RedFame

Journal of Education and Training Studies
Vol. 3, No. 5; September 2015
ISSN 2324-805X E-ISSN 2324-8068
Published by Redfame Publishing
URL: http://jets.redfame.com

Barriers Encountered in the Transfer of Educational Training to Workplace Practice in Saudi Arabia

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Received: May 7, 2015 Accepted: May 18, 2015 Online Published: June 25, 2015

doi:10.11114/jets.v3i5.905 URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.11114/jets.v3i5.905

Abstract

This study introduces a critical issue in the practicality of training programs, not only in Saudi Arabia, but also in other developing countries where billions of dollars are spent on training human resources without evaluation of these programs on workplace practice and organization development. This study investigates barriers encountered in the transfer of training to workplace practice in a sample of 90 teachers and school principals, who completed the LTSI questionnaire. We found that although trainees have high expectations for training programs, they faced several barriers in the workplace: 65% of trainees showed limited transfer of training to the workplace due to a lack of encouragement from management; 55% had difficulties applying what they had learned; 45% of trainees considered their work environment unsuitable for transfer of training lessons; 72% faced a lack of cooperation from management; and 64% faced a lack of cooperation from colleagues. This study confirms the results of an earlier study on female school principals in Saudi Arabia. We recommend that the Ministry of Education limit such barriers by training managers and supervisors to be receptive to changes in workplace practice, to be accountable for providing better environments, and to be active in giving feedback on training lessons to employees. This study has implications in Saudi Arabia, and other developing countries facing these same barriers.

Keywords: transfer of training, training programs, workplace environment, education training, developing countries, Saudi Arabia

1. Introduction

Transfer of training to workplace practice is a worldwide issue; it is difficult to measure this factor, due to the many variables affecting transfer of lessons learned in training programs to the workplace. Many countries have spent billions of dollars on training programs, but only a small percentage of transferred learning outcomes have been reported. Past research shows that only 10% of what is learned in training programs actually transfers to the job (Georgenson, 1982; Holton & Baldwin, 2000). Although there is great increase in transfer of training in work place of training results, Saks (2002) indicated that training organizations rarely incorporate activities that deal with transferring training principles into practice, and when they do, these are most likely to occur during—rather than before or after—training. Saks considered the typical change in workplace practice after training to be substantially greater than 10%; however, this declines by almost 50% (from 62% to 34%) one year after training. Kupritz (2002) indicated that action oriented research is needed to investigate how workplace design might be effectively changed or managed to enhance training transfer. This approach moves beyond questions about the relative impact of workplace design on training transfer, to the development of workplace design interventions that support training transfer. Clarke (2013) indicated the need for a shift in policy-makers' mindsets, away from training, toward training transfer, in directing workforce development strategies.

2. Problem of the Study

Saudi organizations invest billions of dollars in human resource (HR) development and training with the expectation that their training investments will lead to improvements in organizational performance (Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency Report, 2009). Shenge (YEAR) concluded that effective training evaluation is necessary for the successful management of training programs, and for organizational growth and development. Effective training evaluation requires managers to think through the purposes of training and evaluation, the audiences for the evaluation results, the time points or time spans at which measurements will be taken, the time perspective to be employed, and the overall training framework to be utilized. Although HR managers in the private sector perceive that trainees successfully

transfer knowledge acquired through training to the workplace, the assessment of training programs in government sectors occurs mainly at the end of each program, before employees return to their jobs. Saudi Arabia spent 25% of its budget on education and training, but this education needs to be developed to reach international standards. The focus of employee training was on the reactions of trainees, how trainers delivered materials, how trainers interact with trainees, and the adequacy of the training environment. This study investigates barriers outlined in past research to see which of these barriers limits transfer of training knowledge, to improve the use of human and financial resources for development in Saudi Arabia, and to serve as an example for researchers in other developing countries.

3. Barriers to Transfer of Training Principles in the Workplace

Past research affirms that training knowledge transfer is affected by many factors, including those related to participants' characteristics, the design of the training program, and the work environment (Baldwin & Ford, 1988). These factors are direr in developing countries however. Al Rabea (2011) used the Learning Transfer System Inventory (LTSI) to determine the status quo for the application of training experiences to workplace practice, in female school principals in Saudi Arabia. She found that:

- Sixty-eight percent of school principals who participated in the study applied experiences gained from the last training program they had enrolled in and received positive results, while 28% faced difficulties when trying to apply experiences acquired from training
- School principals' application of experiences gained from the training ranged between 20% and 80 %.
- The trainee is not the only factor that affects training transfer. There are other factors that combine and affect school principals' ability to transfer training knowledge. Some of these factors relate to the work environment, others relate to the trainer or the training program.

Al Rabea (2011) also stated that barriers to transfer of training knowledge for female school principals in Saudi Arabia were linked to the work environment, including: lack of material and moral incentives that help school principals in the application of new experiences, lack of school principals' accountability to supervisors or management personnel after she returns from training, lack of sources of information and modern electronic equipment that help to apply the knowledge and skills gained from training, and lack of supervisory meetings with the school principals to discuss ways of applying new knowledge and skills.

Gilley (2002) indicated that some of the most common reasons employees fail to transfer knowledge learned include delayed application, fear of change, and lack of confidence. A lack of management support and involvement is another primary barrier to transfer, as are organizational policies and procedures, work environment factors, management practices, and training overload. Baldwin and Ford (1988) stated that training transfer is affected by many factors, including those related to the participants' characteristics, the design of the training program, and the work environment.

Alawneh (2008) stated that the participant is not the only factor that affects training knowledge transfer; there are other important factors that work together to affect a participant's motivation to change workplace practice. Barriers to such training transfer occur because of factors related to the organizational climate, program design, and personality characteristics.

Brinkerhoff and Montesino (1995) found higher usages of training programs, and a more positive perception regarding the forces that encourage transfer of training within the work environment among trainees who received their management support interventions. They also observed the effects of a lack of feedback on the impacts of training on the bottom line, and they found that this was made worse by poor communication between trainers and line managers before, during, and after trainings.

Al-Taani and Hassan (2004) emphasized the necessity of involving participants in identifying their training needs and in planning training programs. Khodran (1992) aimed to determine the effects of training employees in their needed areas on their changes in attitude and on changes in knowledge in the field of agricultural extension in the directorates of agriculture and water in Saudi Arabia. This study revealed that there were significant changes in trainees' needs, attitudes, and knowledge, and that there were significant relationships between some of the trainees' characteristics, their training needs, and their attitudes. No significant relationships were found between trainees' characteristics and their training knowledge. It was recommended that priority must be given to agricultural extension fields when conducting future training programs, taking into consideration the field of program planning"and evaluation. Al-Taani also showed, in his study about the efficiency of school administration programs as viewed by school principals in Jordan, that they were most efficient in terms of their objectives, but least efficient in the domain of planning. In the light of his results, Al-Taani emphasized the necessity of involving participants in identifying their own training needs, and in planning their own training programs.

Khasawneh (2004) established the relationship between the learning transfer system domain and the organizational

learning domain, thus expanding their homological network. Learning transfer systems explained a significant portion of the total variance in each measure of organizational learning. Results suggested that higher levels of learning transfer were associated with higher levels of organizational learning. Saks and Belcourt (2006) mentioned that the transfer of training research has increased over the past decade, but that only a few studies have examined transfer of training at the organizational level.

Velada et al. (2007) concluded that it is important for organizations to create environments that support the transfer of newly trained KSAs to the work environment. In other words, trainees should feel that they will receive the necessary support and feedback regarding their performance from their organization, supervisor, and co-workers in order to effectively transfer training knowledge. Sawczuk (1990) indicated that when the subjects' skills are directly related to subordinate development their weaknesses are more pronounced, and their negative perceptions are exacerbated by their managers' lack of skills and failure to recognize their developmental responsibility for their subordinates.

In order to enhance the application of newly learned knowledge and skills to the workplace, tangible or intangible interventions can be considered. The work conducted by Taylor, Russ, and Chan (2005) reports that transfer is enhanced when rewards and sanctions for using—or not using—newly learned skills is introduced as a post-training strategy in trainees' work environments. This research shows problems in transfer of learning, but for the case of Saudi Arabia, efforts should be made to overcome these obstacles to transfer learning to workplace.

Brinkerhoff and Montesino (1995) found higher usages of training programs, and a more positive perception regarding the forces that encourage transfer of training within the work environment among trainees who received their management support interventions. They also observed the effects of a lack of feedback on the impacts of training on the bottom line, and they found that this was made worse by poor communication between trainers and line managers before, during, and after trainings. Saks and Burke (2012) found that, consistent with previous research, organizations are most likely to evaluate reaction criteria and least likely to evaluate behavior and results criteria.

4. Kirkpatrick Model

The Kirkpatrick Model was originated by Kirkpatrick in the late 1950s and was updated many times, but is still a well-known model for evaluating training programs. The model consists of four levels and is used for evaluating training programs in many different social settings (Kirkpatrick, 1983; Mohamed & Alias, 2012; Arniyati et al., 2015). The first level is called reactions; this is the stage at which materials are delivered, and information is collected from participants regarding the existing training program contents and relation of the program to participants' jobs. This level indicates participants' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the training program. If participants are satisfied with the program, then they will probably apply their new knowledge and skills in the workplace. The second level is called learning; this stage involves the knowledge and skills gained in the program, and can be checked by noting changes in participants' behavior and attitudes. These two levels of evaluation are widely used before returning to the workplace, in programs in developed and developing countries.

The third level measures whether the new knowledge, skills, and attitudes developed through training have been transferred to workplace to reflect positive changes in employee behavior and job performance. The fourth level the effect of the improved performance of participants on the organization's business or environment. The third and fourth levels are concerned with transferred knowledge and skills, and organizational gain from the training program, after participants have returned to their jobs. These two levels, which are related to the transfer of training knowledge, are very important indicators of the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of a training program. Participants may have good reactions about program, and learn new knowledge and skills, but they may face barriers to training transfer at the third and fourth levels, due to workplace environment and other factors, which will be investigated in this paper.

5. Methods

The study used two methods; one was the LTSI survey instrument, which is widely used in research in different environmental settings, and has been applied in developing countries such Jordan (Al-Taani, Hassan, 2004), Saudi Arabia (Al Rabea, 2011), and other countries. We made some adjustments to this instrument to meet the objectives of the current study, and tests for validity and reliability of 0.894. The sample for this study consisted of 90 male educational leaders attending graduate school and training programs at the college of education at King Saud University in Saudi Arabia in 2014. Sixty-two percent of the sample had B.S degrees, 27% had Master's degrees, and one had a PhD. Most of the participants had 6-16 years of experience working in the field of education. All participants attended at least one training program, and 87% attended several training programs.

The other method used was an interview of 20 trainees; they were asked two questions:

- What are the largest barriers you faced in transferring your training knowledge to the workplace?
- What percentage of training knowledge transferred to your workplace?

5.1 Data Analysis for the Survey Instrument

Table 1 clearly shows that trainees had high expectations of the training program, particularly with regards to its ability to improve their performance and increase their productivity at work. Trainees also expected that the program would fit their job development requirements after training. Table 2 shows that respondents gave high ratings of the equipment, illustrations, methods, activities, and trainers used in their training programs, and that trainees expected that what was learned in the training program could be transferred to their jobs.

Table 1. Expectations of education leaders prior to the Training Program

Training Program	Mean	SD
Prior to the training, I knew how the program was supposed to affect my performance.	3.45	0.623
Training will increase personal productivity.	3.46	0.656
I believe the training will help me do my current job better.	3.56	0.620
I get excited when I think about trying to use my new learning on my job.	3.57	0.638
Before the training, I had a good understanding of how it would fit my job-related development.	3.37	0.733

Table 2. Expectations of education leaders after the Training Program

	Mean	SD
The instructional aids (equipment, illustrations, etc.) used in training are very similar to real things I use on the job.	3.76	0.457
The methods used in training are very similar to how we do it on the job.	3.71	0.527
I like the way training seems so much like my job.	3.72	0.498
The activities and exercises the trainers used helped me know how to apply my learning on the job.	3.55	0.584
It is clear to me that the people conducting the training understand how I will use what I learn.	3.24	0.707
The trainer(s) used lots of examples that showed me how I could use my learning on the job.	2.69	0.902

Table 3 shows that 65% of respondents indicated that transfer of knowledge and skills were limited in the workplace because of a lack of encouragement to apply what they learned, and 55% had problems applying what they learned in their work environments. These results show that there are serious problems in the transfer of training knowledge to the workplace in Saudi Arabia. Several barriers caused these problems, as shown in Table 4. Transfer of training knowledge to the workplace was mainly affected by work environment (45%), a lack of incentives for transfer (53%), a lack of cooperation from management (72%), and colleagues (64%). These results show that the training program is not itself the problem, but instead, the work environment is the main factor preventing transfer of training knowledge to the workplace.

Table 3. Transferred Knowledge and Skills in the Workplace

Transferring Knowledge and Skills	Yes	No
I tried but there is no encouragement	65%	25%
I applied what I learned but it did not fulfill my ambitions	7%	83%
I found problems when I applied what I learned	55%	35%
I did not apply what I learned for I did not make use of the program	7%	83%

Table 4. Barriers to Transfer of Training to the Workplace

Barriers	Yes	No
There is no suitable environment for transfer of training.	45%	45%
There are no incentives for transfer	53%	37%
Lack of cooperation from Management	72%	18%
Lack of cooperation from colleagues	64%	26%
Content of the program cannot be applied	6%	84%
There is a difference between what was offered in the program and my training needs	16%	74%

Table 5 shows other barriers to transfer of training knowledge to the workplace. The main barrier was a lack of accountability; employees were neither penalized nor cautioned for failing to transfer training knowledge to the workplace. There was a lack of follow up of trainees and a lack of evaluation of the training program's impact on job performance.

Table 5. Workplace Environment

Workplace	Mean	SD
Employees in this organization are penalized for not using what they have learned in training.	1.46	0.692
Employees in this organization receive various "perks" when they utilize newly learned skills on the job.	1.86	0.891
My workload allows me time to try the new things I have learned.	3.06	.748
If I do not use new techniques taught in training I will be reprimanded.	2.44	0.800
If I do not utilize my training, I will be cautioned about it.	2.79	0.746
When employees in this organization do not use their training, it gets noticed.	2.48	0.799
I have time in my schedule to change the way I do things to fit my new learning.	2.18	-934

Table 6 shows that colleagues are obstacles to transfer, for they neither encourage nor have expectations for the transfer of training. This may be due to the centralized system of education, where a manager is the main agent of change, and subordinates have no direct influence on helping their colleagues transfer training to the workplace. These results support the results in Tables 1 and 2, wherein management does not encourage transfer of training knowledge in the workplace, for they themselves lack leadership training, so that monitoring learning transfer will cause more burden on their behalf. Table 7 shows that although supervisors meet, discuss, and show interest in what was learned after training, they do not have practical involvement in assessing the application of what was learned, as they use different techniques than those used in training. Additionally, if trainees use what they learned, they will not get salary increases or other incentives.

Table 6. Colleagues' Support in the Workplace

Colleagues In The Workplace	Mean	SD
Someone will have to change my priorities before I will be able to apply my new learning.	2.37	0.970
I wish I had time to do things the way I know they should be done.	1.64	0.798
My colleagues appreciate my using new skills I have learned in training.	2.80	.0.902
My colleagues encourage me to use the skills I have learned in training.	2.48	0.887
At work, my colleagues expect me to use what I learn in training.	1.90	0.807
My colleagues are patient with me when I try out new skills or techniques at work.	2.55	0.917

Table 7. Supervisor Support in the Workplace

Supervisors In The Workplace	Mean	SD
My supervisor meets with me regularly to work on problems I may be having in trying to use my training.	2.97	0.761
My supervisor meets with me to discuss ways to apply training on the job.	2.95	0.700
My supervisor shows interest in what I learn in training.	3.06	0.748
My supervisor opposes the use of the techniques I learned in training.	2.68	0.872
My supervisor sets goals for me that encourage me to apply my training on the job.	3.15	0.873
My supervisor lets me know I am doing a good job when I use my training.	2.77	0.662
My supervisor helps me set realistic goals for job performance based on my training	2.70	0.973
My supervisor would use different techniques than those I would be using if I use my training.	2.94	0.976
My supervisor thinks I am being ineffective when I use the techniques taught in training.	3.57	0.601
If I successfully use my training, I will receive a salary increase.	1.62	0.873

Table 8. Suggestions for Improving Transfer of Training

Statement	Mean	SD
To take practical measures for the participation of education leaders in designing training needs	3.78	0.444
The enrollment for training programs should be based on criteria.	3.71	0.566
To apply measurement for the transfer of training	3.54	0.690
To design training programs according to the needs of trainees	3.76	0.547
To have feedback from trainees in workplace for the improvement of training program	3.61	0.596
To encourage trainees to apply what the learned	3.71	0.566
To evaluate trainees work before and after training to measure transfer of learning	3,64	0.626
Effective participation of trainees in training program	3.66	0.521

6. Data Analysis for the Interview

The interviewees stated the largest barriers they faced in transferring training knowledge as follows:

1. Low encouragement and support from managers;
2. Lack of incentives for transfer;
3. Managers are not accountable for providing better environments for transfer;
4. There is no link between workplace and training centers.

The interviewees stated percentages of transferred training knowledge to workplace practice at values varying between 20 and 30 percent, for they worked in different environments.

The results of the survey and interview indicate that there are many barriers to transfer of training knowledge in Saudi Arabia. The investment in training in Saudi Arabia is not cost-effective, not because of the training programs themselves, but because the emphasis on training evaluation does not take place at the third and fourth Kirkpatrick levels.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

This study indicates that participants have good reactions to training and gained knowledge from training programs in relation to content, knowledge, and skills needed for development in the workplace. However, when they returned to the workplace, they face barriers in transferring training knowledge due to many factors, including a lack of encouragement to apply what they learned, work environment factors, and a lack of cooperation from management and colleagues. The study reveals that evaluation of training programs is involved mostly at the first and second levels of the Kirkpatrick model. Barriers in the workplace environments are due to the lack of support of supervisors and managers in providing better environments for transfer of training knowledge. This may happen in centralized systems of education in developing countries where managers have less authority and responsibilities in managing their organization. This paper is limited in its ability to investigate these barriers, but it reveals other barriers to transfer of training knowledge in

developed and developing countries. The result of his study has implications for Saudi Arabia and developing countries; evaluation of training programs should be implemented at levels beyond the first and second in the Kirkpatrick model in order to get results from the training programs, and to be more cost-effective for organizations.

This study reveals that participants have high expectations of training programs, in terms of their ability to transfer training knowledge to the workplace; however, when they returned to the workplace they faced barriers in transferring what they learned in training to improve their performance. The barriers to transfer of training knowledge in Saudi Arabia are mainly work environment factors such as lack of manager and supervisor encouragement and support for transfer, no incentives, lack of accountability of managers for providing better environments for transfer, and lack of authority to apply training knowledge in the workplace. Managers and supervisors in the workplace have no active involvement with training centers or the training needs of employees before participants attended the training program. Burke and Saks (2010) indicated that accountability has taken the proverbial backseat in much of the published work on transfer, particularly in regards to accountability mechanisms for trainers and supervisors. However, the few findings associated with mechanisms of holding trainees accountable for transfer have been noted as critical to transfer by managers, and have been found to be statistically significant influences on transfer across the published studies reviewed.

There is isolation between instructional designers, trainers, and managers in the workplace. The emphasis herein was on the first and second levels of the Kirkpatrick model, but the third and fourth levels are still not well investigated. With more decentralization at lower levels, managers will be made more accountable for transfer of training knowledge in the workplace. The centralized system of education in Saudi Arabia has contributed to the lack of emphasis on transfer of training knowledge to the workplace. The results of this study affirm Al Rabea's study (2011) on the transfer of training for female school principals. Therefore, the measurable organizational benefits resulting from training are still in their early stages, in training programs in Saudi Arabia. Large efforts should be taken by the Ministry of Education to concentrate on transfer of training knowledge, by giving managers and supervisor more authority and holding them accountable for providing better environments and feedback about training programs and the training needs of their employees. This study has implication for limiting the barriers to transfer of training, building high levels of trust between individuals and work groups in organizations, and making the investment in training programs more effective and efficient. This paper elaborates on some of the key factors that can influence the effectiveness of training transfer in the workplace, and leads researchers to further investigation of training transfer in the workplace in Saudi Arabia and other developing countries.

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