

Employee Readiness, Training Design and Work Environment in Influencing Training Transfer Among Academic Staffs of Uitm

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Abstract

The importance of the acquisitions of the newly learned skills and its transfer to the workplace have been admitted by workers which has led much research being done on this issue since 1980 until to date presenting a serious concern in this issue. Despite the increased investment in training, many cases have portrayed academic staffs have inability to transfer of newly learned skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary for their job scopes. By using the partial least squares (PLS) and structural equation modelling tool, the statistical results confirm that ability, error management, supervisor's role and opportunity to use impact on transfer of training. Motivation to transfer also mediates partially error management and opportunity to use.

Keywords: Readiness, training design, environment, academic staff.

Introduction

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 (Kasim and Hashim, 2012). 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 (Public Complaints Bureau, 2015), 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 (MPC, 2015), yet during 2000 till 2015 period China, Singapore and Taiwan had scored higher productivity (MPC, 2016). Malaysia has emphasized more initiatives in order to enhance the productivity. For instance, HRDF (2015) reported that 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. Through training and development, it is aimed 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 Paradise (2007) as he noted that every year the billions of dollars will be invested in training.

The American organizations have also 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 (Weide, 2014). The training was provided to workers with the hope they can enjoy for free learning whilst earning number of hours for paid time-off for training (Mason and Bishop, 2010).

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 Baldwin and Ford (1988), 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 vital 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 as identified by Burke and Hutchins (2008). In spite of the limited discussion in the literature regarding this issue in Malaysia (Baharim, 2008), 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 (Saks, 2002), Rackham and Ruff (1991) found that 87% of the worker's loss of skill within one month after the completion of sales training at Xerox and Wahidin (2008) 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 (Cromwell and Kolb, 2004). A study made by Grover (2015) 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

According to Kram, Ting et al. (2002), learning from everyday opportunities at work is most effective. This learning will become beneficial if it is utilized by employees in their day-to-day activities. As such, Noe (2013) defined transfer of training as trainees effectively and continually applying what they have learned in training to their jobs. Other researchers (Wexley and Latham, 1991; Yadapadithaya, and Stewart, 2003) 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 (Chang and Chiang, 2013). Review of several studies have found several factors leading to transfer of training such motivation to transfer (Tai, 2006; Facticeau, Dobbins et al.,1995; Axtell, Maitlis et al., 1997), the supervisor’s role (Goldstein and Ford, 2002; Holton, 2000; Lim and Morris, 2006; Ismail, Abdullah et al.,2010), training design factor (Lim, 2000) and training framing (Tai et al.,2006)

Employee Readiness

Employee readiness is defined as the extent to which employees are ready or willing to attend and participate in training (Baharim and Van Gramberg, 2005). It is also identified as a necessary element in training to influence employee learning and has become the subject to be studied. Noted by Noe (2002), 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 (Chonko, 2004). 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 (Heathfield, 2008).

Attitudes

Attitude is defined as an individual's view of something or his conduct on the matter (Nollen and Gaertner, 1991). 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 Hughey and Mussnug (1997) 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 Liaw (2002) 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.

Organisational Commitment

Organisational commitment includes employee acceptance and belief with organizational goals and values (Mowday, Porter et al., 1982). In past decades, organizational commitment was commonly identified as one of nine factors mostly examined in training transfer issue (Cheng and Ho, 2001). Referring to DeCotiis and Summers (1987), many studies have found positive relationship between organizational commitment and motivation to transfer. They assumed the higher the level of organizational commitment, the greater would be the motivation to transfer of the workers relatively with those who have lower organizational commitment. However, the assumption has not supported Facticeau, Dobbins et al. (1995) that found organizational commitment was uncorrelated with the perceived training transfer. Therefore, 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 (DeSimone, Werner et al., 2002). 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 (Ismail, Bongogoh et al., 2009). Noe et al. (2002) 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 (Anderson, Dooley et al., 1994). 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 as per Ree and Earles (1991). 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 (Noe et al., 2002). A study by Lane and Lubatkin (1998) indicated that cognitive ability will influence job performance and also abilities 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 (Lane, Salk et al., 2001; Baldwin, Magjuka et al., 1991). It is suggested by Minbaeva, Pedersen et al. (2003) 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 (Velada, Caetano et al., 2007). 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 (Noe et al., 2013). 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 Burke and Hutchins (2007), 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 Debowski, Wood et al. (2001), 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 DeCotiis et al. (1987) 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 (Burke et al., 2007). 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 (Heimbeck, Frese et al., 2003). This variable is classified under training design with behavioural modelling and realistic training environments and has found a consistent relationship with transfer of training. The finding can support a study by Frese and Altmann (1989) 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 (Frese et al., 1989). 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. Davis (1989) also stressed that the positive role of errors is when it conforms to the statement of "one learns best from errors". 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 (Mullen, Kroustalis et al., 2006), Rahman and Rahman (2013) 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 Bates (2003), 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, Yamnill and McLean (2005) 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 Noe and Wilk (1993) identified 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. The previous works (Kozlowski and Hults, 1987; Kozlowski and Salas, 2014) suggested two aspects of the work environment that can

influence employees' attitudes and participation in development activities - social support and situational constraints. However, according to Tracey and Tews (2005), 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 (Facteau et al., 1995; Axtell et al., 1997) which contradicted with Van den Bossche and Segers (2013) as they claimed that much should be done to the conceptual meaning and operationalization of constructs that related to the work environment. The constructs should also be relevant to the training program.

Supervisor's Role

Supervisors are given major duties and responsibilities to lead work groups in organizations (Goldstein et al., 2002). Being as the first level people in management, their roles for effective training are crucial. This is relevant with Ford, Quiñones et al. (1992) that appreciated supervisors and peer support as becoming powerful factors of effective training transfer. Lim (2006) supported that supervisors, colleagues and peers are the three major people-related factors in enhancing transfer as discussed by previous studies (Foxon, 1997; Russ-Eft, 2002; Richey, 1990). Other than that, availability of a mentor (Cheng and Hampson, 2008; Lim et al., 2000) and positive personal outcomes (Holton, 2000) were also identified important to training transfer.

In addition, Lim et al. (2000) 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, Holton, Bates et al. (2000) found a negative influence of supervisor and peer support on transfer of training, although they applied LTSI (Learning Transfer System Inventory). Building from previous studies, the following is hypothesized:

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

Opportunity to Use

According to Ivancevich and Lee (2002), 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 (Baldwin and Ford, 1988). 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 (Gegenfurtner, Veermans et al., 2009). 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 (Noe, Hollenbeck et al., 2014). It plays an important role in motivation to training transfer (Xiao, 1996). Thus, Noe et al. (2014) claimed that without 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. A few of studies have also focused training motivation as the training outcome by testing the drivers of this motivation (Kontoghiorghes, 2001; Kontoghiorghes, 2002).

Referring to Kontoghiorghes et al. (2001), 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 (Noe, 1986; Heimbeck et al., 2003; Van der Locht, Van Dam et al., 2013). 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 (Ngeow, 1998), training reputation, self-efficacy and managerial support (Switzer, Nagy et al., 2005) with transfer of training. Thus, the followings are hypothesized:

H2a: Motivation to transfer will mediate the relationship between attitudes and transfer of training.

H2b: Motivation to transfer will mediate the relationship between organisational commitment and transfer of training.

H2c: Motivation to transfer will mediate the relationship between motivation to learn and transfer of training.

H2d: Motivation to transfer will mediate the relationship between abilities and transfer of training.

H2e: Motivation to transfer will mediate the relationship between error management and transfer of training.

H2f: Motivation to transfer will mediate the relationship between perceived importance and transfer of training.

H2g: Motivation to transfer will mediate the relationship between supervisor's role and transfer of training.

H2h: Motivation to transfer will mediate the relationship between opportunity to use and transfer of training.

Research Method

A cross-sectional research design was employed for this study and the unit of analysis for this study is individual, which consists of UiTM's academic staffs that have attended training courses organized by Institute of Leadership and Development (ILD), UiTM. This study employed the survey method and for data collection; a self-administered questionnaire was

designed and used. Two hundred and fifty eight questionnaires were mailed to the respondents. A total of 238 questionnaires were received and used for this analysis which translates to about a 92% response rate. Instruments used in this paper were adapted from previous research by using a seven-point Likert scale.

Results and Discussion

Using PLS-SEM, the tests were conducted based on the measurement model and structural model. The significant direct relationships were found between ability, error management, supervisor's role, opportunity to use and transfer of training (refer Table 1). Meanwhile, mediation effects of motivation to transfer were found on the relationships between error management, opportunity to use and transfer of training (refer Table 2).

TABLE 1:
DIRECT RELATIONSHIP RESULT

Hypothesis	Direct path		Path coefficient (β)	T-statistics ^a	P-values	Result
	Exogenous variables	Endogenous variables				
H1a	AT	TOT	0.118	1.590	0.112	Not significant
H1b	OC	TOT	-0.023	0.282	0.778	Not significant
H1c	AB	TOT	0.194	2.572	0.01	Significant
H1d	ML	TOT	-0.1	1.097	0.273	Not significant
H1e	ER	TOT	0.198	2.975	0.003	Significant
H1f	PI	TOT	-0.1	1.524	0.128	Not significant
H1g	SV	TOT	0.183	3.011	0.003	Significant
H1h	OP	TOT	0.201	2.261	0.024	Significant

TABLE 2:
DIRECT, INDIRECT EFFECTS OF MOTIVATION TO TRANSFER ON TRANSFER OF TRAINING

Path	Direct effect model			Indirect effect			Total effect	VAF	Type of mediation
	β	t-stat	p-value	β	t-stat	p-value	β		
AT → TOT _c	0.118	1.590	0.112	0.042	1.717	0.086	0.16	0.263	No effect
OC → TOT _c	-0.023	0.282	0.778	-0.026	0.959	0.338	-0.049	0.531	No effect
AB → TOT _c	0.194	2.572	0.01	-0.017	0.552	0.581	0.177	0.096	Direct only

ML → TOT <i>c</i>	-0.1	1.097	0.273	0.058	1.85	0.064	-0.043	1.34	No effect
ER → TOT <i>c</i>	0.198	2.975	0.003	0.085	2.575	0.01	0.283	0.300	Complementary
PI → TOT <i>c</i>	-0.1	1.524	0.128	0.036	1.263	0.207	-0.064	0.563	No effect
SV → TOT <i>c</i>	0.183	3.011	0.003	0.019	0.962	0.336	0.202	0.094	Direct only
OP → TOT <i>c</i>	0.201	2.261	0.024	0.146	3.244	0.001	0.347	0.421	Complementary
Direct effect model									
MT – > TOT <i>b</i>	0.341	3.842	0.000						
AT → MT <i>a</i>	0.124	2.003	0.045						
OC → MT <i>a</i>	- 0.076	0.937	0.349						
AB → MT <i>a</i>	-0.05	0.558	0.577						
ML → MT <i>a</i>	0.169	2.151	0.032						
ER → MT <i>a</i>	0.248	3.188	0.001						
PI → MT <i>a</i>	0.106	1.254	0.21						
SV → MT <i>a</i>	0.055	0.983	0.326						
OP → MT <i>a</i>	0.427	6.589	0.000						

Notes :

β = path coefficient. AB= Abilities, AT= Attitudes, ER= Error management, ML=Motivation to learn, MT= Motivation to transfer, OC= Organizational commitment, OP= Opportunity to use, PI= Perceived importance, SV= Supervisor's role, TOT= Transfer of training

The findings reinforce previous studies which contend that abilities, error management, supervisor's role and opportunity to use relate significantly to the application of skills (Ford et al., 1992; Holton, 1996; Cromwell et al., 2004; Van den Bossche, Segers et al., 2010; Burke and Hutchins, 2007) among academic staffs of UiTM. Thereby, it is best to be understood that transfer of training will occur when academic staffs have physical and mental capacity for learning, provided with effective feedback about error they have made and social support from the seniors in assisting their transfer efforts to transfer. Provided with adequate resources (e.g. research grant, computer labs and research management unit) also has enabled them to be more positive in applying the skills and knowledge that they have learned from training program. Other than that, out of four employee characteristics been studied, ability was found to have direct influence on transfer of training with small effect size (0.037).

However, it has no impact on motivation to transfer ($f^2 = 0.002$). Hence, it can be clarified that though the readiness variables have effects on transfer of training, it could not motivate academic staffs of UiTM to apply the skills and knowledge they obtained from the training programs which in turn may lead to non-transferability among UiTM academic staffs. Previous studies have revealed several factors for the transfer motivation to take place such identical elements, motivation to learn and expected utility (Van der Locht, Van Dam et al., 2013); training reputation, self-efficacy and managerial support (Switzer et al., 2005) with transfer of training which some of the factors did not impact training transfer in this study.

Conclusion

Training is used to build a skilled workforce, including the academic staffs of UiTM. 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 of academic staffs. Therefore, with high investment been allocated to training, the needs for identification of training transfer-related factors are demanded and crucial.

Implications of The Study

The first implication of this study related on the transfer of training issues itself. There was a study on transfer of training dimensions available in the current literature conducted in UiTM but comprised of support staffs of UiTM (Kasim and Ali, 2011) with only one campus involved. The other studies however conducted on other private sectors in Malaysia such manufacturing (Zaidi, Baharuddin et al., 2016), banking sector (Awais Bhatti, Mohamed Battour et al., 2013) and electrical and electronics (Giroud, 2000).

Secondly, the message to UiTM's policy makers is very clear that in order for the academic staffs to apply the skills from training programs, they should enhance understanding among academic staff about how the training programs can be useful for their job and career planning. Therefore, it needs for UiTM to be more realistic in designing training program that perhaps will increase their preparedness for learning and training transfer. Engaging academic staffs in designing training program may help academic staffs to match their needs and UiTM's goals. Other than that, framing training prior the program is also considered important that can motivate them to participate in the training programs so that the generalizability and maintenance of the learned skills can be executed and this can be impactful with the roles played by supervisor or senior academic staffs.

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