Factor Affecting the Transfer of Training at the Workplace: Case study of SSGC Ltd, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT
This study focuses on influence of work environment feasible for the transfer of training. Both researchers and practitioners have acknowledged that transfer of training will only occur when trainees have positive perception of the work environment. Thus the purpose of this research is to investigate the influence of work environmental factors on the extent to which employees are satisfied with their work environment and are motivated to the training transfer particularly in the SSGC. The present study was carried out within the environmental framework of Sui Southern Gas Company of Hyderabad region and data was collected through survey. The results indicate that company believes on training and development and frequently sent their employees for training by given them time off from their routine work. Also, Employees received adequate support from the management. The study results showed that irrelevant workload on employees need to be reduced as it influences the effective transfer and evaluation criterion for the trained skills should be reviewed by the company.

Keywords: Training, Training Transfer, Environmental factors, Evaluation, SSGC

INTRODUCTION
Training is necessary for healthy functioning of an organization in order to generate high quality and competitive workforce in the global market. Many organizations spend an immense sum of money on training, believing that training will improve their employees’ performance and enhance the firm’s productivity (Yamnill, 2001). Many organizations spent significant time and
billions of dollars on training program and it is crucial to ensure transfer of training occurs within the organization. According to Nijman et al. (2006), transfer of training is the essential element for training programs to be effective and efficient.

Despite the ambiguities surrounding transfer of training of management, the field of training research has recently undergone a major paradigm shift with the development of several integrative models designed to explain the measuring factors affecting transfer of learning and training (Holton et al., 2000). Persistently low estimates of the application rates generated from corporate training expenditures suggest that, despite an explosion of literature attention to transfer in recent years, the “training problem” remains acute (Anthony & Norton, 1991; Garavaglia, 1993). Unfortunately, the research on training and development in the human resource management area has not fully addressed the critical aspects of the transfer process or generated a comprehensive body of knowledge. While approximately $100 billion are spent annually on organizational training programs, only an estimated 10 per cent of this investment results in actual behavioral change on the job (Georgenson, 1982). Although this level may be highly immediately after training, and decline over time (Newstrom, 1986), highlighting a glaring gap between training efforts and organizational outcomes. Consequently, this has generated significant interest in the specific issue of transfer of training. The main purpose of the transfer of training is to enhance the return on investment from training. Therefore organizations must understand the variables associated with transfer of training, so that they can promote those which enable transfer and intervene to limit those which inhibit it (Baharim, 2008).

Performance is key (Swanson, 1995) and there are many factors to consider within the workplace. Important factors that may influence training transfer are supervisor support, workplace support / transfer climate, peer support, subordinate support, frequency of use, and continuous learning culture. Yamnell et al., (2001), stated “if we believe that training truly makes a difference in organizational and individual performance, we must understand how to support transfer of training in organizations. There appears to be less research in the field of training transfer specifically designed to focus on work environment factors in the workplace.

INTRODUCTION OF SSGC
Similarly, organizations in Pakistan are facing problem of staff turnover, due to lack of motivation and low employee’s satisfaction level. These two factors could be addressed through extending opportunities of learning, developing and imparting on hand training and workforce experience. Private organizations in Pakistan have stayed energetic since 1947. Their sole purpose is to repair and provide social welfare towards those less fortunate and marginalized people.

Likewise, for the purpose of this study one of the leading organization in Pakistan called Sui Southern Gas Company (SSGC) is selected. Sui Southern Gas Company (SSGC) is Pakistan's leading integrated gas company. In SSGC, the Human Resource Department is divided in 3 divisions namely Operational, Industrial Relations and Organizational Development and Training. The employees needed to have competence and to improve their skills in order to meet future requirements of the Company. It was to meet these needs that the Gas Training

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Institute was established in January 2001 to conduct specialized training courses for the gas sector which no other institution provides. GTI offers almost 200 courses and almost 1,000 persons attended these courses every year. However, so far SSGC has not evaluated the impact of these trainings.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES
The objectives of this study include

- To identify types of trainings SSGC offers to its employees.
- To assess the overall employees perception regarding conducive training environment in SSGC.
- To investigate about mechanisms SSGC implements to support training transfer at the workplace.
- To identify indicators or the evaluation criteria implemented training transferred by SSGC in order to make employees accountable to use the learned skills on the job.
- To assess which work environmental factor in SSGC is more powerful for the effective transfer of training and which factor can further be improved in the company.

LITERATURE REVIEW
The training transfer review will focus on the factors that impact training transfer. Factors that impact learning are "learning climate", "sustained use of skills", "constraints" and "opportunities". Research has demonstrated that training efforts are unlikely to result in positive changes in job performance unless the newly trained competencies are transferred to the work environment (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Montesino, 2002; Rouiller & Goldstein, 1993). As a result, there has been increased effort to understand the antecedents and consequences of the transfer of training process.

Many empirical studies have examined training from several different perspectives, but the unique contribution of this research is to narrow the discussion down to work environment factors that impact the transfer of training. There have been a number of work environment factors studied, including evaluation, top management, supervisor and peer support (Facteau et al., 1995), task constraints and opportunity to perform, and learning transfer climate (Bates & Ford et al., Khaswneh, 2005). The goal of this research is to examine these factors in the workplace in the context of SSGC.

Factors Inhibiting Transfer
Foxon (1993) conducted a content study of literature spreading over 30 articles and found that the following four areas (comprising 128 inhibiting factors) exerted negative influence on transfer of training in the magnitude mentioned against each of the following:

- Organizational Climate Factor: 42 %
- Training Design Factor: 22 %
- Individual Learner Characteristics: 21 %
- Low Learner Motivation: 13 %
- Training Delivery Factor: 13 %
The above data shows a high percentage of influence attached to organizational factors that should be primarily focused in studying effects on transfer of training.

**Barriers to Transfer of Training**

There are many barriers to transfer the training to the workplace. Ridge (2002) specified certain barriers occur after determining the training that may inhabit the transfer of this training to the workplace: (1) lack of reinforcement on the job; (2) transference from the immediate environment; (3) no supportive organizational culture or climate; (4) the employee’s views that the training is impractical or irrelevant, and (5) lack of technology or equipment to support training. There are some barriers to transfer the training that occur through the manager's practices. Ridge (2002) mentioned that managers may not have the knowledge to support the information that the employees have learned. For example, if an employee wears a respirator for a specific task but the supervisor has never worn one or attend respirator protection training, then the supervisor might not fully understand the issue involved.

**Transfer Problem and its Relation with Work Environment**

Researchers and practitioners involved in training consider training transfer of vital importance since a fraction of skills, behaviors and attitudes actually get transferred through application in the workplace. Previously, researchers such as Newstorm (1984), had maintained that “positive transfer” was the application of skills and knowledge learnt in training at the workplace. In addition to learning, studies identified the transfer phenomenon to signify actual implementation by the trainee on the job-setting (Atkinson, 1972; Fleishman, 1953). Hence, due to significant managerial implications the problems related to transfer received greater focus by the researcher community. But recent researchers consider trainee and the organizational context the key factors that affect transfer to the work environment (Brinkerhoff and Montesino, 1995; Garavaglia, 1993; Gist, Bavetta, and Stevens, 1990; Rouiller and Goldstein, 1993).

**Work Environmental Factors and Trainees’ Motivation**

Hence, transfer of training is complex and includes many factors that impact in many parts in work in organizations. However, significantly less work has been done to understand how transfer-related factors present themselves in organizations and how these factors can be effectively changed or managed (Holton et al., 2003). A review of the literature included factors that most affect transfer of training can be classified into two categories: factors related to the work system and people-related factors (Handy, 2008). Some researchers (Baldwin et al., 1991; Holton et al 2001) have defined work environment factors also motivation in transfer of training. Measuring these factors separately makes it easier to delineate the specific factors in the work environment that impact transfer (Handy, 2008).

This study focus on the following environmental factors at the workplace:

- **Social Support: Management Support, Peer Support, Supervisor Support:**
Within the organizational context, the element of social support plays a key role in facilitating training transfer. Particularly, social support system within an organization seems to exert significant influence in the transfer of training.

- **Supervisor Support:**
  Training will only be transferred to the workplace if supervisors’ support exist (Foxon, 1993; Mosel, 1957). Supervisors’ supports have more effect than co-workers' support on the trainees’ decision to apply training. Huczynski and Lewis (1980) as cited in Foxon (1993) emphasized the role of supervisors in the transfer process. According to Ridge (2002), supervisors can provide support for trainees to put the training to work. They can achieve this by providing a reduced workload so that trainees can have the time they need to plan for the application of the new skills. Supervisors may be able to provide opportunities for trainee to use new skills. Similarly, Lim & Johnson (2002) confirm that work environment factors related to supervisors were among the strongest factors that influenced transfer of training.

- **Peer Support:**
  The element of peer support has its significance in the training environment for performance results. Peer support is the extent to which employee members of an organization reinforce and support the application of learning on the job such as goal setting, assistance, positive feedback. The influence of learning from peers is strong especially when peers operate on the same task, project or department. Clark et al., (1993) and Ruona Leimbach, Holton & Bates (2002) find that many studies demonstrate a positive effect of peer support on motivation to transfer. Hawley and Barnard (2005) suggest that peer support is significant factor even across geographic distances.

- **Managerial Support:**
  Managerial support has been identified as a key environmental variable affecting transfer (Ford et al., 1992; Huczynski and Lewis, 1980). Managers must encourage trainees to use new skills and tolerate employee mistakes as they progress. The ability for managers to allow trainees the latitude to self-manage may also increase transfer and help trainees overcome the obstacles to using new skills and increase performance (Gist, Bavetta, & Stevens, 1990).

  - **Transfer Climate:**

Trainees will also have some understanding about the general extent to which factors in the workplace support employee training. These general perceptions of workplace support are referred to as “the transfer climate”. Rouiller & Goldstein, (1993). Tracey et al., (1995) Tracey et al. (1995) stressed the importance of both transfer of training climate and continuous learning culture as work environment variables that have a significant impact on the post-training behaviors. Research has indicated that when employees perceive that the organizational climate is supportive, they are more likely to apply their new knowledge in the work environment (see Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Tracey et al., 1995). Overall, a positive transfer climate is critical for the application and maintenance of new skills on the job as shown in figure 2.10
Opportunity to Perform:
Opportunity to perform actually enables trainees with adequate resources to use their learned skills on the job (Holton et al. 2000). Providing employees an opportunity to apply training benefits can increase chances of effective application. It could be achieved by connecting learning from training to actual job or task environment, and vice versa. More recent work comes from Lim and Johnson (2002) who reveal that the opportunity to use trainees’ new learning on the job was the primary reason for transfer to occur. Similarly, they found lack of opportunity to apply on the job as the biggest reason for low transfer.

Workload
Generally, workload pressure is the influence of work quantity, high performance expectations in less time period, or simply more work per given time. The concept maybe interpreted in two ways: excessive workload and insufficient time.

Identical Elements or Contextual variability
The principal of identical elements, first proposed by Throndike and Woodworth (1901a, 1901b, 1901c), suggests that the similarity between the training and performance situations in terms of the stimuli presence and responses required will lead to a greater likelihood of transfer of training. When the physical characteristics of the transfer environment match the learning environment, the actual stimuli may be identical. This occurs when equipment used in training is identical to that used in the workplace. The difference between the training context and the “applied” context will significantly restrict the effective transfer of trained skills.

Transfer of Training: Measurement and Evaluation
Evaluation is an important part of training in order to understand the level of transfer of training. Among other benefits, evaluation can help understand the strengths and weaknesses of the current training program, the impact of training on individuals and the impact of training on the organization (Reeves, 1994). According to English (2003), there are number of
theoretical and empirical studies available on assessing training such as Kirkpatrick (1998), Brinkehoff (1987) and Phillip (1997). The ways that organizations measure the transfer of training differ from one organization to other. Some organizations measure transfer of training by obtaining reports from supervisor, conduct surveys and questionnaires, develop action or implementation before completing training. Next participants create action plans and send copies to their supervisor, and interview trainees and supervisor in order to validate certain evaluation findings.

Framework designed for this research study includes various criteria through which employees assessed consist on feedback forms filled by the employees, lectures to the others, self-reporting, workshops or seminars arrange by the company in order to assess them.

METHODOLOGY
Research Design
Questionnaire is designed in order to conduct the survey distributed among the employees of SSG, consist of 41 questions regarding the different variables of work environment that can affect training transfer. It is based on likert scale having five options from strongly disagree to strongly agree. This research study used the Quantitative approach in order to collect and analyze the data. The first objective of this study consists of what types of training SSGS offer to its employees. However, the close ended questionnaire was developed in order to achieve rest of the objectives. This will ask the feeling and opinions of employees and managers who have attended the training programs in SSGC. All the factors were scored through 5-point likert type scale (1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree). The questionnaires were randomly distributed among the participants of the company who attend the different training programs arrange by their organization.

Data Collection
For data collection questionnaire was used as an instrument. The questionnaire consists of 41 questions divided into sub sections, includes questions regarding evaluation, support, transfer climate and suitable working condition. For this research study, two categories of variables were being investigated to analyze the data. They were known as the independent variable and dependent variable. The independent variable was the work environment factors which further divided into evaluation criteria, supervisor support, peer support, identical elements, and transfer climate opportunity to perform. Meanwhile, transfer of training was known as the dependent variable in the research.

Data Analyzing Tools
After data collection the next step is to analyze the data. Statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) is used for this purpose. Descriptive statistics is used for this purpose, which includes Mean values; Standard deviation and Percentage rate of the different attributes included in questionnaire. The Pearson correlation coefficient ‘2 tailed’ was used to identify the relationship between work environment factors (management support, peer support and opportunity to perform) and the level of transfer training in the context of SSGC.
FINDINGS AND RESULTS

List of Trainings for Executives / Engineers in SSGC

Following types of different training courses are offered by the SSGC to their employees, which are divided into three categories that is Managerial, different Computer courses and Technical.

Table 1.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MANAGERIAL COURSES</th>
<th>COMPUTER COURSES</th>
<th>TECHNICAL COURSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• MOTIVATION SKILLS.</td>
<td>• MS-OFFICE 2007.</td>
<td>• CATHODIC PROTECTION TECHNIQUES.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• PUBLIC SPEAKING SKILLS.</td>
<td>• MS-PROJECT.</td>
<td>• CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE POLYTHELANE PIPE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• TEAM BUILDING.</td>
<td>• MS – EXCEL ADVANCE-2007.</td>
<td>• DEVELOPING HSE CULTURE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• TRAIN THE TRAINER.</td>
<td>• BASIC COMPUTER SKILLS.</td>
<td>• GAS DISTRIBUTION OPERATIONS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• LEADERSHIP /</td>
<td>• MS ACCESS.</td>
<td>• GAS LEAK DETECTION AND RECTIFICATION TECHNIQUES.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• DECISION MAKING SKILLS.</td>
<td>• MS POWERPOINT.</td>
<td>• GAS QUALITY MEASUREMENT AND GAS CHROMATOGRAPH.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• COMMUNICATION / PRESENTATION SKILLS.</td>
<td>• CUSTOMER CARE &amp; BILLING (CC&amp;B).</td>
<td>• ORIENTATION AND APPLICATION OF GEOFACIAL SYSTEM.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• MANAGERIAL SKILLS.</td>
<td>• DATA PROCESSING TRAINING FOR BILLING STAFF</td>
<td>• UNDERSTANDING AND CONTROLLING UFG.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• CUSTOMER SERVICE SKILLS.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• VEHICLE MOUNTED GAS LEAK DETECTORS SYSTEM.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• PROJECT MANAGEMENT</td>
<td></td>
<td>• ELECTRO CORRECTOR INSTALLATION AND MAINTENANCE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• HOTTAPPING &amp; STOPPING.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• MANAGING PIPELINE INTEGRITY.</td>
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<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Significance</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Training Frequency in SSGC</td>
<td>.553</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Supervisor support</td>
<td>.402</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Peer support</td>
<td>.310</td>
<td>.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Incentives (Employees satisfaction &amp; management support in terms of incentives)</td>
<td>.323</td>
<td>.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o SSGC Evaluation criterion Verses employees encouragement by this assessment process</td>
<td>.149</td>
<td>.202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Training Weightage in Performance Appraisal</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>.680</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Identical Elements (Similarity between the actual &amp; training working conditions i.e. equipment &amp; Machines)</td>
<td>.239</td>
<td>.039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Transfer Climate &amp; Opportunity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Existence of opportunities in SSGC for new skills &amp; ideas</td>
<td>.550**</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Workload hinder the practice of new skills at the workplace</td>
<td>-.098</td>
<td>.402</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Figure: Framework for training Transfer
The figure above is the framework model of training for the SSGC which represents the findings of this study in a very precise manner.
Figure: 4.25: Assessment of work environmental factors
The above figure 4.25 indicates the stronger and the weak environmental factors in the perspective of SSGC. According to the contribution of the various factors, the impacts of these factors are analyzed into three categories which is strong, moderate and weak. The factors that were considered strong include support given by the company, supervisors and the coworkers to the employees as well as various incentives and benefits were also given to employees in order to motivate them. While on the other hand there were also some factors which can be further improved if company gives some attention to those areas such as evaluation criteria, that is implementing by SSGC, must focus more on assessing the trained skills of employees along with the training as present evaluation system is more concentrating on evaluation of training. Another factor includes transfer climate and opportunity to perform the trained skills on the job which were pretty suitable but demands little focus on work stress or pressure on the employees at the time of transfer which can hinder the positive transfer that need to be reduced and the work related to the application of the new skills should be given to them.
Similarly identical elements were also appropriate for transfer as company provides similar physical characteristics in the work environment but the delay between the learning and the application of the new skills were recorded due to installations of equipment and machines that can be seen as a barrier in training transfer so that time period should be minimized.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY
The limitation to this study includes, firstly, this study was conducted within the context of Hyderabad region of SSGC and it is also limited by the sample size so, this study cannot represent the whole organization. Another limitation is the lack of interest showed by the respondents in filling up the questionnaires and lastly, others factors can also be considered other than environmental that can influence positive transfer.

RECOMMENDATIONS
The results of this study suggest that:

- SSGC need to develop and implement the adequate evaluation criteria or the specific indicators need to be set for the trainees to assess the performance of a trainee in the actual work environment at the time of implementing the trained skills.
- There should be a training related workload at SSGC. Routine work pressure on the employees can hinder the positive transfer of skills.
- The company should work on minimizing the delay or the time period between the learning of the new skills and its implementation on the job as it can hinder the effective transfer.

CONCLUSION
This research helps SSGC to determine and examine the different critical factors that can affect training transfer. The results show that organizations need not focus on one particular variable to increase transfer but to put trainees in an environment where all of the factors can play a role. Results of this study suggest that company need to polish its evaluation method by assessing trained skills of the employees besides assessing training and timely assessment of application of the new skills also very important for maximum transfer to avoid barriers. As company believes on training and development of their employees and enough amount of money being spent on training of employees, so company should get their money spent. Hence, managers and supervisors by focusing on their environmental factors can tailor their training programs to benefit themselves and get the best results from their employees and form the money spent.

REFERENCES


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The author Miss. Qurat-u-lain has completed her 18 years MS degree in HRM from Mehran University of Engineering & Technology, Jamshoro, Pakistan. Now she is independent research scholar and PhD aspirant in same field of research. Dr. Arabella Bhutto has PhD from United Kingdom as well as a full Professor and supervisor of PhD and MS students in Mehran University of Engineering & Technology, Jamshoro, Sindh, Pakistan. Mr. Raza Ali Tunio is PhD student as well as research scholar in the field of HRM and Innovation Management. He is currently working as visiting lecturer in Sindh University, Larkana Campus. He is teaching HRM, Marketing and Technology Management subjects.