THE RELATIONSHIP AMONG TRAINEES CHARACTERISTICS, TRAINING DESIGN AND WORK ENVIRONMENT WITH TRAINING TRANSFER

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ABSTRACT

This study is an attempt to address the relationship between characteristic of trainees, the training design and the working environment and the transfer of training. 211 respondents from different positions in the Malaysian Royal Customs Department of Johore who have attended a customs course took part in the survey. A questionnaire was used as the main data collection method. Spearmen Rank Correlation analysis was used to find direction and strength of correlation between each dependent and independent variables. The result analysis showed that there are significant relationship between the transfer of training and all the independent variable mentioned. Characteristics of the trainees, that is personality, ability and motivation have a direct relationship with the transfer of training From the aspect of the training design, the contents of the training, learning principles and arrangement of learning activities, there is a direct and significant relationship with the training of transfer. Working environment, that is organizational support, information communication technology (ICT) and work place facilities, and opportunities to apply knowledge, skill and ability (KSA) gained from the training have direct and significant relationship with the transfer of training. The findings of the research showed that majority of respondents displayed average personality characteristics. The majority of the respondents were also of the opinion that the training design and the work environment are at average level.

INTRODUCTION

Today's organizations have realized the importance of training. Therefore, training programs are planned and managed carefully to ensure that employees who have received the training will be able to apply what they have learned and increase their work performances. Training program is seen as an organizational investment and not as an expense (Noe, 2000). Clements and Josiam (1995) and Adamson and Caple (1999) also support this notion.

The effectiveness of any training program is not evaluated based on the participants performance while attending the training alone but the application of the knowledge and the skills learned during the training to the workplaces. A training program is considered

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affective if it can change the attitude or behaviors of the trainees when they come back to work (Ibrahim Mamat, 2001). Therefore, the internalization of knowledge and skills are considered successful when it can be applied at the workplace effectively (Wills, 1993).

In general, training transfer is the ability to utilize all knowledge, experiences, skills and behaviors learned during the training at the workplace. Training transfer is considered successful if the training program increases the trainees performance while assuming that the training is related to their work. In this case, the training transfer also refers to the trainees ability to accept what has been taught in the course or training and transfer them to actual working situation and be able to retain it for a certain period of time (Baldwin and Ford, 1988; Foxon, 1993; Elangovan and Karakowsky, 1999).

Unsuccessful training program is usually caused by many factors. Among the factors is non-transfer of training among trainees. Baldwin and Ford (1988) summarize three criteria that influence the training transfer, which are trainees characteristics, training design and work environment. Foxon (1993) is in the opinion that there are two factors called hindrance factors and supportive factors that influence the training transfer. Elangovan and Karakowsky (1999), on the other hand, emphasize more on the individual factor and organizational environment as major influence of the transfer of training.

This study examined the relationship among the factors and the transfer of training among trainees who were Customs officers from various position who attended the Customs training program organized by Malaysian Royal Customs Department.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Dynamic organization will always assume that supervision and implementation of training program for their workers as an investment, with hope that the workers performance will increase. Asa return of this investment, these workers are hoped to contribute to the organizational excellence and productivity.

Based on the study conducted by Broad and Newston (1992), majority of organizations wasted their money when conducting the training programs. The notion that training is a waste is caused by the failure of trainees to apply what they have learned during the training. Simply put, the transfer of learning does not happen in the organization. In reality, transfer of training has very positive effects in the context of organization performance. However, there are few factors that complicate the transfer of training process in the organization.

This scenario is aligned with Dessler's view (1997) that training is regarded as a waste if the training program is unable to change the trainees attitude at the workplace. Wills (1993) also concludes that transfer of training should be given a serious attention in the organizations.

Baldwin and Ford (1988) acknowledge the fact that there is an obstruction for transfer of training to happen. The view is also shared with Goldstein (1993) who concludes that it is an acceptable fact that many training received by workers fail to be transferred to their actual working places. Therefore, issues that need to be analyzed are the factors that contribute to the weaknesses and ineffectiveness of the transfer of training to the workplace.

The view given by Ford and Weissbein (1997) on ineffective transfer of training is very interesting since their study showed that there are four factors that hinder transfer of training. The first factors is how the criteria of transfer of training is defined and measured. Secondly, level of evaluation on the training process complexities. Third is the weakness of the conceptual model of trainees characteristics and finally the characteristics of the working environment. Tannenbaum and Yuki (1992) shared the same opinion with other researchers in that these factors are contributors to the transfer of training.

Mumford (1986) describes the relationship between failure to transfer training with trainees characteristics, training design and work environment as agreed by others such as Goldstein (1993) and Leifer and Newstrom (1980). A classical research by Mumford (1986) showed that the factors mentioned contributed to the obstruction in the transfer of training process. This has been acknowledged by Baldwin and Ford (1988) who have later on came up with their own model called Model of Transfer of Training Process.

It seems that the debates on the transfer of training concepts have been an ongoing issue among human resource management practitioners and educationists. Even though the training is regarded as an investment there in no assurance that the investment will give a positive and equitable return to the organizations. Nevertheless, organizations still provide increasing fund to ensure that training programs can be implemented with hope that the training will give positive effects to the organizations.

The Royal Customs Department of Malaysia which was studied in this research has planned and organized its own training programs to fulfill its needs to face the changes and development of the borderless market. The question is how far the customs officers who had attended training are able to transfer what they have learned at their working places?

Another issue arises is that why many similar trainings are conducted repeatedly by department even though many officers have attended them before. Are the officers who had attended the program just come to attend the training session and later on did not utilise the knowledge, skills and attitudes in their jobs? Is this an indicator that transfer of training is very minimal or does not happen at all? If the transfer of training is not effective, are the trainees characteristics the factor that cause the failure of the transfer of training? Apart from this, is the training design or the working environment also contributors to the effectiveness of transfer of training?

Until today, there was no research done on the transfer of training and its relationships with the trainees characteristics, training design and work environment in the organizations. Therefore, this research is aimed to study the relationships among the characteristics of trainees, training design and work environment with the transfer of training at the Royal Customs Department of Malaysia.

Accordingly, this research are hoped to answer the following research questions:

i) Is there any relationship between the trainees characteristics and the transfer of training?
ii) Is there any relationship between the training design and the transfer of training?
iii) Is there any relationship between the work environment and the transfer of training?

The research hypothesis are as follows:

i) H_o: There is no significant relationship between the trainees characteristics and the transfer of training?

   H_a: There is significant relationship between the trainees characteristics and the transfer of training?

ii) H_o: There is no significant relationship between the training design and the transfer of training?

   H_a: There is significant relationship between the training design and the transfer of training?

iii) H_o: There is no significant relationship between the work environment and the transfer of training?

   H_a: There is significant relationship between the work environment and the transfer of training?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on the model developed by Baldwin and Ford (1988), who preferred the research on the transfer training concluded that there are three important factors that influence the transfer of training process. The first is the characteristics of the trainees which refer to their abilities, motivations and personality. Secondly is the training design which combines learning techniques and principles, learning activities sequences and training contents. The third factor is the work environment that covers management support and opportunities to apply what they have learned during training in real working places. The transfer of training will not exist if trainees have negative attitudes not only when

attending the training but also after attending the training. That is why it is really important to choose trainees who are willing and suitable to attend training programs so that the transfer of training can take place effectively and successfully.

A study by Ford *et al.* (1992) on 180 graduates and supervisors who attended military technical training on the theoretical and practical aspects of transfer of training found that the conflict of principles in applying the training as major reason that affect the training transfer. The conflict of principles refer to the presence of contradict values, theories or principles which are learned during the training with the beliefs that had existed in the individual trainees themselves. This conflict deters the transfer of training process. This phenomenon if exists will affect the trainees efforts to the transfer of training or to apply the knowledge, skills and attitudes developed during in their working places become ineffective.

Eden and Shani (1982) sampled 105 soldiers who had attended a course related to battle strategies to determine whether there is a relationship between motivational factor such as trainers needs with the transfer of training. This study found that there was a significant relationship between training transfer and trainers need. Trainers needs and hopes cause trainers to strive to get many average score points. This study found that in term of effectiveness, about 73% variance were achieved in the learning test which was conducted at the end of the training.

The study by Carolyn *et al.* (1997) took 45 technical staffs who participated in the interpersonal skills training program as sample and measured their reaction three times. Based on the first assessment, 86% of the staff informed that they can understand the training and could master the new knowledge and skills resulted from self awareness and self motivations. Later on, the researchers made follow up assessment a month after the trainees completed the training. The findings showed that almost half or 49% of the trainees had successfully transferred their training to their workplaces. This finding is very important since trainees are able to internalize the knowledge and able to use them at the working place. In is obvious that the success factor for the transfer of training is the motivation factor aside from the similarity of the training environment and work environment.

However, study by Wagner and Campbell (1994) is very interesting since it raises the question whether skills learned from the external program initiatives can be transferred to the actual workplace even though external programs are a popular techniques used to train managers that handle training programs directly. This study found that the external program offer new training content and have the tendency to resolve conflicts at workplace. Interpersonal skills learned in the program can be applied to the working places. At the same time, this study brought a new idea that represents external training program or reality training. Reality training refers to the modifications of training program to resemble the trainees work environment and this will help to speed up the transfer of training process to the work places. However, Wagner and Campbell (1994) were skeptical on the use of reality training as not all organizations can apply it.

Donovan *et al*. (2001) gives a new perspective on the transfer of training by contending that the success of the transfer of training starts with the success of the training program. This study describes three steps that need to be present in any training program. The first step is to identify the training needs, the second step is to analyze the issue that can influence the new skills and the third step is to evaluate the training to ensure sufficient resources have been applied in the implementation of the training program. The second and third steps are considered as basic for the transfer of training. Although Donovan *et al*. (2001) advocates this principles, they acknowledge that work environment especially the management support as important element to ensure the transfer of training's success. This study recommends that managers and decision-makers of organizations get first hand experiences and be involved in the training program designing. This study also concludes that training evaluation plays an important role in determining the transfer of training effectiveness.

Carolyn *et al*. (1997) implemented last stage measurement on the trainees that have attended training before and found that 53% of trainees have successfully transferred their knowledge, skills and attitudes into their actual working places. This finding is interesting since trainees are able to retain their skills and knowledge from training for long term. From the organization aspect, this situation is favorable since the organization investment by sending employees for training is being paid off.

Cheng and Ho (1998) conducted an empirical study on 155 part-time MBA students in Hong Kong. The findings showed that there are two attitudinal factors (training values and training motivation) and two organizational factors (opportunities to transfer and reward for transfer) that affect the transfer of training to work places. The conclusion made from this study is that if employees feel that the training is valuable and they are also motivated, the trainees will participate in the training enthusiastically and when the organization management supports the application of the training to the work places by giving rewards, the transfer of training success and effectiveness are assured.

Cheng and Ho (2001a) observed and monitored their research from 1989 to 1998 and concluded that factors discussed throughout this paper are significant contributors to positive transfer of training.

To complete the continuous research, Cheng and Ho (2001a) examines specific parsimonious model to know whether there are effects on job involvement and job commitment in the transfer of training. This research showed that job commitment is positively correlated with motivation and the transfer of training.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research instrument of this study was questionnaires distributed among the Malaysian Royal Customs Department in Johor State. Correlation method is used to explain the relationships among trainees characteristics, training design and work

environments and the transfer of training. Trainees characteristics, training design and work environment are treated as independent variables and transfer of training as a dependent variable.

The research population was customs officers that work in the Royal Customs Department in the State of Johor only. The customs officers identified were selected from various positions. The research sample consisted of 211 respondents which was about 30% from the total number of customs officers in every station in Johor. Type of sampling used was simple random sampling and the sample was chosen from various hierarchical positions as defined by Customs Act 1967.

Before the actual research was done, a pilot test was conducted from 30 respondents. The respondents were selected from various levels of positions in Johor Bahru station only. The pilot test was done to see whether all instructions in the given questionnaires could be understood, details of questionnaires were homogeneous, the instructions were explicit and concise and to ensure that all respondents understand the research objectives. In the pilot test session, the respondents were given two weeks to answer the distributed questionnaires.

Based on the feedback, it was found that some questions need to be modified to increase understanding. The reliability of questionnaires used in the pilot test were tested using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was 0.82, and that fulfilled the standard reliability coefficient.

The data gathered using two methods which were questionnaires, documents and printed materials. The research used modified questionnaires from the previous research instrument developed by Baldwin and Ford (1988) and Broad and Newstrom (1992). Other information was extracted using secondary data which include printed document or materials. Data was collected from references and library researchers such as journals, previous literature and books in publics university libraries and public library. The reference was also done through web-surfing and the use of internet. Since the research concerned with Royal Customs Department of Malaysia, officials documents published were also used.

Two types of methods were used in the data analysis. Firstly is descriptive statistics and secondly the inference statistics and later processed using the SPSS.

The descriptive statistics methods used were frequency distribution. The frequency distribution was used to show the distribution of score for the trainees characteristics, the training design and the work environment. The Spearman Correlation Coefficient was used to see whether there were relationships among the trainees characteristics, the training design, work environments and the transfer of training. Guilford's Rule of Thumb was used to interpret the relative strength of relationships. The below mentioned formula was used to determine whether the relationship was low, medium or high (Guildford and Frutcher, 1973).

< 0.2	=	very weak correlation and no relationship
0.21- 0.40	=	weak correlation and weak relationship.
0.41 – 0.70	=	medium correlation and medium relationship
>0.71	=	high correlation and strong relationship.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Correlation analysis showed that there were significant relationship among all the three factors with the transfer of training at level of significant 0.0005. The transfer of training has direct significant relationship with all trainees characteristics which include personality ($r_s = 0.664$), ability ($r_s = 0.143$) and motivation of the trainees ($r_s = 0.405$). The transfer of training has significant relationship with training design dimensions such as training content ($r_s = 0.206$), learning principles ($r_s = 0.408$) and sequence of learning activities ($r_s = 0.408$) at significant level of 0.0005. Transfer of training has also significantly correlated with work environment dimensions which were organizational support ($r_s = 0.514$), technological and work support ($r_s = 0.308$), and opportunities to apply ($r_s = 0.514$). The research finding also showed that majority of respondents have medium personality. Most respondents also rated the training design and the work environment at medium level. Based on the findings, all hypothesis null were rejected and hypothesis alternatives were accepted.

The findings revealed a few elements that need to be given serious attention by the top management to ensure effectiveness of the transfer of training. 7.6% of the respondents felt that the organization did not pay attention to or given support on the transfer of training. About 21.3% of the respondents felt that they did not receive a fair reward even though they had proved their contributions to the transfer of training. In reality, reward is not only in the form of materials but also include verbal appreciation and certificates.

Apart from that, 13.3% of the respondents claimed that the organization did not support transfer of training program in the organizations. Furthermore, 25% of the respondents informed that the management was not ready to accept changes. Since the department would like to emerge as a respected, recognized and world class organization, these views are alarming and changes should be done by all parties including the management. This phenomenon will influence the effectiveness of transfer of training as all local and oversea researchers are in the agreement that management support is vital in order to achieve optimal and successful result.

All the three factors which are trainees characteristics, training design and work environments are inter related. Therefore, the transfer of training would not give any desired effects if only one of the factor being focused upon. There is a need to recognize the fact that transfer of training process need commitment, support and facilities to realize it.

CONCLUSION

The transfer of training is an interesting issue to be studied. Success and failure factors related to transfer of training have always been center of interest among researchers. This research tried to complement the previous researches. These research findings should have varying levels in term of the factors that influence the transfer of training.

The findings of this research showed that majority of respondents have medium level perception on all factors that claimed to influence the transfer of training. Even though trainees abilities were at medium level, with positive enthusiasm in the face of challenges and changes in the environment, the transfer of training can be applied effectively. The respondents were motivated to transfer the knowledge, skills and attitudes to the work places and this would also affect the effective transfer of training. Trainees personalities were also directly related with transfer of training.

Previous empirical studies showed that transfer of training will be maximized if there is stimulations and feedback during and after training. In this case, comprehensive training design that fulfills trainees need play an important part in ensuring effective transfer of training. Primary factors in the training design is related to the learning principles. The learning principles are the basic criteria that assist the success and effectiveness of training transfer. Sequence of learning activities is element that supports learning process and eventually training transfer. On the other hand, training content is a theoretical element that is closely related with learning principles. These three factors are essence of effective training transfer.

Most of the previous studies emphasize that positive transfer happens in conjunction with work environment of the trainees. Conducive organizational climate will supports training transfer especially in term of management support. The opportunities to apply and also facilities at the working places also play their parts to ensure successful training transfer.

To conclude, training transfer does not rely on any exclusive factors. It does not evolve naturally but need constant work, planned improvements, accurate and effective strategies.

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