



Identifying the Strategies of Learning Transfer to Workplace in Kermanshah Universities: Content Analysis

Sayyed Mohammad Reza Mostafaei¹, Fataneh Khakrah^{1*} and Faramarz Malekian²

¹Department of Education, Farhangian University, Kermanshah, Iran

²Department of Education, Kermanshah Branch, Islamic Azad University, Kermanshah, Iran

*Corresponding author: Farhangian University, Kermanshah, Iran. Tel: +98-9188589276, Email: fatanehkhakrah@yahoo.com

Received 2020 April 19; Revised 2020 October 08; Accepted 2020 October 10.

Abstract

Background: The persistent success of any organization depends on the effective and constant learning of its staff, as well as the communication of the learned material to improve job performance.

Objectives: The present study aimed to elaborate on the strategies of learning transfer to the workplace based on content analysis in the universities of Kermanshah, Iran, especially Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences.

Methods: The sample population included the universities of Kermanshah province, and the participants were 15 faculty members and the specialists in training and improvement of university human resources, who were selected via purposeful sampling. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews, and the validity of the questions was assessed based on the perspectives of the experts. Data analysis was performed using qualitative content analysis, and the findings were validated by member checking and peer debriefing.

Results: The strategies to transfer learning included organizational learning culture, development of participation and the teamwork culture, institutionalizing experiences and expertise in the organization, performance management, career path management, revision and modification of rules and regulations, creating opportunities to apply, improvement of scientific interactions, and promoting the status of training units.

Conclusions: By applying the identified strategies, universities will be able to increase the rate of learning transfer, which in turn enhances the effectiveness of organizational training.

Keywords: Learning Transfer, Strategies, Content Analysis

1. Background

Undoubtedly, making changes in employees is an important goal to bring about the qualitative and quantitative improvement of products or services; this process requires superior learning transfer to the workplace (1). Universities hold several annual training courses to change the employees' attitudes, skills, and knowledge; if employees are not able to transfer learning to the workplace, the effectiveness of these investments and credibility of the training is questionable (2).

Studies have indicated that the implementation of novel training and development programs does not necessarily result in performance change (3). A training program could be justified by providing reliable and credible evidence on improving attitudes, skills, and knowledge, which implies an important dimension of training and learning known as learning transfer (4). In the literature, the terms 'learning transfer' and 'training transfer'

are often used interchangeably (5). Learning transfer has been defined as the continuous and effective application of the acquired knowledge and skills through training by the trainees in the workplace (6, 7). In fact, the ultimate goal of learning and training is to transfer the learned material to the behaviors of individuals (8). Learning transfer has attracted the attention of training researchers and human resource development managers (9). Most of the studies in this regard have indicated that only 15 - 20% of the investments by organizations in training improve the job performance of individuals (10, 11). This issue originates from the complexity of the training transfer process, which is influenced by several factors (12). Therefore, further investigations are required to identify the unknown influential factors and determine the effect of each factor independently (13).

According to the model developed by Baldwin and Ford (1988), transfer is influenced by three classes of fac-

tors, including the trainees' features (individual factors), workplace (environmental factors), and features of the training design (situational factors) (14). The environment provides the conditions for the implementation of training (15). Even the programs that are effectively designed and implemented (i.e., acceptable performance outcomes following positive transfer) may fail if the workplace cannot motivate the targeted behaviors (16). Some of the studies that have investigated the influential organizational factors in learning transfer have been discussed in the following paragraphs.

Akhavan Kharrazian and Moqaddasi (2017) have confirmed the key role of the organizational culture in knowledge sharing as most scholars believed it to be a contributing factor to the transfer, distribution, and application of knowledge in an organization (16). Another study in this regard was performed by Ezzati et al. (2017) (17) to evaluate the current status of training courses and provide a qualitative model for improving the effectiveness of these courses in the Iranian National Tax Association. The results of the mentioned study indicated that the main disadvantages of the training system in this organization were cultural issues (authorities' mistrust in training and inappropriate attitudes toward training by senior managers) and the improper use of specialization in training (negligence of others' knowledge and experience and lack of job description on training).

Youzbashi et al. (2016) have also identified the influential organizational factors in learning transfer in the National Iranian Gas Company, reporting the most important influential factors in the workplace to be organizational culture, organizational environment, organizational support, organizational outcome, performance management, organizational justice, characteristics of the direct manager, participation in decision-making, learners' environment, application opportunities, and employee-job fit (4). Furthermore, Babashahi and Mohammad nezhad Fedradi (2016) have confirmed that the efficacy of organizational training is influenced by the governing rules of the organization (18).

In another study, Montazer Some'eraei et al. (2015) observed that the most important barriers to organizational learning were the tendency to performing the tasks using the old approaches, lack of support by senior managers, and lack of resources to apply new ideas and programs (19). On the other hand, the most important facilitators were reported to be the need to put the learned material into practice and the employees' determination and intent to learn. According to the findings of Heidari (2013), the components of knowledge management and training transfer had strong and positive associations, and knowledge sharing had the most significant effect on

training transfer (20). The results obtained by Mahfuzpour and Mojdekar (2012) in this regard have also demonstrated that job-related knowledge could be transferred more efficiently through teamwork (21). In addition, Khorasani and Molamohammadi (2010) claimed that the solutions to the problems of training units in organizations (including universities) are efforts to change the perspectives of managers toward training, so that they could acquire specialized views toward organizational training and its transfer to the workplace (22).

According to the results obtained by Cromwell and Kolb (2004), job participation and training transfer are positively correlated (23). In addition, the studies by Egan et al. (2004) have indicated a positive correlation between the organizational learning culture and motivation to transfer learning (24). Similarly, Carol Yaw (2008) and Burke and Saks (2009) claimed that learning transfer is an effective tool for evaluating job performance to maintain the learned material (25, 26). In a research aiming to investigate the optimal approaches to transfer training and propose a model for the transfer, Burke and Hutchins (2008) identified the 'opportunity to act' as an optimal approach to transfer, which has attracted the attention of trainers (27). Roussel (2014) also believes that the employees in a workplace with numerous opportunities to transfer learning have a higher ability to increase the level of learning transfer in the organizational environment (28).

According to the study by Di Milia' (2015), in addition to the support of senior managers for the organizational learning program, other factors such as peer learning, openness to new ideas and changes, communication, open relations, knowledge sharing, training, feedback, self-awareness, and self-confidence influence a supportive environment (29). Furthermore, Medina (2017) reported that proper goal setting in training programs plays a key role in the motivation to transfer training effectively (30). In this regard, Niknazeli and Sheikh Kheiruddin (2018) have stated that the organizational learning culture is an organizational variable that affects the transferring of training to the workplace (31).

To date, only few studies have been focused on the organizational factors of learning transfer as opposed to training and individual factors. On the other hand, educational organizations (especially universities) have not been extensively investigated by researchers compared to other organizations, while universities play a key role in the training of human resources. If the employees are unable to transfer the learned knowledge and skills to their workplace, the effectiveness of these investments and validity of training becomes questionable. In this context, the awareness of the organizational indicators that affect learning transfer in universities largely influences the in-

creasing rate of return to training investments and the effectiveness of training. It is hoped that the results of this study be used as a guide for managers, policymakers, and the authorities of organizational training in the universities under study, as well as other universities, to identify the strengths and weaknesses in increasing the learning transfer rates and planning to implement appropriate solutions.

2. Objectives

The present study aimed to identify and elaborate on the strategies of learning transfer to the workplace in the universities of Kermanshah, Iran.

3. Methods

This qualitative research was conducted using content analysis with an inductive approach. In this method, researchers avoid using preconceived categories and arrange for the categories that are derived from data (31). In our study, the unit of analysis was the theme, and the unit of context was the texts of the interviews. The field of study was the universities of Kermanshah, and the participants were the faculty members, scholars, and experts in the training and improvement of human resources in the universities. The participants were selected via purposeful sampling. In addition, semi-structured interviews were performed to collect qualitative data and obtain the views and experiences of the experts regarding the strategies of transferring learning to the workplace. The interview questions (four open questions) were designed based on the experiences of the experts in the training and improvement of human resources and dimensions of the contextual theory, as follows:

1. Which contextual factors affect the learning transfer of employees to the workplace? (specific contextual conditions affecting strategies)
2. Which progressive and deterrent factors affect the transfer of learning to the workplace in educational organizations? (general contextual conditions affecting strategies)
3. Which managerial factors accelerate or prevent the learning transfer of employees to the workplace?
4. What strategies help employees transfer learning to the workplace in educational organizations?

The mentioned questions were confirmed by the experts. Although data saturation was obtained after 13 interviews, two more interviews were conducted for certainty. In total, the sample population consisted of 15 participants. The interviews were performed in person and orally

in the university centers, and the average time of each interview was 46 minutes. In order to record the qualitative data with the consent of the participants and observance of other ethical considerations, the recording process of the interviews was carried out using a tape recorder.

In the current research, we used qualitative data analysis in the form of inductive coding, which is similar to open coding in the grounded theory. After coding the data, they were classified into a single category based on their commonalities. Finally, member checking (three interviewees) and peer debriefing (two professors and two skilled PhD candidates in coding the documents and interviews) confirmed the validity of the results of content analysis.

4. Results

In total, 15 key informants were interviewed (semi-structured interviews) in this research, and their characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Key Informants Interviewed

Variable	Number
Gender	
Male	11
Female	4
Academic rank	
Assistant Professor	7
Associate Professor	6
Professor	2
University	
Medical Sciences	3
Non-medical sciences	12
Degree of training	
PhD	15
Work experience	
< 15 Years	5
> 15 Years	10

After the transcription of the interviews texts, the sentences containing the key concepts were identified in each interview, and 187 initial open codes were extracted. Following the review of the codes and integration of the similar concepts, the initial open codes reduced to 76 non-repetitive open codes. The secondary codes were also classified based on conceptual similarities, and nine subcategories were identified as the strategies of learning transfer to the workplace. The subcategories included the development of the organizational learning culture, development

of participation and the teamwork culture, institutionalizing experiences and expertise in the organization, performance management, career path management, revising and modifying the rules and regulations, creating opportunities to apply, improving scientific interactions, and enhancing the status of training units, which were classified into three main categories of the mechanisms of developing the learning transfer culture, management mechanisms, and dynamics of scientific environment. [Table 2](#) shows the categories and the related open codes.

5. Discussion

The present study aimed to identify the strategies of learning transfer to the workplace in the universities of Kermanshah from the perspective of the experts in organizational training. The results of the interviews indicated that the most important strategies of learning transfer to the workplace in the universities from the perspective of the participants could be classified as nine components, including the development of the organizational learning culture, development of participation and the teamwork culture, institutionalizing experiences and expertise in the organization, performance management, career path management, revising and modifying the rules and regulations, creating opportunities to apply, improving scientific interactions, and improving the status of the training units. Other researchers have also investigated some of these components and their roles in learning transfer. For instance, Niknazeli and Sheikh Kheiruddin (2018) (31), Egan et al. (2004) (24), and Montazer Some'esaraei et al. (2015) (19) have proposed consistent findings with the results of the present study regarding the component of the development of the organizational learning culture, emphasizing on the role of organizational learning in the efficacy of learning transfer.

According to the qualitative analysis in the current research, the atmosphere of positive learning transfer depends on the learning organizational culture. Therefore, universities must focus on approaches to developing a learning culture at the organizational level and foster proper attitudes toward creating the environments that support learning and transfer. This could also be attained through a learning process as a collective task.

The importance of participation and development of the teamwork culture has been implied in the findings of Akhavan Kharazian and Moqaddasi (2017) (16), Youzbashi et al. (2016) (4) and Cromwell and Kolb (2004) (23). On the other hand, the component of institutionalizing experiences and expertise in the organization has not been explicitly studied, while Heidari et al. (2013) (20) have indirectly discussed its importance in an attempt to realize

learning transfer. The importance of performance management as a key component in the perspective of experts has been highlighted in the studies conducted by Khorasani and Molamohammadi (2010) (22), Youzbashi et al. (2016) (4), Ezzati et al. (2017) (17), Carol Yaw (2008) (25), Burke and Saks (2009) (26), Lancaster et al. (2015) (29), and Medina (2017) (30).

Career path management was another important component in the present study, which was regarded as a strategy to facilitate learning transfer in the interviewees' viewpoint. Some of the studies focused on this component have been conducted by Youzbashi et al. (2016) and Khorasani and Molamohammadi (2010) (22). In addition, Babashahi and Mohammad nejad Fedradi (2016) (18) have discussed the importance of the component of revising and modifying the rules and regulations. Providing opportunities to apply the learned skills in the workplace is another important component in learning transfer, and our findings in this regard are consistent with the results obtained by Youzbashi et al. (2016) (4), Lancaster et al. (2015) (29), Roussel (2014) (28), and Burke and Hatchins (2007) (27). The other components in the present study, which were extracted from the documents and research on training transfer and have been overlooked in the studies in this regard, are the improvement of scientific interactions and improvement of the training unit status. On the other hand, the improvement and development of multilateral interactions is a strategy adopted by most universities to achieve strategic goals, which is often clearly mentioned in their mission statement. Nevertheless, our participants believed that this issue should be given special attention, and various channels should be devised to communicate knowledge and skills sharing among employees through the interaction of their views, combination of ideas, group learning experiences and learning transfer, staff training to comprehend their interactions, reinforcing the communication skills of employees, and developing a culture of communication.

5.1. Conclusion

The investigation of the perspectives of the participants and analyzing the interview results revealed the great importance and high contribution of learning transfer to the efficacy of organizational training and increasing the rate of investment return to training. On the other hand, the analysis of the literature and perspectives of the experts in this study indicated that the evaluated universities (especially the universities of medical sciences) that were at the helm of community and individual health must critically evaluate the identified factors regarding the transfer of learning to the workplace, such as the promotion of the organizational learning culture, teamwork,

Table 2. Organizational Strategies of Learning Transfer to Workplace

Main Categories (Main Classes)	Components (Subcategories)	Open Codes
Mechanisms of developing learning transfer culture	Organizational learning culture development	Institutionalizing organizational learning culture, strategies to turn the organization to a trainer and trainee organization
	Institutionalizing experience and expertise in organization	Spatial prediction to exchange experiences, sharing experiences of universities on strategies of learning transfer to workplace
	Developing participation and teamwork culture	Creating opportunities for employees to participate in organizational decision-making and planning, attempting to reach consensus on solving university problems
Management mechanism	Performance management	Goal setting and prioritization, enforcing standards to measure learners' learning in real workplace, recording effectiveness of training courses in employees' training files
	Career path management	Correlation between provided training and improved organizational status of individuals, assigning more responsibility to learners after course completion (job enrichment)
	Revising and modifying rules and regulations	Reconsidering quantitative nature of promotion regulations, revising legal restrictions and eliminating cumbersome rules and hierarchies
Dynamics of scientific environment	Improving scientific interactions	Providing professional growth environments, improving communication between workgroups and research teams
	Creating opportunities to apply	Involving employees in implementing innovations as opportunities for professional growth and application of learned material, providing high levels of performance opportunities, creating opportunities to apply learned material in real work environment
	Improving training unit status	Communication between training unit and performance evaluation system, empowering of training unit capacity

attention to staff experiences, strengthening the knowledge sharing culture, setting goals based on outcomes, developing a monitoring system to ensure learning transfer, standardizing specialties, applying mentoring and coaching, identification of employees' potential, reviewing and refining the rules and regulations, promoting scientific interactions, and improving the position of the educational units in universities.

Acknowledgments

Hereby, we extend our gratitude to the professors and scholars who participated in this study, especially the faculty members of the evaluated universities.

Footnotes

Authors' Contribution: Study concept and design: Faramarz Malekian. Analysis and interpretation of data: Sayyed Mohammad Reza Mostafaei. Drafting of the manuscript: Mostafaei. Critical revision of the manuscript for important intellectual content: Malekian.

Conflict of Interests: There are no conflict of interests in this paper.

Funding/Support: This study was not funded by any person or organization and all costs were borne by the First author.

References

- Schneider K, Eshrat Abadi M, Shateri K, translators. *Transfer of learning in organizations*. Tehran, Iran: Tehran University; 2018.
- Mehdi R. [analysis of the human resources training and development status in institutes from the perspective of social responsibility]. *Quarterly Journal of Training & Development of Human Resources*. 2014;**1**(2):123-39. Persian.
- Leimbach M. Learning transfer model: A research-driven approach to enhancing learning effectiveness. *Ind Commerc Train*. 2010;**42**(2):81-6. doi: [10.1108/00197851011026063](https://doi.org/10.1108/00197851011026063).
- Youzbashi A, Abili K, Kharazi K, Sobhaninezhad M. Organizational factors on transferring effective learning to workplace: case study of National Iranian Gas Company (NIGS) [Organizational factors on transferring effective learning to workplace: case study of National Iranian Gas Company (NIGS)]. *QJ Train Dev Hum Resour*. 2016;**3**(9):21-45.
- AlSagheer A. The transfer of learning: Exploration of benefits and perspectives in the state of Kuwait. *IJMIS*. 2011;**15**(2):39. doi: [10.19030/ijmis.v15i2.4152](https://doi.org/10.19030/ijmis.v15i2.4152).
- Jun Choi H, Park J. The relationship between learning transfer climates and innovation in public and private organizations in Korea. *Int J Manpow*. 2014;**35**(7):956-72. doi: [10.1108/ijm-07-2012-0101](https://doi.org/10.1108/ijm-07-2012-0101).
- Passmore J, Velez M. SOAP-M: a training evaluation model for HR. *Ind Commerc Train*. 2012;**44**(6):315-25. doi: [10.1108/00197851211254743](https://doi.org/10.1108/00197851211254743).
- Yavari S. [Learning transfer]. *The second international conference on entrepreneurship and development management*. Qom, Iran. 2013. Persian.
- Rahimian H, Najafi A. [Analysis of training transfer models]. *The first international conference of training managers*. Tehran, Iran. 2009. Persian.
- Schneider K. Introduction. *Transfer of learning in organizations*. Cham: Springer International Publishing; 2014. p. 1-3. doi: [10.1007/978-3-319-02093-8_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-02093-8_1).
- Kontoghiorghes C. A systemic perspective of training transfer. In: schneider K, editor. *Transfer of learning in organizations*. Cham: Springer International Publishing; 2014. p. 65-79. doi: [10.1007/978-3-319-02093-8_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-02093-8_5).

12. Donovan P, Darcy DP. Learning transfer: the views of practitioners in Ireland. *Int J Train Dev*. 2011;**15**(2):121-39. doi: [10.1111/j.1468-2419.2011.00374.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2419.2011.00374.x).
13. Awais Bhatti M, Mohamed Battour M, Pandiyan Kaliani Sundram V, Aini Othman A. Transfer of training: does it truly happen? *Eur J Train Dev*. 2013;**37**(3):273-97. doi: [10.1108/03090591311312741](https://doi.org/10.1108/03090591311312741).
14. Lotfi H, Ahanchian MR, Karami M. Identifying non-educational factors affecting the application of training in the organization: environment and extra-organizational factors. *Organ Resour Manag Res*. 2016;**96**(1):211-36. Persian.
15. Grossman R, Salas E. The transfer of training: what really matters. *Int J Train Dev*. 2011;**15**(2):103-20.
16. Akhavan KM, Moghadasi F. [studying the effect of empowerment on knowledge sharing and designing the multilevel models to explain the impact of participatory organizational culture on knowledge sharing]. *Organizational Culture Management*. 2017;**15**(1):207-23. Persian.
17. Ezzati M, youzbashi A, shateri K. [Assessing the current situation of training courses and providing a qualitative model for improving the effectiveness of training courses (case study: State tax organization)]. *Train Dev Hum Resour*. 2017;**4**(12):127-48. Persian.
18. Babashahi J, Mohammad Nezhad Fadardi M. [Analysis of the causes of inefficiency in organizational educations of the government sector: A research based on integrated management strategy]. *Education in the Humanities*. 2017;**13**(2):127-44. Persian.
19. Hosseini MA, Montazer Someesaraee N, Yazdani S, Nakhostin MR. [organizational learning capability and the barriers and facilitators of its in university of social welfare and rehabilitation sciences]. *J Med Educ Dev*. 2015;**8**(17):93-101. Persian. doi: [10.18869/acadpub.edcj](https://doi.org/10.18869/acadpub.edcj).
20. Heidari H. [Evaluating the effectiveness of in-service training courses for Refah Bank staff based on the Halton training transfer model]. Tehran, Iran: Tehran: Shahid Beheshti University; 2013. Persian.
21. Mahfoozpour S, Mojdekar R. Attitudes of health care providers toward teamwork, safety climate and knowledge. *Adv Nurs Midwifery*. 2012;**21**(76):35-41.
22. Khorasani A, Molamohammadi A. [The shortcomings of education in organizations and the solutions that came out of them from the perspective of managers and experts in the field of education]. *Management And Planning In Educational Systems*. 2010;**3**(5):126-42. Persian.
23. Cromwell SE, Kolb JA. An examination of work-environment support factors affecting transfer of supervisory skills training to the workplace. *Hum Resour Dev Q*. 2004;**15**(4):449-71. doi: [10.1002/hrdq.1115](https://doi.org/10.1002/hrdq.1115).
24. Egan TM, Yang B, Bartlett KR. The effects of organizational learning culture and job satisfaction on motivation to transfer learning and turnover intention. *Hum Resour Dev Q*. 2004;**15**(3):279-301. doi: [10.1002/hrdq.1104](https://doi.org/10.1002/hrdq.1104).
25. Carole Yaw D. Tools for transfer. *Ind Commer Train*. 2008;**40**(3):152-5. doi: [10.1108/00197850810868658](https://doi.org/10.1108/00197850810868658).
26. Burke LA, Saks AM. Accountability in training transfer: Adapting schlenker's model of responsibility to a persistent but solvable problem. *Hum Resour Deve Rev*. 2009;**8**(3):382-402. doi: [10.1177/1534484309336732](https://doi.org/10.1177/1534484309336732).
27. Burke LA, Hutchins HM. A study of best practices in training transfer and proposed model of transfer. *Hum Resour Deve Q*. 2008;**19**(2):107-28. doi: [10.1002/hrdq.1230](https://doi.org/10.1002/hrdq.1230).
28. Roussel J. An adaptive perspective centered on the learner and the development of self-regulation. In: Schneider K, editor. *Learning transfer in organizations*. Cham: Springer International Publishing; 2014. p. 45-64. doi: [10.1007/978-3-319-02093-8_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-02093-8_4).
29. Lancaster S, Di Milia L. Developing a supportive learning environment in a newly formed organisation. *J Workplace Learn*. 2015;**27**(6):442-56. doi: [10.1108/jwl-08-2014-0061](https://doi.org/10.1108/jwl-08-2014-0061).
30. Medina MN. Training motivation and satisfaction: The role of goal orientation and offshoring perception. *Pers Individ Differ*. 2017;**105**:287-93. doi: [10.1016/j.paid.2016.10.016](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2016.10.016).
31. Nik Nazli NNN, Sheikh Khairudin SMH. The factors that influence transfer of training and its effect on organizational citizenship behaviour. *J Workplace Learn*. 2018;**30**(2):121-46. doi: [10.1108/jwl-09-2017-0080](https://doi.org/10.1108/jwl-09-2017-0080).