

# THE IMPACT OF LEARNERS’ CHARACTERISTICS ON TRANSFER OF TRAINING – A REVIEW

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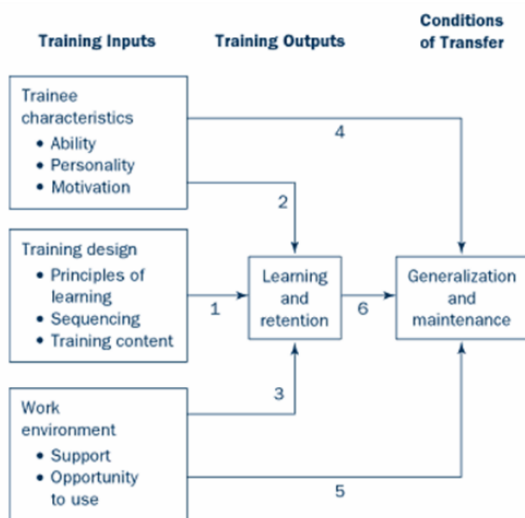
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**Abstract:** Organizations across sectors and industries spend significant budget on training and development programs. Organization’s expect training programs to translate into quality performance at workplace. Organizations also expect good return on training investment. It is essential that employees implement their learning of training programs at workplace. We have made an attempt to understand the factors that impact transfer of training. During our review process we identified few variables that influence transfer of training with research support. Out of many variables like organization’s culture, trainer’s effectiveness, training infrastructure, training interventions, learning resources and others, we have identified learners’ characteristics as a parameter to understand impact on transfer of training.

**Key Words:** learner characteristics, transfer of training



Baldwin and Ford's (1988) work on "transfer problem" in training research has led to discussion on how to diminish the gap between learning from training programs and its transfer to workplace performance. As per Baldwin and Ford's work there are three inputs that impact transfer of training including learners’ characteristics, training design, and work environment. In the present review we are focusing on learners’ characteristics and its impact on transfer of training. The estimates of the extent of the training transfer vary, from 10% of change in employee behaviour at workplace to 40% of trainees transferring computer skills at workplace. Training investments continue to give disappointing results in various studies. Thus, transfer of training has become an important issue for training

practitioners who endeavour to ensure improved individual, team, and organizational performance through training interventions. We believe that there is a need to understand the impact of various components of training transfer. We have made an attempt to examine learners’ characteristics at length to training transfer literature to provide better perspective for future research in this review.

## Learners’ Characteristics

In order to conduct this review, we identified learning characteristics' that are instrumental in influencing transfer as per significant concepts and theories. Training transfer means application of knowledge, skills and change in behaviour for a long period of time at a workplace. Learning should translate to the context of the workplace and should make meaningful contributions to individual, team and organizational needs.

As per psychology an individual's ability and motivation affect one's performance. The primary learner characteristics that influence transfer of learning/training are intellectual ability, self-efficacy, and job/career variables.

### **General Mental Ability**

The general mental ability has been long recognized as one of the most popular and supportable findings in educational research. Students with higher general mental ability have achieved higher level of training transfer including knowledge skills and behavioural learning inputs. The impact of cognitive ability on trainees' learning performance were confirmed by Robertson and Downs (1979). Colquitt, LePine and Noe (2000) found that there is moderately high correlation between cognitive ability and training transfer.

### **Training Motivation**

Training motivation means intensity and tenacity of the trainees to learn before, during, and after training interventions. There are quite a few research studies that suggests that pre-training motivation positively affects training transfer. The correlation between pre-training motivation and training transfer was found to be a healthy by Fecteau, Dobbins, Russell, Ladd, and Kudisch. Quinones (1995). They inferred that motivation to learn was a key variable that ensured actual training outcomes. The motivation components especially intrinsic factors impact training retention more than extrinsic factors. In Fecteau et al employees who attended training program inspired by intrinsic reasons, reported higher levels of motivation to learn. Kontoghiorghes (2001) noticed that for many trainees' recognition was more influential factor on the retention of training than pay raise and promotion. Transfer of training was even more significant in certain cases where training retention was correlated with performance appraisal (Taylor et al.)

### **Self-efficacy**

Judgments a trainee make about his/her ability to learn particular skills have received strong support from the literature. As per Albert Bandura (1997) Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in one's ability to execute behaviours required to produce specific performance attainments. Various studies confirm a positive correlation between pre-training self-efficacy and final learning outcome from training interventions. Some interventions that have been designed to increase learner self-efficacy have been shown to increase training performance too. When organizations employ goal setting and self-management techniques to ensure training transfer post training programs, initiatives to develop self-efficacy has demonstrated better transfer of training.

### **Openness**

Trainees' openness to experience helps them to attain skills quickly and retain for longer period of time. Though more research is needed to support existing findings regarding connect between openness to experience and transfer of training, it seems that trainees who are willing to discover, accept, and adopt are able to learn, retain and apply learning at workplace on sustained basis (Barrick and Mount).

### **Positive/Negative Affectivity**

Trainee motivation can be negatively influenced by innate behavioural qualities. The tendency of trainees to feel negative emotions towards training interventions, was found to be key implementation issue post training. (Colquitt et al). Naquin and Holton found that people with high positive affectivity have higher motivation to learn and transfer learning at workplace.

### **Extroversion**

Naquin and Holton suggest that extroversion motivates trainees to improve their performance through learning. Extrovert trainees may have positive interactions with other members of the training group that may lead to better learning retention through a social process. It has also suggested that a group of people having varying degree of skills may achieve better transfer of training than a group of people with lower level of skills in a social environment.

### **Perception of Importance**

Learner's perception regarding utility or importance of training is also a factor that impacts transfer of training. According to Baumgartel, Reynolds, and Pathan, if managers believe that training has utility, there are chances that learners apply skills learned during the training workshop. The case of Axtell et al. Learner who had higher levels of skill transfer, believed that training inputs are valuable for their career.

### **Conscientiousness**

Conscientiousness may have a positive impact on transfer of training but the link between conscientiousness and transfer of training has not been supported by empirical research. Colquitt et al. There is a possibility that conscientious trainees consider their learning capability highly Herold et al.

### **Job and career variables**

Job and career variables including also influences training transfer. Variables include self-development for career enhancement, skill self-assessment, job involvement, and identification with work groups. Those employees who are positively related to job and career have reported higher transfer of training compared to those are negative or neutral regarding these variables.

### **Locus of Control**

Locus of Control refers to a trainee's mindset where he or she believe that they are in control of their life. Internal locus of control and its impact on transfer of training has mixed reviews from the literature. Tziner and Falbe did not find any noteworthy relationship between (Locus of Control) and transfer of training. On the contrary Tziner, Haccoun, and Kadish found trainees having an internal LOC displayed higher levels of transfer when using a post-training intervention.

Most studies of the learner characteristics factor rely on empirical studies. Cognitive ability, self-efficacy, pre-training motivation, negative affectivity, perceived utility, and organizational commitment variables are some of the variables that have suggested having an influence on transfer of training.

### **Suggestions**

On the basis of the review of literature we believe that there is an opportunity to further research impact of learner characteristics on transfer of training with some of the factors moderating and/or mediating factors.

- 1) If we remove the influence of external motivational components on transfer of training studies, we may get better understanding of influence of internal motivational components. In other words, if we disentangle training part from performance appraisals, we may get a better idea regarding impact of internal motivation on training outcomes.
- 2) A separate study may reveal better understanding of the role an extroversion trainees play in the group learning settings where degree of skill sets differs among trainees.
- 3) People having an internal Locus of Control seems to transfer more of their learning at workplace and continue applying for a long period of time but those who exhibit external locus of control may also be paying attention to transfer training inputs to workplace to ensure better group and organizational alignment. A further study may reveal better understanding regarding actual transfer of training.

### **Conclusion**

There has been plenty of research about transfer of training over last decades yet there is still an opportunity to identify research gaps, carry out necessary studies and contribute to the field of training effectiveness for both scholars and practitioners. In addition to learners' characteristics, there are many factors that impact training outcomes and its impact on overall performance of an individual, team and organization. The transfer

of training is an important research area and has a direct and significant impact on the function of training in educational, government and private organizations.

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