



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Human Resource Management Review

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/hrmr

Context-dependent accountability strategies to improve the transfer of training: A proposed theoretical model and research propositions

Rebecca Grossman^{a,*}, Lisa A. Burke-Smalley^b

^a Department of Psychology, Hofstra University, 114 Hauser Hall 135, Hempstead, NY 11549, United States

^b Department of Management, College of Business, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, 615 McCallie Avenue, Chattanooga, TN 37403, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Training theory
Transfer strategies
Transfer of training
Accountability
Work context

ABSTRACT

The transfer of training continues to be a primary concern for organizations, yet important gaps in the literature remain. Thus, we extend recent work by Tews and Burke-Smalley (in press), which integrates accountability concepts from Schlenker (1997), along with Yelon and Ford's (1999) context-dependent transfer approach, to create a theoretical model and specific research propositions to help guide the field forward. We suggest that an accountability approach to training transfer, which simultaneously considers relevant work-context dimensions (e.g., skill type and supervision type) can be used to adopt appropriate accountability strategies that enhance trainees' transfer of learning back to their jobs. More specifically, by targeting variables that promote accountability – trainees' role clarity, ownership perceptions, and perceived control over their learning transfer – our work provides a useful theoretical model to guide scholars and practitioners in order to facilitate transfer in different workplace contexts. Implications for research and practice are also discussed.

1. Introduction

With continuous learning now critical for success in today's ever evolving workplace, the need for effective training interventions has become a prominent organizational concern. Reflecting this, organizations have increased their direct training expenditures and number of learning hours per employee (2016 Association for Talent Development State of Industry Report). However, both research and organizational reports suggest that such efforts often do not yield a sufficient return on the training investment (IBM, 2008). That is, although trainees may garner new knowledge and skills during training, they reportedly fail to apply, or transfer their learning to the work environment. In addition to application, the transfer of training entails the generalization and maintenance of trained competencies over time (Ford & Weissbein, 1997) – the primary goals of any training endeavor.

A wealth of research has long been directed toward addressing this “transfer problem” (c.f. Michalak, 1981), but important gaps remain. Although conceptual models (e.g., Baldwin & Ford, 1988) and organizing frameworks (e.g., Broad, 2005) exist, much of the literature is atheoretical and disconnected. Without overarching theory, it is difficult to interpret results of individual studies in a manner that enables the development of actionable interventions, particularly those that can be applied across different work settings, each with their own unique situation surrounding the training effort. Related to this, there is an assumption underlying theory that does exist that its tenets are universally applicable; yet not only is there great variance on attributes that can influence transfer

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: rebecca.grossman@hofstra.edu (R. Grossman), lisa-burke-smalley@utc.edu (L.A. Burke-Smalley).

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2017.08.001>

Received 2 September 2016; Received in revised form 22 June 2017; Accepted 1 August 2017

1053-4822/ © 2017 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

between organizations, but even within them, such contextual features are continually changing, prompting questions about the efficacy of generic recommendations for promoting transfer.

Hence, stimulating employees' transfer of learning from training interventions back to their everyday jobs represents a complicated, yet solvable, challenge for both researchers and practitioners. At this juncture, we believe the research gaps and organizational needs necessitate the advancement of a theoretical model that facilitates the empirical investigation of specific, actionable transfer interventions, while giving consideration to the extent to which their effectiveness may change depending on the particular organizational context in question. One approach to doing so is to focus on accountability as a mechanism for promoting transfer in different contexts (Burke & Saks, 2009). Specifically, our basic premise is that an accountability framework, couched within the transfer literature, can be used to derive strategies for enhancing transfer, depending upon the specific type of work context, since a one size fits all approach to boosting transfer is unlikely to operate across all situations.

Building on prior work, we contend that organizations can improve transfer by targeting variables that promote accountability – trainees' role clarity, ownership, and perceived control (Schlenker, 1997) – and that specific approaches to doing so should differ depending upon the type of skills being transferred and the supervisory conditions under which such transfer will occur (Yelon & Ford, 1999). Along these lines, Tews and Burke-Smalley (in press) presented a high-level, practical description relating to this intersection of accountability, skill type, and supervisory concepts. We extend their work by taking a deeper theoretical dive into these relationships, unifying them into a theoretical model that we position within the broader transfer literature, and providing specific guidance for future testing efforts. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to present a parsimonious transfer model and testable research propositions that are theory-grounded, integrative, and context-sensitive. This work should enable researchers to flexibly generate appropriate transfer strategies depending upon the workplace context under investigation, and ultimately, can inform the development of evidence-based, customizable interventions for promoting training transfer in practice. Next, we provide a summary review of the relevant literature undergirding our approach, and then articulate our theoretical model and research propositions.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Accountability

Training scholars have long recognized that the determinants of training transfer extend far beyond design features of the training itself. In their original model of the transfer process, for example, Baldwin and Ford (1988) identified trainee characteristics and the work environment as broad factors that also influence the transfer of training, in addition to features of the training design. Subsequent reviews have reinforced their model, delineating specific variables within each of these categories that are particularly important, such as motivation, self-efficacy, and transfer climate, to name a few (Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Grossman & Salas, 2011). One concept that extends original transfer models in a practical way is accountability – being answerable, or essentially, responsible for “performing up to prescribed standards that are relevant to fulfilling obligations, duties, expectations, and other charges” (Schlenker, 1997, p. 249). When workers are held accountable for carrying out a particular task, such as transferring learning to the workplace, they are more likely to engage in prescribed behaviors that enable them to adhere to performance expectations.

Outside of the transfer literature, Schlenker, Britt, Pennington, Murphy, and Doherty (1994) originally proposed and provided support for a “triangle model of responsibility” that delineates the processes by which accountability exerts influence on behaviors and outcomes of value. Underlying the triangle are three primary elements: prescriptions, identity, and events. *Prescriptions* are formal or informal rules, expectations, and standards that explicitly or implicitly serve to guide individuals' behavior. *Identity* involves characteristics of the individual, such as roles, values, commitments, and ambitions that are relevant to the prescriptions and events. Finally, *events* entail a specific course of action, related to the prescriptions, that has occurred or is expected to occur. Schlenker et al. (1994) propose the links between these elements create a sense of accountability, serving to bind individuals to situations and related courses of action.

As introduced by Burke and Saks (2009), accountability has a clear role in training transfer. When there is a clear set of expectations regarding the desired utilization and application of trained skills, the *prescription-event* link is established, which enables trainees to identify specific goals for transfer and an understanding of how to achieve them. The *prescription-identity* link involves the extent to which trainees perceive transfer to be relevant to them considering their organizational roles or personal sense of obligation. Finally, a degree of connection to the training event and personal control over transfer-relevant actions enables trainees to develop the *identity-event* link, with all three links culminating in the “responsibility triangle” which prompts trainees to engage self-regulatory mechanisms, spring into action, and sustain efforts necessary for goal completion.

Although accountability was not explicitly outlined in most former transfer models, many of the mechanisms for establishing and reinforcing accountability closely align with variables that are included in existing models (Burke & Hutchins, 2008; Kontogiorghe, 2004). In their model of the transfer process, for example, Baldwin and Ford (1988) identified three major types of training inputs – trainee characteristics, training design, and features of the work environment. These include such variables as self-efficacy, realistic training environments, and transfer climate, respectively, and are thought to influence transfer both directly, and indirectly through learning and retention. Accountability strategies typically fall under the trainee characteristics and work environment factors – that is, influences beyond the training design itself that can play a large role in the degree to which target competencies are learned and transferred. For example, perceived utility, or the value trainees associate with participating in training, has been identified as a trainee characteristic that is particularly important for the transfer process (Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Grossman & Salas, 2011). Research suggests that a portion of training efforts should be devoted to communicating the necessity and utility of training in relation

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7240137>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7240137>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)