

THE RESULTS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPERVISOR SUPPORT AND PEER SUPPORT IN TRANSFER OF TRAINING

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the importance of supervisor support and peersupport in the transfer of training with the empirical results. This paper is based on the paper (Maung and Chemsripong, 2014) submitted to the Kuala Lumpur International Business, Economics and Law Conference 4 (KLIBEL4). The previous paper proposed a conceptual framework to explore the importance of supervisor support and peer support that can upgrade the transfer of training in the private manufacturing firms of Myanmar. The present paper tested the proposed conceptual framework of previous paper with the empirical data. The present study covers private electrical transformer manufacturing firms in Myanmar. The results revealed that supervisor support indirectly related to transfer of training through the mediating effect of motivation to transfer. However, peer support directly related to both motivation to transfer and transfer of training. This study contributed to the literature of transfer of training to understand the roles and importance of supervisor support, peer support, and motivation to transfer in transfer of training and to fulfill the research gap of the country, Myanmar.

Keywords: supervisor support, peer support, motivation to transfer, transfer of training.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Because of the strong competition among the organizations, organizations make increasingly large investment in human resource activities (Grossman and Salas, 2011) Organizations realize that they have to invest in training activities (one of the human resource activities) to improve both the employees and the organizational performance (Bhatti and Hoe, 2012). The training programs can provide several advantages such as higher productivity, improved work quality, increased motivation and commitment, higher morale and teamwork, and fewer errors (Seyler et al., 1998; Yamnill and McLean., 2001). However, the effectiveness of training depends ultimately on whether the learned skills are used in the workplace or those skills are actually transferred to the real work environment (Chiaburu and Lindsay, 2008; Chiaburu, et al., 2010). Trainees must fully apply and transfer what they learn in training programs and training is not likely to improve firm performance if transfer of training is low (Saks and Burke-Smalley, 2014).

The importance of supervisor support and peer support in the transfer of training were explored by several studies (e.g., Saks and Belcourt, 2006; Zumrah et al., 2012; Chiaburu and Marinova, 2005; Kirwan and Birchall, 2006; Martin, 2010). There is a lack of empirical evidences in the study of the role of supervisor support, peer support, and motivation to transfer in transfer of training in one of the least developed countries (LDCs) context, Myanmar. The present study provided the useful findings for practitioners and researchers to understand the importance of supervisor support and peer support, to emphasize motivation to transfer, to create effective transfer of training, and to provide necessary intervention in light of the country context, Myanmar.

1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM, QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

To achieve the high individual performance and to promote the firm's performance, the private electrical transformer manufacturing firms have invested in human resource development activities, including training. However, these firms have not completely satisfied the application of training outcomes by employees or transfer of training. They also could not effectively emphasize the important of supervisor support, peer support and motivation to transfer to give trainees the ability to transfer the trained skills, and to reinforce and support the trainees' beliefs in their ability to apply those skills in the workplace.

Based on the previous studies, the present study used the integrated model of supervisor support, peer support, motivation to transfer, and transfer of training. The creation of successful transfer of training with the help of supervisor support, peer support and motivation to transfer is the expected outcome of the private electrical transformer manufacturing firms in Myanmar. According to the research problem, the two research questions were set forth:

- I. How do supervisor support, peer support and motivation to transfer relate to transfer of training?
- II. Does motivation to transfer mediate the relationship between (a) supervisor support and transfer of training and (b) peer support and transfer of training?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Promoting the knowledge, skills and abilities of employees through training is one of the critical human resource functions for all organizations (Hussain, 2011). For the effectiveness of training or the success of the training, trainees will be able to apply the new skills learned during the training back on their jobs (Kim and Lee, 2001). Thus, transfer of training or the actual application of training outcomes is an essential requirement for all organizations. According to the previous studies, there are several effective factors that can influence transfer of training in the individual and organizational contexts. Among those factors, the different results of supervisor support and peer support in the transfer of training were explored by several researchers. Thus, based on the significant impacts of supervisor support and peer support on motivation to transfer and transfer of training of previous studies, the present study tested the importance of supervisor support, peer support, and motivation to transfer in transfer of training.

2.1 SUPERVISOR SUPPORT

Supervisor support can be described as the extent to which supervisors-managers support and reinforce the use of newly learned knowledge and skills on the job (Holton et al., 2000). Most of the literatures of supervisor support in training transfer suggested that the more the trainees perceive that their supervisors support the application of newly developed knowledge and skills, the more they are likely to transfer these trained skills back to the job (e.g. Bates et al., 2000; Brinkerhoff and Montesino, 1995; Noe, 1986; Tracey and Tews, 2005).

Chiaburu et al. (2010) indicated that supervisor support has a significant relationship with training self-efficacy, learning goal orientation and motivation to transfer and also proved that supervisor support significantly influences on motivation to transfer. Supervisor support can enhance the motivation of trainees to use their newly acquired knowledge in the workplace (Hussain, 2011). In the study of Zumrah et al. (2012), if the employees receive the support from their supervisor to apply the new learned knowledge, skills, and attitudes on the job, they will be more motivated to learn and to master the learning content and can create positive transfer of training. Supervisors can create supportive work environment to give help and feedback on the employees' performance. Moreover, supervisors need to show their interest in the implementation of new skills and abilities by employees to build confidence of employees in training transfer (Lancaster et al., 2013). The present study tested the following hypotheses:

H1a: Supervisor support is positively related with motivation to transfer.

H1b: Supervisor support is positively related with transfer of training.

2.2 PEER SUPPORT

Peer support reinforces peers to apply learning on the job by trainees, to help trainees set goals to use the training result, to give trainees some assistance, and to offer positive feedback for the use of learning skills (Holton et al., 1997). The result of positive impact of peer support on training transfer was shown by Fecteau et al. (1995) and Hawley and Barnard (2005). Seyler et al.'s (1998) empirical finding described that peer support has a positive influence on motivation to transfer. Empirical research on the importance of peer support related to motivation to transfer and transfer of training has increased in recent years (e.g., Bates et al., 2000; Chiaburu and Marinova, 2005; Kirwan and Birchall, 2006; Martin, 2010). In the study of Hawley and Barnard (2005), peer support is an important work environment factor influencing positive transfer. Peer support shows the most significant relationship with motivation to transfer (Kirwan and Birchall, 2006). Trainees in a more favorable workplace environment with great peer support show the achievement of greater performance improvement than those in an unfavorable climate with less peer support (Martin, 2010).

In Fecteau et al.'s (1995) study, although peer support is positively related with perceived transfer measure, there is no significant relationship between peer support and motivation. Because of the lack of uniform results or the mixed findings of the past studies about the effects of supervisors and co-workers or peers supports on motivation and training transfer, more research is needed to understand the significant effects of these variables in learning transfer (Bates et al., 2000; Bhatti and Hoe, 2012). Based on the different findings of previous studies, the following hypotheses were explored:

H2a: Peer support is positively related with motivation to transfer.

H2b: Peer support is positively related with transfer of training.

2.3 MOTIVATION TO TRANSFER

Motivation to transfer can be described as the trainees' desire to use the knowledge and skills mastered in the training program on the job (Noe, 1986, p. 743). Additionally, motivation is a process that determines how energy is used to satisfy needs (p.502) and is seen as a future-oriented concept in which people expect the outcomes they received after applying their skills that will satisfy their needs (Latham and Pinder, 2005). Without motivation to transfer, successful transfer of new knowledge, skills and abilities will not appear in the real workplace and thus, transfer motivation is a key element in the training transfer (Bhatti and Kaur, 2010). For future investigation of motivation to transfer studies, Gegenfurtner et al. (2009) developed an integrative model of motivation to transfer training. They explored motivation as an essential requirement for the newly trained knowledge and skills to be applied on the job.

Motivation to transfer plays a critical role in the transfer of training process (Bhatti and Kaur, 2010) and it is trainee's desire to use the knowledge and skills learned in the training program in the work setting (Axtell et al., 1997). Seyler et al.'s (1998) result showed that peer support, one of the work environment factors, has the strong influence on motivation to transfer and the training transfer process. Similarly, motivation to transfer has significant relationship with training outcomes and can improve work performance through learning (Grossman and Salas, 2011). In the empirical study of Chiaburu and Lindsay (2008), Motivation to

learn and motivation to transfer are important for skill transfer and perceived training transfer is mainly predicted by motivation to transfer. Based on the Malaysian bank employees, Bhatti et al.'s (2013) study found that transfer motivation mediates the relationship between support, learner readiness, instrumentality, and training transfer. As a recent study, Wen and Lin (2014) revealed that there is a positive relationship between motivation to transfer and transfer of training. The present study focused on the relationship between motivation to transfer and transfer of training by using the following hypotheses. This study also tested the mediating effect of motivation to transfer to create successful transfer of training.

H3a: Motivation to transfer is positively related with transfer of training.

H4a: Motivation to transfer mediates the relationship between supervisor support and transfer of training.

H4b: Motivation to transfer mediates the relationship between peer support and transfer of training.

2.4 TRANSFER OF TRAINING

Transfer of training is the application to the job of knowledge, skills and attitudes learned in training and subsequent maintenance of them over a certain period of time (Xiao, 1996). The majority of training transfer research relies mainly on the Baldwin and Ford's (1988) transfer of training model, Holton et al.'s (2000) Learning Transfer System Inventory (LTSI) model and Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory. To achieve the return on training investment through transfer of training, the effective and efficient transfer of training strategies should be considered by the organizations as an essential requirement for training programs (Nijman et al., 2006). Among the empirical studies, the significantly and severely cited transfer of training model is the Baldwin and Ford (1988) model. This model proposes a theoretical framework to conduct research on training transfer and provides a critical analysis of the existing transfer literature and suggests directions for future research. Holton et al.'s (2000) Learning Transfer System Inventory (LTSI) model is also significantly applied by several researchers to explain the importance of training transfer in different organizations (Khasawneh et al., 2006; Yamkovenko et al., 2007; Devos et al., 2007; Yaghi et al., 2008).

Kontoghiorghes (2004) attempted to examine the validation of a new systemic model of learning transfer with work environment variables. The results showed that organizational environment factors have significant impact on individual or organizational performance and have a moderation effect on successful training transfer. Burke and Hutchins (2008) proposed a transfer model and their study reported that supervisor support, coaching and opportunities to practice new skills and knowledge are the best practices in training transfer. If employees can apply their new skills more immediately in the real work environment, the increased level of motivation and training transfer will be clearly demonstrated (Vo and Hannif, 2012). In this study, supervisor support, peer support and motivation to transfer were selected to demonstrate their positive relationship with transfer of training to create successful application of training outcomes and to gain high performance for the organizations.

3. RESEARCH INSTRUMENT, KEY RESPONDENTS AND SAMPLE FIRMS

Questionnaires were used to collect the primary data. Questionnaire was prepared in English version and then translated into local language; in this case, Myanmar language was used for the convenience of respondents. Except for the general information about the employees, all variables were measured with twenty-two five-point Likert scale items. Four hundred employees who attended the training program(s) in year 2013 were randomly selected as the respondents who were from the private electrical transformer manufacturing firms of the Yangon region, Myanmar. A total of 350 valid questionnaires were included in the analysis. According to the personal data, 67.1 per cent of the respondents were male. 30.6 per cent and 36.9 per cent were aged between 18 and 23 years and between 24 and 29 years respectively. 42.6 per cent held a high school degree and more than one-third of the respondents (35.1 per cent) held a university degree. 45.7 per cent of respondents had the work experience between 0-2 years and 39.1 per cent were the work experience of 3-5 years. Over 74 per cent of respondents attended the training programs at least 1-2 times in year 2013.

4. RESULTS

The proposed model represented a relatively poor fit to the data as shown in table 1. According to the recommendations of several researchers, including Bollen, 1989; Hair et al., 2010; Bentler, 1990; Schreiber et al., 2006; Libermann and Hoffmann, 2008; Yankovenko and Holton, 2010, the model fit was assessed by examining several goodness-of-fit (GFI) statistics indices: ratio of χ^2 which is the most direct and obvious test of model fit, normed Chi-square (χ^2/df), Incremental Fit Index (IFI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), standardized root mean residual (SRMR), and the root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA). A well-fitting model will have the χ^2/df smaller than 2, IFI, and CFI values that are 0.9 or higher, RMSEA value below 0.06 and SRMR value less than or equal to 0.08 to indicate appropriate goodness-of-fit (Bollen, 1989; Hair et al. 2010; Williams et al. 2009; Chiaburu et al., 2010; Zumrah et al., 2012). Model fit statistics are presented in Table 1. Mean, standard deviation, reliability estimates, and correlation matrix of all variables are shown in table 2.

Table 1: Models and fit statistics

Models	χ^2	df	IFI	CFI	SRMR	RMSEA
Proposed model	903.91	204	0.93	0.93	0.15	0.09
Revised model	170.45	143	1.00	1.00	0.04	0.02

df = degree of freedom, IFI = incremental fit index, CFI = comparative fit index; NNFI = non-normed fit index; SRMR = standardized root-mean-square residual; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation.

Table 2: Means, standard deviations, reliability estimates, and correlation matrix

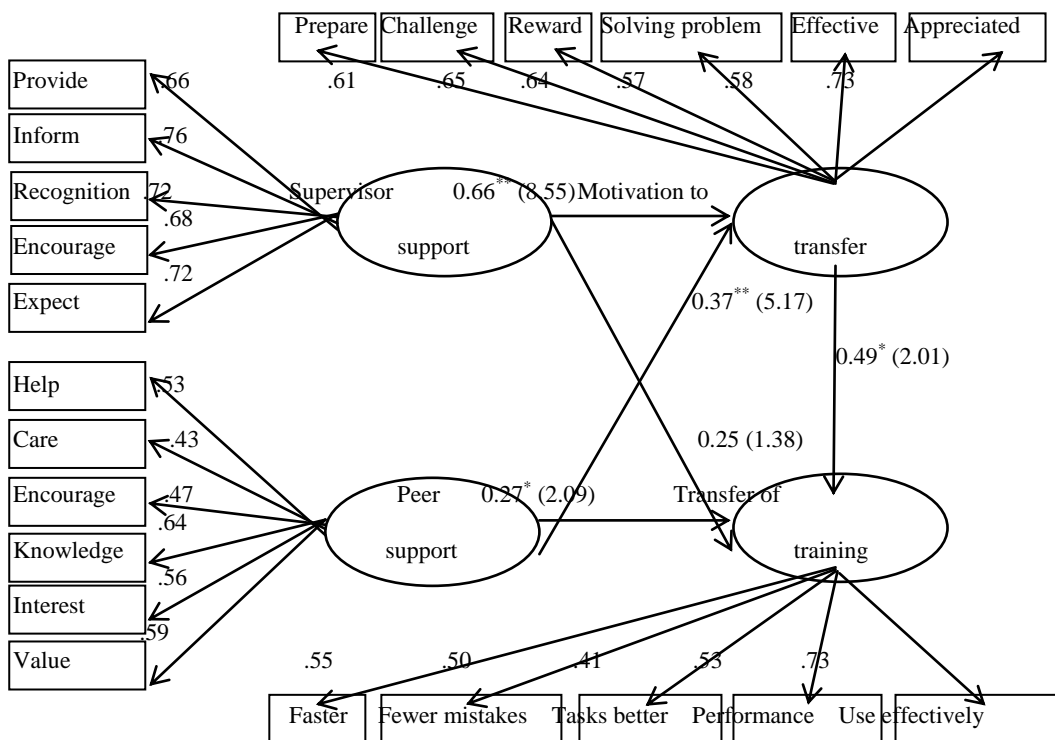
Variables	Mean	SD	SS	PS	MT	TOT	Alpha	Item
SS	4.23	.506	-				.814	5
PS	4.32	.357	.54**	-			.727	6
MT	4.21	.450	.77**	.61**	-		.799	6
TOT	4.31	.351	.60**	.62**	.70**	-	.724	5

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

SD = Standard deviation; SS = supervisor support; PS = peer support; MT = motivation to transfer; TOT = transfer of training

Baron and Kenny's (1986) three conditions for mediation were used to test the mediating effect of motivation to transfer: (a) the independent variable must affect the mediator in the first condition; (b) the independent variable affect the dependent variable in the second condition; (c) the mediator must affect the dependent variable in the third condition. Perfect mediation holds if the independent variable has no effect when the mediator is controlled (Baron and Kenny, 1986, p. 1177). The final results are presented in figure 1.

Figure 1: Hypothesized model with final results (t value in bracket)



*P < .01; **p < 0.5

The results of the direct and indirect effects of supervisor support, peer support and motivation to transfer on transfer of training are shown in table 3.

Table 3: Summary of effects

	Motivation to transfer			Transfer of training		
	Direct	Indirect	Total	Direct	Indirect	Total
Supervisor support	0.66	-	0.66	0.25	0.32	0.57
Peer support	0.37	-	0.37	0.27	0.18	0.45
Motivation to transfer	-	-	-	0.49	-	0.49

Accordingly, supervisor support had a strong direct effect on motivation to transfer ($\gamma = 0.66, p < .01$), supporting hypothesis 1a. However, the effect of supervisor support on transfer of training was nonsignificant ($t = 1.38$). The result did not support hypothesis 1b. The effect of peer support on motivation to transfer was significant ($\gamma = 0.37, p < .01$). The result supported hypothesis 2a. Moreover, peer support directly influenced on transfer of training ($\gamma = 0.27, p < .05$), supporting hypothesis 2b. The path of the relationship between motivation to transfer and transfer of training was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.49, p < .05$). Thus, hypothesis 3 was completely supported. According to the results, supervisor support had indirect effect on transfer of training through motivation to transfer. This indirect relationship from supervisor support to transfer of training through motivation to transfer revealed that motivation to transfer fully mediated the relationship between supervisor support and transfer of training. The result supported hypothesis 4a. Because of the significant relationship between (a) peer support and motivation to transfer, and (b) peer support and transfer of training, motivation to transfer partially mediated the relationship between peer support and transfer of training. This result partially support hypothesis 4b.

5. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

To explore the importance of supervisor support, peer support, and the direct and indirect relationships among supervisor support, peer support, motivation to transfer and transfer of training were the main objectives of this study. Firstly, the results revealed that supervisor support directly related to motivation to transfer and motivation to transfer also directly related to transfer of training. The employees believed that supervisor support can create effective motivation to transfer strategies to promote employees' behavior to apply or to transfer the learned skills in the real workplace. Employees will be more motivated to transfer their skills with favorable supervisor support. The results of these relationships fully supported the previous findings (e.g. Chiaburu et al., 2010; Hussain, 2011) which explored the importance of supervisor support and motivation to transfer in the transfer of training process.

On the other hand, this study explored the nonsignificant relationship between supervisor support and transfer of training. It means that supervisor support indirectly related to transfer of training through the mediating effect of motivation to transfer. Like the unexpected results of Velada et al. (2007), Manju and Suresh (2011), and Homklin et al. (2014), the present study cannot explore the significant relationship between supervisor support and transfer of training. The important findings of previous studies (e.g. Hawley and Barnard, 2005; Homklin et al., 2014), which showed the direct relationship between peer support and transfer of training, were supported by this study. Moreover, peer support was significantly related to motivation to transfer. Some studies (e.g. Seyler et al., 1998; Kirwan and Birchall, 2006) stated the positive relationship between peer support and motivation to transfer. The present result was strong enough to support those previous results. Because of the strong peer support and motivation to transfer, the application of training outcomes by employees can be promoted in their job.

Because of the mediating effect of motivation to transfer, it played an important role in evaluating the effectiveness of supervisor support and peer support and in creating transfer of training of this study. Motivation to transfer can create the expected return of the firms or the application of training outcomes after the costly training programs, especially with the supervisor support. By emphasizing motivation to transfer by the firms, the positive results of the actual application of training outcomes or transfer of training will be fully created. More specifically, the more the employees receive favorable supervisor support, peer support and motivation, the more they will transfer their learned skills to their job setting. Thus, the direct and indirect effects of supervisor support, peer support, and motivation to transfer are important to shape the successful transfer of training and the achievement of high performance in the near future.

5.1 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study has some practical implications related to transfer of training. Supervisor support had a direct relationship with motivation to transfer. The result suggested that supervisors need to emphasize the employees for their application of newly learned behaviors on the job by motivating their behavior. The lack of the interest of supervisor about the application of training outcomes or the transfer of training and the lack of motivation will hurt the performance of the employees and the whole organizations. Not only supervisor support but also peer support is needed to be considered for transfer of training. Because of the direct relationship of peer support and (a) motivation to transfer and (b) transfer of training, firms should focus on the relationship among peers, the influence of peer, and the nature of their work. In this study, the nature of those private electrical transformer manufacturing firms was based on the team performance. Thus, peer support is a motivational force to accomplish the tasks more effectively. The interdependence of peers can promote the actual application of their skills to create successful transfer of training. Motivation to transfer plays a significant role in creating successful transfer of training. Therefore, managers, supervisors, and trainers must focus on the strengths and weaknesses of supervisor support, peer support, and motivation to transfer in their firms to yield the expected return from the training investment. All of these factors played a critical role to support the transfer of training.

5.2 LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTON FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

There are some limitations and suggestions which could give a better and deeper understanding for future research. Firstly, only supervisor support and peer support were used as significant factors that affect motivation to transfer and transfer of training. It is recommended that future research should determine the other factors such as trainee characteristics, training design, and motivation to learn which will have different effects on motivation to transfer and the transfer of training. Secondly, additional studies should examine the proposed model among different industries and service organizations in different regions of Myanmar. Additionally, this study used the perceptual measures of employees. Future studies should focus not only on employee

level but also on managerial and supervisor levels to gain different perspectives of respondents. Finally, the longitudinal study is highly recommended to measure transfer outcomes (Cheng and Ho 2001). Thus, there is a requirement for additional research that could use longitudinal study to detect the application of training outcomes in real work environment to yield a complete picture of transfer of training.

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