effectiveness of training programs. A work by [61,62] that suggested two aspects of the work environment can influence employees’ attitudes and participation in development activities- social support and situational constraints. However, according to [63], the concept of a supportive work environment has not really much addressed in the training literature. Many studies have also named such perceived organizational support or perceived supervisory support and its relationship which may not reflect the actual predictors of training transfer [23, 24] which contradicted with [64] as they claimed that much should be done to the conceptual meaning and operationalization of constructs that related to the work environment. The constructs must also relevant to the training program.

Supervisor’s Role

Supervisors are given major duties and responsibilities to lead work groups in organizations [25]. Being as the first level people in management, their roles for effective training are crucial. This is relevant with [65] that appreciated supervisors and peer support as becoming powerful factors of effective training transfer. In [27] supported that supervisors, colleagues and peers are the three major people-related factors in enhancing transfer [66, 67, 68]. Other than that, availability of a mentor [69, 29] and positive personal outcomes [26] also identified important to training transfer.

In addition, in [29] emphasized that among people-related work environment factors, there are several factors appears to lead training transfer more than others. The factors are having discussions with supervisors about applying the new learning, involvement or familiarization of supervisor in training and receiving positive response or feedback from the supervisor. However, in [70] found a negative influence of supervisor and peer support on transfer of training, although they used LTSI (Learning Transfer System Inventory) which developed by [71]. Building from previous studies, the following is hypothesized:

H1g: Supervisor’s role is positively related to training transfer.

Opportunity to Use

According to [72], employees must be given a chance to practice or use of what they have learned in their workplace. Not given such opportunity will let them to forget to try out the learned skills and knowledge. It is a responsibility of employer to always stress to their employees that is naturally difficult and will not proceed perfectly, but they should keep trying to use the newly skills. The importance of opportunity to use can be realized by urging companies to provide adequate time so that it can enable the employees to practice and repeat the use of materials [73]. Furthermore, allocating more time to the employees will enable them to assimilate, accept and internalize of what is being learned.

Additionally, it can build confidence in practicing the new acquisitions. Supervisors can first ensure the employees have this kind of opportunity to use the new skills in which they are trained[74]. For those who already utilized the skills being trained to them, the supervisors can give them praises, recognition or even the extrinsic rewards. Employees who perceived they are well treated or appreciated by their supervisors will have a higher chance to repeat the utilization of new skills into their work performance. Therefore, the following is hypothesized:

H1h: Opportunity to use is positively related to training transfer.

Motivation to Transfer

Motivation to transfer is defined as the trainees’ desire to use the skills and knowledge gained from training on the job [71]. It plays an important role in motivation to training transfer [75]. They claimed that having no motivation to transfer, employees will not apply and retain the newly learned skills. Employees with higher levels of motivation to transfer learning will inspire or drive them to processing knowledge, either from informal or formal learning in the context of a specific job. Many studies have focused training motivation as the training outcome by testing the drivers of this motivation [76, 77].

Referring to [76], he revealed that trainees’ abilities and motivation to transfer can occur with having a transfer climate effect. There are several factors of motivation to transfer [78, 53, 79]. Among the factors, motivation to learn, a motivating job and perceived use the newly learned skills and knowledge exhibited the most important predictors for motivation to transfer. Motivation to transfer is also identified as a mediating factor between predictors of identical elements, motivation to learn and expected utility [80], training reputation, self-efficacy and managerial support [41] with transfer of training.

Citing an opinion from [81], there is an agreement between training transfer and motivation. These key terms are mutually supportive in creating an optimal level of learning environment. When employees perceive the contents learned are relevant and can be applied to work setting, they will find learning gives meaningfulness and it can increase their motivation to learn. In consequence, it will motivate employees to execute or transform the learned skills, knowledge and behavior to their work setting. In addition, the more positive evaluation among employee about the content and administration activities that they have participated in, the more likely they will participate in the learning process [61]. Taken altogether, this study attempts to examine the mediating role that motivation to transfer plays in the relationship between employee readiness, training design and work environment with transfer of training. Thus, the followings are hypothesized:

H2a: Motivation to transfer will be a mediator of the relationship between employee readiness and transfer of training.

H2b: Motivation to transfer will be a mediator of the relationship between training design and transfer of training.

H2c: Motivation to transfer will be a mediator of the relationship between work environment and transfer of training

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 depicts the proposed conceptual framework employee readiness [30,31], training design [18, 50] and work environment [82, 61] and links them to transfer of training [20, 18]. In between, motivation to transfer [71, 53] mediates the relationships.

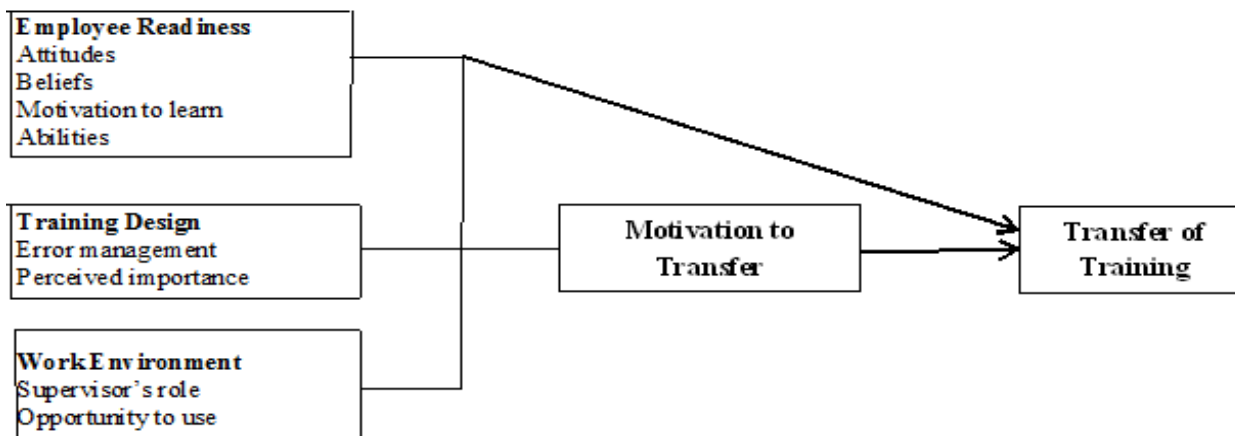


Figure 1: The conceptual framework

The general structure of suggested effects includes the direct and positive effect that employee readiness components, training design components and work environment have on transfer of training as well mediating effect of motivation to transfer in between of these three components and training transfer. To provide a more inclusive understanding of the associations among the employee readiness, training design and work environment elements in Figure 1, explicit magnitudes of the components and its constructs is incorporated in the section on research

propositions. This is because different dimensions of employee readiness, training design and work environment may have dissimilar effects on transfer of training among public sector employees.

CONCLUSION

Training is used to build a skilled workforce, both in the public and the private sector. As the policy-makers of Malaysia perceive training as an investment for increasing productivity and for adopting changes in the organizations in response to internal and external forces, lack of transfer of training will ruin the human resource development. With high investment been allocated to training, therefore the needs for identification of training transfer-related factors are demanded and crucial.

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