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A Structural Analysis of Training Transfer at A Private Limited Company in Malaysia

Noor Rafhati Romaiha¹, Nuraidil Syahfiq Aididin², Rusnifaezah Musa³, Nurul Ezaili Alias⁴, Arnida Jahya⁵, Nurmuslimah Kamilah Abdullah⁶

^{1,2,4,5}Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Melaka, Malaysia, ³School of Business, Universiti Utara Malaysia, ⁵Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Terengganu, Malaysia
Email: noorrafhati@uitm.edu.my

Abstract

The concept of "transfer of training" is commonly used in Industrial and Organisational Psychology to refer to the application of knowledge and skills acquired during training to a targeted job or role. The importance of training transfer in imparting new knowledge, skills, or attitudes related to current job responsibilities undoubtedly can improve employee's performance in the workplace. Previous studies have used different approaches to determine factors influencing the training transfer. As a result, more in-depth research about this relationship is required. Hence, this study intends to further investigate the influence of training design, individual characteristics, and work environment towards the transfer of training at a private a limited company in Johor Bahru. A total of 54 questionnaires were sent out, with 52 of them being completely returned. Structural equation modeling of partial least squares was used to analyze the data using SmartPLS 3.2.9. It was found that individual characteristics, training design, and work environment have a positive influence on training transfer. The three independent constructs substantially explain 46.1% of the variance for transfer of training. Therefore, 53.9% of the change in training transfer would be explained by other factors. The Human Resource Department is suggested to have a proper plan for effective transfer of training by blending the SMART Goal Training Setting, welcoming ideas from workers, and enriching top management commitments. Since the study focused on a single company, it is recommended to replicate the study across other entities as well as expanded to a specific industry.

Keywords: Training Transfer, Training Design, Individual Characteristics, Work Environment

Introduction

Generally, training is the process of teaching and learning to deliver knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to existing job responsibilities (Masadeh, 2012). The fundamental goals of the training are not only to improve employees' performance particularly in preparing them to fill present positions but also for vacant positions along with satisfying both individuals and organizations (Ibrahim et al., 2017). Although training can be considered an

expensive investment to any organization, it is one of the most effective strategies to enhance employees' performance (Rowold & Heinitz, 2007). Organizations are currently striving to provide employees with extensive training suitable for their job scope and responsibilities which can significantly increase their performance and productivity.

For training programs to be worth the investment, the top management must ensure that employees apply what has been taught in their work; this process is known as the transfer of training (Zahra et al., 2014). Both organizations and trainees devote a lot of time, exertion, and assets in business-related training where they expect to see the outcome to be applied in the work setting. However, the transfer of training is a challenge as it is hard to sustain in any organization (Chiaburu et al., 2010). A study by Muduli and Raval (2018) showed that after training, around 40 percent of employees will not be able to transfer what they have learned, and only 50 percent of investments in training will show improvement on the individual or organization. Consequently, the common issue in training and development is why the training design is essential. Hence, it is important to properly plan the training design for the programs as it can influence the effectiveness of training transfer among employees. According to Headrick et al (2015), training design can influence the transfer of training depending on the training material, learning principles, and the job relevance in the training content. Hence, the training design should be properly planned as it will influence the transfer of training among employees.

At the same time, the employees themselves play a vital role to ensure the effectiveness of training transfer (Burke & Hutchins, 2007). Participants will have trouble learning when they have less interest in the training content or if they feel that it is a waste of time. Apart from that, some employees may have fears about their abilities to learn new skills and lack motivation; this may affect their knowledge retention. As a result, employees may not implement what they have learned from their training because of demotivation (Kamau, 2015). When employees fail to learn and adapt new knowledge and information from the training programs, time, energy, and money are wasted. Therefore, organizations need to keep providing full motivation and encouragement to their employees to attain more effective transfer of training (Lim & Nowell, 2014). Moreover, lack of support from supervisors will lead to a decrease in the productivity of employees, and transfer training will be hard to occur at the workplace.

Since the importance of training transfer is undeniable, it is vital to determine the factors that influence it. Thus, this study examined three variables which are training design, individual characteristics, and work environment and their effects on the transfer of training at a private limited company in Johor Bahru.

Literature Review

Over the years, training can significantly improve the capability of individuals and is recognized as a valued mechanism to enhance team and organizational effectiveness (Turab & Casimir, 2015). Training is also necessary as an important human resource technique to increase employee's productivity (Bhatti & Kaur, 2010). According to Sahoo and Mishra (2018), training can be described as a systematic and planned approach to develop and enhance skills, knowledge as well as attitudes to achieve effective performance through learning. Hence, transfer of training can be referred to as the act of applying the output gained during the training program in performing employee's day-to-day tasks. This also means that transfer of training can help maintain the generalization of skills, attitudes, and knowledge for a long time (Zumrah & Byole, 2015; Blume et al., 2010). Thus, transfer of training is

considered effective if the employees are willing to practice the knowledge and skills attained in completing their job responsibilities after completing a training program. Based on that, employees' retention can be achieved through effective training and development opportunities (Govaerts et al., 2011),

Previously, there are various predictors of training transfer based on Baldwin and Ford's model (1988). This fundamental model was grouped under categories such as individual characteristics, training design, and work environment. Consequently, these categories were accepted as factors influencing transfer of training (Bron, 2012). Details regarding them are explained further below.

Training Design

Training design is a systematic and flexible technique essential for developing a training program purposely to adapt to business needs (Ngure & Juma, 2018). The design and training delivery can fundamentally affect learning activities among participants which eventually affect the transfer of training. As stated by Baldwin and Ford (1988), training design is one of the factors that can motivate the transfer of training. Hence, the training must be designed and developed according to the needs of existing employees and the objectives to be achieved. Methods, training contents, learning principles, and training sequences are among the components under training design (Pesiridis et al., 2014). Formerly, there are different training methods for employees such as video recordings, contextual analyses, instructional exercises, discourses, shows, and role-playing (Chan & Ng, 2010). However, emerging technology has diminished these conventional techniques of exchanging information by providing a variety of modern and advanced delivery methods.

According to Olubukunola (2015), a training design should be tailored to the needs of the staff members, hence organizations need to create an appropriate training design. Meaningful training requires organizations to identify the needs of their employees and the training design that will utilize their workforce towards achieving the organizations' objectives (Ngure & Juma, 2018). Previous studies have shown a positive relationship between training design and the transfer of training. Nijman, Nijhof, and Veldkamp (2006) described training design as a significant determinant of training transfer. Khan et al (2011) examined the impact of training and development on organizational performance. The findings indicated a significant impact between training delivery approaches and organizational performance. Conversely, Velada et al (2007) conducted a study on training transfer by analyzing factors such as training design, work environment, and individual characteristics. The results showed that performance self-efficacy, performance feedback, transfer design, and training retention had a significant effect on training transfer.

Individual Characteristics

Individual characteristics are described as the employee's efforts in applying the work behavior learned during training to the workplace (Ngure & Juma, 2018). Specifically, individual characteristics can be categorized as motivation, attitudes, personal features, self-efficacy, and trainability of the employees (Homklin et al., 2014). Cheng and Ho (2001), and Salas and Cannon-bowers (2001) identified values, employee attitudes, expectations, and interests as predictors that influence training effectiveness. Meanwhile, Chiaburu et al. (2010) further acknowledged employee characteristics to encompass locus of control, achievement and motivation, cognitive ability, anxiety, and conscientiousness. Based on previous studies,

it was found that the transfer of training is significantly influenced by individual characteristics (Velada et al., 2007).

Studies on employee characteristics suggested that certain personality traits can influence training outcomes to a greater extent than others. Previously, numerous studies were conducted to investigate the effect of employee characteristics on training effectiveness. Grossman and Salas (2011) conducted a study on the transfer of training and identified the determinants related to employee characteristics which comprise self-efficacy, cognitive ability, motivation, and perceived utility. Furthermore, other research was conducted by measuring the influence of motivation to transfer, motivation to learn, and self-efficacy on training effectiveness (Wen & Lin 2014). The study examined the prediction roles of individual characteristics such as eagerness to learn and self-efficacy on training effectiveness. However, the results indicated that self-efficacy has no significant association with training effectiveness, but motivation has.

Work Environment

Environmental factors refer to the organizational climate and situational constraints of the actual job, where the learned skills will be connected (deCaires, 2013). These factors consist of organizational support, supervisor support, peer support, technological support, and the opportunity to practice the job-related behaviors acquired from the training. Yusuf (2011) expressed that a supportive condition in the workplace can inspire the implementation of knowledge and skills. Additionally, even well-structured, and successful delivery of programs may not bring positive results if the work environment fails to aid in the practice of new skills (deCaires, 2013). It has been suggested that when employees get a chance to perform, this will positively affect their willingness to showcase the results that had they obtained during the training program. Thus, encouragement from supervisors amid the use of procured knowledge in the workplace contributes to training transfer (Geijsel et al., 2009). As supported by Grossman and Salas (2011), the involvement of the supervisor significantly enhances employees' willingness to training transfer. There are two components: feedback and support from colleagues, which can create a stimulating environment that can lead to positive outcomes in applying acquired knowledge and skills (Pham et al., 2013). Sharing knowledge among colleagues on the training that has been pursued also empowers this process. Learning culture could also impact the employee's motivation on the transfer of training (Aksoy et al., 2014). Consequently, Ahmed et al (2015) suggested that attractive rewards and a realistic career path could effectively encourage the utilization of knowledge and skills to the employee's current job. The work environment assumes an imperative job as the steady instrument for the transfer of training (Burke & Hutchins, 2008). Based on the discussion of variables involved in this study, the following hypotheses were developed:

H1 : Training Design positively influence Transfer of Training

H2 : Individual Characteristics positively influence Transfer of Training

H3 : Work Environment positively influence Transfer of Training

Methodology

This study utilizes a quantitative method of research design whereby the primary data was collected from employees at a private limited company in Johor Bahru. A set of questionnaires consisting of 32 statements were adapted in measuring the transfer of the training model. Items on training design, individual characteristics, and work environment were adopted from Ngure and Juma (2018). The items relating to the transfer of training were

adopted from Tesluk et al. (1995). The demographic section covered gender, race, marital status, education level, and working experience. A total of 60 questionnaires were distributed randomly at the private limited company in Johor Bahru to attain the specified respondents through a self-administered study. A response rate of 87% was obtained consisting of 52 datasets. The data was cleaned from any missing values and outliers before analyzing them using SmartPLS version 3.2.9.

Findings

The majority of the respondents at the private limited company in Johor Bahru are males consisting of 73.1% and females consisting of 26.9%. Most of the employees are aged between 30 to 38 years old consisting of 48.1%. This was followed by 26.9% and 21.2% which are 40 to 49 years old and 20 to 29 years old, respectively. Of 52 employees, 40% are Malays, 38.5% are Chinese, and 13.5% are Indians. For marital status, 40.4% of the respondents are single and 57.7% are married. The remaining 1.9% falls under the 'others' category which is either divorcee (widows or widowers). Regarding the level of education, 40.4% are certificate holders, followed by SPM/STPM, Diploma, Bachelor's Degree, and Master's Degree with 13.5%, 21.2%, 23.1%, and 1.9% respectively. Respondents with 1 to 5 years of working experience made up the highest percentage at 46.2%.

Table 1 shows the measurement model of training transfer which explained the factor loadings and reliability of the constructs. Gotz et al. (2020) explained that the reliability of a single observed variable describes the variance of an individual observed which was compared to an unobserved variable by evaluating the standardized outer loadings of the observed variables. Meanwhile, the observed variables with an outer loading of 0.7 or greater are agreed to be acceptable (Hair et al., 2012), while the outer loading with a value less than 0.7 should be discarded (Chin, 1998). For this study, the cut-off value accepted for the outer loading is 0.7. There were 10 items deleted (TOT2, TOT7, TOT8, TD1, TD2, TD8, IC8, WE3, WE4, WE8) as they have loadings below 0.7 (Hair, et al., 2014).

Table 1. Factor Loadings and Reliability of Constructs (N=52)

	Items	Loading	AVE	CR	Deleted Item
Transfer of Training (TOT)	TOT 1	0.761	0.864	0.900	TOT2,TOT7, TOT8
	TOT 3	0.778			
	TOT 4	0.843			
	TOT 5	0.857			
	TOT 6	0.766			
Training Design (TD)	TD 3	0.752	0.695	0.919	TD1, TD2, TD8
	TD 4	0.900			
	TD 5	0.920			
	TD 6	0.833			
	TD 7	0.749			
Individual Characteristics (IC)	IC 1	0.933	0.729	0.949	IC 8
	IC 2	0.841			
	IC 3	0.733			
	IC 4	0.858			
	IC 5	0.899			
	IC 6	0.829			
	IC 7	0.869			
Work Environment (WE)	WE 1	0.782	0.623	0.892	WE3,WE4,WE8
	WE 2	0.824			
	WE 5	0.759			
	WE 6	0.805			
	WE 7	0.774			

According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) should be higher than 0.5. However, even if the AVE is less than 0.5 (0.4 is still acceptable), but the composite reliability is higher than 0.6, the convergent validity of the construct is still adequate (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). As shown in Table 1, the AVE for all the variables in this study exceeded 0.5 and was validated for the structural analysis. The construct reliability (CR) for all the variables has a value above 0.8.

The discriminant validity of the latent variables in this study as shown in Table 2 illustrates all the bold diagonal elements that exceed the off-diagonal inter-construct correlations which indicate Transfer of Training (TOT) at 0.802, Training Design (TD) at 0.834, Individual Characteristics (IC) at 0.854, and Work Environment (WE) at 0.789.

	TOT	TD	IC	WE
Transfer of Training (TOT)	0.802			
Training Design (TD)	0.478	0.834		
Individual Characteristics (IC)	0.367	0.023	0.854	
Work Environment (WE)	0.259	0.259	- 0.041	0.789

Table 2. Discriminant Validity of Latent Variables

****Bold diagonal elements are the square root of AVE (Average Variance Extracted) which should exceed the off-diagonal inter-construct correlations for adequate discriminant validity**

Next is the assessment of the structural model through the bootstrapping analysis (Streukens & Werelds, 2016). In this study, 1000 subsamples through bootstrapping were done and the result of the structural model is as illustrated in Fig. 1.

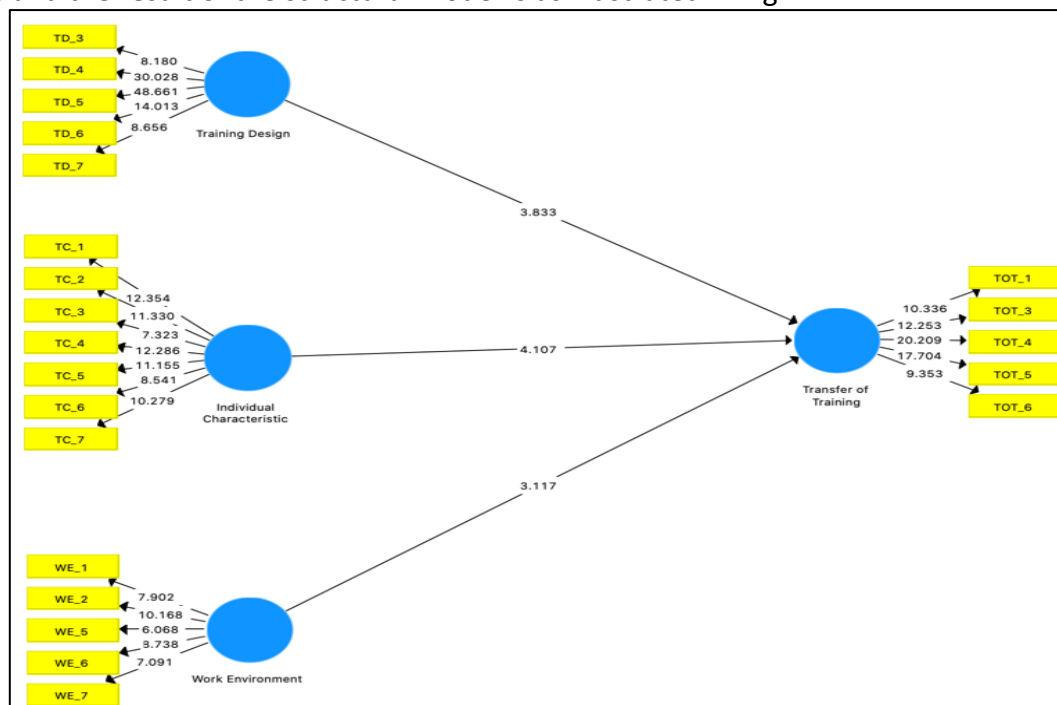


Figure 1. Structural Model for Transfer of Training.

In H1, it was predicted that the training design factor positively influenced the transfer of training. The findings in Table 3 and Figure 2 confirmed that the construct is significant and positively influenced training transfer ($\beta = 0.382$, $T = 3.833$, $p = 0.000$). Hence, H1 is strongly supported. Furthermore, when observing the direct and positive influence of individual characteristics on the transfer of training (H2), the findings from Table 3 and Figure 2 endorsed that individual characteristics positively influenced the transfer of training ($\beta = 0.372$, $T = 4.107$, $p = 0.000$). Thus, H2 is supported. The influence of the work environment on the transfer of training is positive and significant as well ($\beta = 0.337$, $T = 3.117$, $p = 0.002$) and that H3 is supported.

Table 3: Direct Hypotheses Result of Structural Model

Hypothesis	Direct Hypothesis	Beta Coefficient	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1	Training Design → Transfer of Training	0.382	3.833	0.000	Supported
H2	Individual Characteristics → Transfer of Training	0.372	4.107	0.000	Supported
H3	Work Environment → Transfer of Training	0.337	3.117	0.002	Supported

The coefficient of determination measures the overall effect size and variance explained in the endogenous construct for the structural model and is thus, a measure of the model's predictive accuracy. In this study, the inner path model was 0.461 for the quality endogenous latent construct. This indicates that the three independent constructs substantially explain 46.1% of the variance for transfer of training, which means that about 46.1% of the change in transfer training was due to training design, individual characteristics, and work environment constructs in the model. According to Henseler et al. (2009) and Hair et al. (2014), an R² value of 0.75 is considered substantial, an R² value of 0.50 is regarded as moderate, and an R² value of 0.26 is considered weak. Hence, the R² value in this study was moderate.

Discussions and Recommendations

Undeniably, the transfer of training plays a vital part in encouraging organizational performance. Therefore, this research attempted to examine the influence of training design, individual characteristics, and work environment on the transfer of training among employees. This research had taken place in a private limited company in Johor Bahru. As shown in Table 3, the path between all three exogenous latent constructs with an endogenous latent construct (transfer of training) showed a positive relationship and was statistically significant, thus, supporting all the hypotheses proposed in this study. One of the findings suggested that a quality training design increased the quality of training transfer among employees. This finding is consistent with a previous study by Grossman and Salas (2011) which stated that training design has a positive significant effect on training transfer. Thus, an improvement in training design will produce positive results in the transfer of training.

This study also aimed to identify the influence between individual characteristics with the transfer of training. It was found that individual characteristics have a significant impact on the transfer of training. When employees have a high level of individual characteristics, it will influence their ability to implement new knowledge that they had gained in the training programs into their daily work. This finding is consistent with Hicks (2006) and Kia and Ismail (2013) who considered individual characteristics as an effective factor in influencing the transfer of training.

The effect between work environment and transfer of training was the last factor identified in this study. The findings showed that the work environment gives a positive impact on the transfer of training. The work climate will influence how employees implement new knowledge gained in the training programs. For example, good encouragement and support from supervisors and the top management may trigger employees' motivation to perform better, and in this case, the employees will try to implement the output attained in the training programs into their work. This finding also extended the previous findings from Na-nan et al (2017); Pham et al (2013); Kia and Ismail (2013); Brinia and Efstathiou (2012) who agreed that the workplace environment has contributed significant influence on the transfer of training.

Therefore, it is highly recommended that the Human Resource Department in the private limited company in Johor Bahru proposed a proper plan before executing training programs. The SMART goal of training setting (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound) may lead to a better training design. On top of that, the encouragement of ideas from other departments would be helpful in designing effective training programs. Since individual characteristics affect the transfer of training, individual commitment can be attained by involving employees in the planning and executing a process of the training.

programs. Indirectly, this mechanism will motivate the type Y employees who like work and challenges. The role of managers in the organization is crucial to make the transfer of training among employees become a reality whether they are first-level managers, middle-level managers, or top-level managers. This is because commitment from managers may influence employees' commitment. It might not happen in a fortnight, but gradually from these commitments, the willingness to apply new knowledge gained from training programs will become a culture of the company.

The limitation of the study is, it was conducted at a private limited company in Johor Bahru, with a small number of samples. Thus, this study cannot be generalized to other entities. As a result, it is suggested that this study be replicated in a different setting or expanded to a specific industry for better generalization of the findings.

Conclusion

In this turbulent business environment, organizations required skilled and trained employees, and these talents are significant to their long-term success. With a huge amount of money, time, and energy spent in executing training programs, they are indeed important mechanisms to improve employee's performance, particularly for their current roles. If the new knowledge gained from the training is not widely implemented for the benefit of the employees and the company, it will become a waste. Thus, training cannot meet its goals and objectives without constant support from the management. In fact, employees require a lot of opportunities to practice the knowledge and skills they acquired during training to better perform their specific tasks and job responsibilities. To sum up, the transfer of training of employees in their work is crucial. By understanding factors that can influence the transfer of training, hopefully, companies will strategize their training programs in a more effective way, including pre-training, during training, and post-training. This study empirically found that training design, individual characteristics, and work environment positively influenced the transfer of training at a private limited company in Johor Bahru. Since this study only focused on only one company, there is a good opportunity to discover beyond this limitation for future research. Any relationship between the factors related and the transfer of training can lead to improved performance and maximization of benefits. This allows organizations to continue to be competitive in the face of global competition, the changing environment, and unstable economic conditions (Kasim et al., 2013).

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