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A REVIEW OF MAJOR TRAINING TRANSFER STUDIES OF THE PAST

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ABSTRACT

This article studies some of the major investigations in the field of training transfer in the past. The study was undertaken to comprehend the conceptual framework of training transfer for a better perceptive of the construct. It also studies the social impact of trainings through various models of evaluation of training which help the organisations in calculation of return on investments, trainings being an investment of both money and human effort directed towards achievement of certain goals.

KEYWORDS

learning, management learning, outcomes, skills, training.

INTRODUCTION

rganisations provide training to their employees in order to update their skills and ready them for future challenges. But every organisation needs to reflect how much of the training provided by them is being transferred by their employees to the workplace. In case of absence of such a transfer the organisations would be suffering losses on account of amount spent on training. Spending is not proportionate learning through trainings. These trainings are aimed to balance the organization's needs and the employees' needs. As Seyler, Holton, Burnett, Bates and Carvalho (1998) point out, training is focused on trying to change a trainee's behaviour or equip them with new behaviours. Some organizations are concerned with training as a priority issue, while other organizations are concerned with the final product and sales. Apart from money a lot of time in the organisations is also being devoted to such trainings and if the employee learning is minimal or nil from such training sessions the investment of time to such training activities also goes to waste. It is due to these factors that transfer of training is considered desirable.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This section discusses factors that affect training which may be divided into three categories: trainee characteristic, motivation, and the environmental factors (Baldwin & Ford, 1988). Despite the importance of the other factors, trainees' characteristics are considered important factor of motivation to transfer of training.

TRAINING

Training is defined as the act, process, or method of one who trains. It is also defined as the knowledge or experience acquired by one who trains (Merriam Webster Dictionary, second edition). Rothwell and Sredl (2000) were more specific and defined training as a short-term intervention designed to change individuals by equipping them with the necessary and sufficient knowledge, skills, and attitudes they need to meet or exceed customer requirements and achieve results (p.9). Another definition came from Blancher and Thacker (1999) who defined training as a systematic process attempting to develop knowledge, skills, and for current or future job. Training aims to bring changes in the employee's skills, in addition to other changes in attitudes and knowledge. Skills might range from reading and writing to gaining skills in the computer's applications.

TRAINING TRANSFER

Transfer of training can be defined as the application of knowledge, skills and attitudes learned from training on the job and subsequent maintenance of them over a certain period of time (Baldwin and Ford, 1988; Xiao, 1996). This definition has expanded the traditional meaning of transfer which related the transfer of training with effectively taking back the skills taught from a training programme and did not include its maintenance in its fold.

Noe (1986) and Baldwin and Ford (1988) were the pioneers in the field of training transfer. The theoretical framework of Baldwin and Ford (1988) in this field has proved most influential and has attracted a lot of practical studies to examine how employee characteristics, job attitudes and work environment affect the transfer of training process (e.g. Baldwin et al., 1991; Tziner et al., 1991; Gist et al., 1991; Tannenbaum et al., 1991; Martocchio, 1992; Mathieu et al., 1992; Ford et al., 1992; Clark et al., 1993; Fecteau et al., 1995; Saks, 1995; Tesluk et al., 1995; Tracey et al., 1995;). The focus on these constructs is based upon the fact that employee is trainable or the concept of trainability. Trainability was defined by Noe and Schmitt (1986, p. 498) as "the degree to which training participants are able to learn and apply the material emphasised in the training programme". They extended the Wexley and Latham's (1981) trainability idea which stated that trainability is a function of ability and motivation in order to include environmental components. In other words, they suggested that trainability was the sum of ability, motivation and environmental favourability [Trainability = f (Ability, Motivation, Environmental Favourability)]. Their conceptual ideas had a deep impact on training transfer research.

TRAINING OUTCOME

Training outcomes means the significant learning or change of behaviour that the trainees are expected to show after attending a particular training session. It is often defined in terms of learning taken back to the workplace by the said trainees from a particular training. It may be seen in terms of change in working style, updated market information, updating of skills, learning new skills and processes. It tends to identify beforehand what the trainees know and what they need to know to improve their performance (Steve W.J. Kozlowski. et al 2000). It is this training outcome which will affect the future performance of the trainees in the organisation and the organisation in relation to its environment.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

The study focus on collecting and gaining information from the training transfer studies of the past, reviewing them and constructing a conceptual framework for the understanding of the researcher. Also it aims at understanding the various methods of evaluation of trainings for determining their social impact.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite plethora of researches existing in the field of training transfer there is a need to have a clear conceptual understanding of training transfer through which it could be reviewed in the organisations.

OBJECTIVE

The objective is to create a conceptual framework of training transfer for better understanding and further research in the field of training transfer for the author.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Based on the theoretical framework suggested by Baldwin and Ford, 1988, the researcher reviewed the literature related to training transfer and its components in order to create a conceptual framework and pinpoint important components for better understanding of the concept. The researcher has reviewed more than 20 articles, books, and other relevant material related to training transfer; the literature was selected and organized based on the theoretical framework of this study and was limited for the last three decades. Terms such as learning, training, transfer, and motivation were utilized to search the resources:

- (a) Internet search engines,
- (b) Academic Journals and
- (c) Books

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The result of the study was the creation of a broad conceptual framework of the process of training transfer for the purpose of guiding the researcher in further studies related to the concept for this purpose various variables were identified and segregated that contribute to training transfer.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF TRAINING TRANSFER

TRAINEE CHARACTERISTICS

It is the inner ability of the trainee or his personality. It is also referred to as trainability which is to say his ability, motivation and work environment perception in totality. It encompasses his self concept and attitude towards learning. Trainability means a trainees' preparedness for training to happen. His previous education and experience contributes to his preparedness for learning.

Trainee characteristics (e.g. personality, trainee ability, motivation effects) were initially identified by training practitioners as the sole factor affecting transfer of training (Baldwin and Ford, 1988). But with time these characteristics were stretched. Among various personal characteristics, locus of control was presumed in many earlier studies to affect the transfer process (e.g. Baumgartel et al., 1984; Noe and Schmitt, 1986). Locus of control is defined by Rotter (1966) as a general anticipation that organisational outcomes like rewards and reinforcements in life are controlled either by an individual's own actions or by other forces. In a training situation, employees with a strong belief that they can control the organisational outcomes are more likely to help apply their learnt behaviour from training to the job scene. Organisational outcomes can be recognition, promotions, salary increases and job enlargement. The study of Tziner et al. (1991) indicated that those with an internal locus of control who benefited from a relapse prevention module demonstrated higher better understanding of the training contents. Self-efficacy is defined as "people's judgements of their capabilities to organise and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances" (Bandura, 1986, p. 391). The trainees with a high level of confidence in their performance and behaviour change will be more likely to apply what they have learned from training on the jobs.

The Learning Transfer System Inventory (LTSI, Holton et al., 2000) was developed to assess the 'transfer system', i.e. 'all factors in the person, training and organization that influence transfer of learning to job performance' (pp. 335-36). With this aim, the instrument measures 16 dimensions likely to influence training transfer; 11 specific factors, which relate to the particular training program the trainee was attending, and five general factors, which are likely to influence any training program conducted.

MOTIVATION FACTORS

Inadequate motivation is likely to cause poor mastering of the training by the employees and subsequent training performance motivational variables that are grouped into four major dimensions: career and job attitudes; organisational commitment; decision and reaction to training; and post training interventions. Motivation is significantly affected by temperamental factors in the employees. Career and job attitudes generally refer to the cognitive state of psychological identification with one's career and job. Organizations whose performance depends on their employees' willingness to learn continually and use their learning to make changes in the workplace must be concerned with the dispositional profile of those employees (Sharon and Holton, 2002). A study conducted by Kehrhn (1995) investigated the relationship of individual and perceptions on transfer of customer service skills training found that motivation to transfer was one of the variables that predicted transfer of learning. However, trainees who frequently engage in cognitive or environmental search activities are expected to have a better understanding of their strengths, weaknesses and interests (Noe, 1986; Noe and Schmitt, 1986). Neo and Schmidt (1986) describe motivation as a desire to use the knowledge and skill mastered in the training program on the job. In fact, they recognise the importance of learning new skills and refining current skills (Facteau et al., 1995) so that such skills can match with the requirements of the new job settings. Trainees who had both good career planning and a high level of job involvement were more likely to be motivated to learn (Mathieu et al., 1992; Williams et al., 1991). Employees being offered opportunities to provide input into the training decision were more likely to perceive the training as useful for their jobs which, in turn, resulted in higher levels of pre-training motivation (Baldwin et al., 1991; Clark et al., 1993; Mathieu et al., 1992). The pre-training motivation was said to be related to learning in a training programme (Baldwin et al., 1991; Mathieu et al., 1992) and subsequent training performance (Mathieu et al., 1992). Moreover, trainees' reaction to training was shown to affect their learning and subsequent training performance (Mathieu et al., 1992; Martocchio, 1992). The study of Tziner et al. (1991) revealed that a relapse prevention component included in a training helped increase the likelihood of the prognostic power of internality and a supportive environment on the use of trained skills and transferring them to the job. More recent studies have supported the importance of post-training interventions on skill transfer and maintenance. Burke (1997) found that relapse prevention positively affected the trainees' ability to transfer and desire to transfer.

ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

In the training setting, the organization is responsible for preparing the climate of learning to the convenience of the trainees. A number of strategies can be employed to enhance learning transfer system: first, the organization has to ensure a supportive transfer climate, program planners may clarify with the supervisor what is to be learned and how that is transferred through follow-up assistance such as individual coaching and peer mentoring. Second, the organization should include participants in the planning. And third, the organization has to integrate strategies that relate to transfer in the program design (Merriam and Leahy, 2005, p14-16)

The supports-in-organisation variables come from the concept of social support that is said to be influential when employees believe that other client systems in the organisation (e.g. their supervisors and peers) provide them with opportunities for practising new skills and knowledge in the job settings (Noe, 1986). Opportunity to practise ensures that when trainees have plenty of chances to apply what they have learned to their jobs, a larger amount of training content can be transferred (Ford, 1992). Some researchers have used the term "transfer climate" to represent the social supports from the organisation (e.g. Tracey, 1992). Basically, there are four major sources of social support of subordinate, peer, supervisor and top management (Facteau, 1995). Tziner et al. (1991) found that supportive environment alone could not influence trainees' use of trained skills

PERCEIVED VALUE AND CREDIBILITY

Perceived value is the worth of the training in the minds of the trainees. (AK Min Ho, 2008). If the trainee group does not value the training imparted they do not actively imbibe the learnings there from and are less likely to reproduce the learning on the job. This could be due to varying factors like training environment, training design, trainee or the trainer themselves. Another important factor is the credibility of the training if the training being imparted sounds impractical to the trainees they are less likely to perceive its value and learn from it.

SOCIAL IMPACT OF TRAINING

Training being cost intensive process for any organisation needs to generate the desired outcome for becoming useful to the society and having a social impact on the society in which it is being imparted. In the social impact of training transfer we studied various model of evaluation of training and their outcome to gain a better understanding of the expectations of various social groups from training and how trainings are evaluated to see if these expectations are being met. These expectations are not just in terms of changed behaviour of individuals and learning and retention of new skills but also recovering the cost of training resulting from such behaviour by the organisation, lesser attrition rates and more dedication of employees towards their organisation. Some important models that discuss the returns on amount spent by organisations on training are:

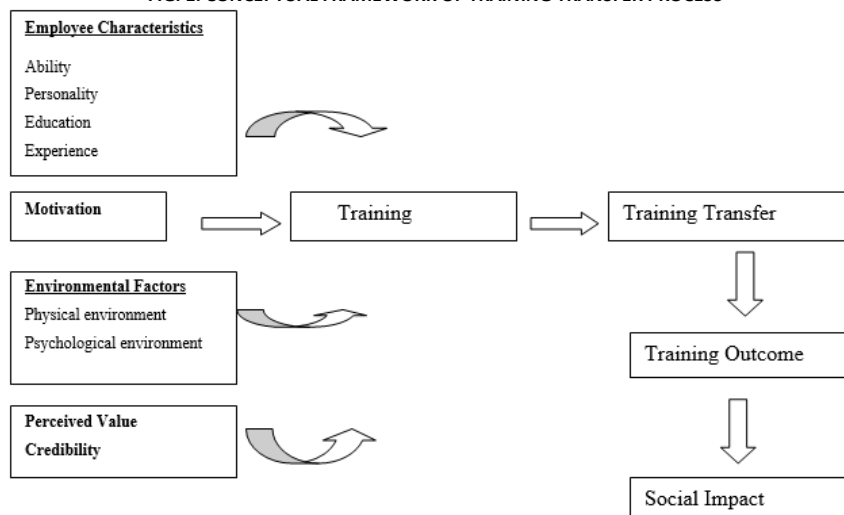
Cost-benefit analysis is the oldest evaluation method used to access the feasibility of expenditures of all types of programs in order to show the value of education and training (Kearsley, 1982; Prest & Turvey, 1965; Thompson, 1980). It can be understood as:

- Identify key stakeholders and their values
- Identify alternative choices to compare to the program
- Define the costs and the benefits of all alternative choices
- Place a monetary value on the cost and benefits
- Identify intangible benefits (those not converted to monetary value or any additional benefits identified through the evaluation)
- Compare the costs and the benefits derived
- Make a decision regarding the program

Phillips' Five-Level ROI Model: In the 1980's Phillips (1983) began efforts to stretch the training evaluation to Return on Investment (ROI), which he called Level Five. This type of evaluation is similar to Kirkpatrick's Level Four in that it seeks to identify training results, usually in a monetary form, but it differs because it also examines the cost of the training (investment) that may have led to the measured results. The cost of the training is subtracted from the monetary value of the results to obtain the ROI

Kaufman's five Levels of Evaluation: Kaufman and Keller (1994) developed another type of training evaluation, which is a variation of Kirkpatrick's four-level framework that expanded the definition of Level One and added a fifth level that addresses societal issues, client responsiveness, the consequences and payoffs. They use the concept of enabling, at Level One, which addresses the availability of various resource inputs necessary for a successful intervention. Their work attempts to move evaluation beyond the organization, and examine the extent to which programs enhance society and the environment surrounding the organization (Phillips, 2004).

Success Case Evaluation Model: Brinkerhoff and Dressler (2002) developed the Success Case Evaluation Model. Their model uses purposive sampling rather than random sampling. The model focuses on input from training participants who have been most successful as well as least successful at applying the knowledge and skills learned during the training event.

DISCUSSION**FIG. 1: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF TRAINING TRANSFER PROCESS**

Thus in building the conceptual framework of the process of training transfer we see that there are four major variables that affect training:

- The employee characteristics which includes his ability to learn, his personality educational background of the employee and experience
- Motivation factors that provide the base for learning and answer the question of why should the employee learn new skills for him
- Environmental factors which include his physical environment involving the training setting where training is imparted and also his psychological environment which is built of his mental state for accepting the training imparted,
- Perceived value and credibility relate to training design aspect which impacts the mind of the trainee so that he accepts the learning and considers it of value in future for his job. Credibility relates to the applicability of training where the training is imparted by relating to the actual work scenario of the trainee group.

Once the training has been imparted it is upon the trainees to transfer their learning to their job which makes visible the training outcomes that is whether the learning imparted from training has been successfully assimilated by the learners or not. From the assessment of our training outcomes using various methods of evaluation we can assesses the social impact the training. Social impact aspires to delve into whether the training has been successful for the society on the whole using the parameters of learning and the return on investments made in training in terms of time money and other resources of the organisations.

CONCLUSION

The finding of this article are derived from the literature review which has been done on this topic or related topics. In particular environment, motivation, the ability to transfer, and the learners' attitudes impact transfer. The participant is not the only factor that affects the transfer; there are other important factors that work together and affect the transfer. It is recommended for future research to conduct research on participants' characteristics as a major thrust area in transfer. Researchers should look for and find those positive characteristics; they should also look for the undesired characteristics and develop training programs to overcome them. If as stakeholders we want to improve our training outcomes, we need to provide a well-designed and planned training for our employees, we need also to learn how to motivate them to apply this training in the workplace. This certainly will increase the organization's productive ability and the returns on investment in the field of training.

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