

The Impact of Peer Group Interaction on Training Effectiveness: Mediating Role of Training Motivation and Transfer Climate

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Abstract

This conceptual article proposes a new research model to examine the relationship between Peer Group Interaction and Training Effectiveness. It is hypothesized that the relationship between Peer Group Interaction and Training Effectiveness will be moderated by conducive Transfer Climate and positive Training Motivation. The article begins with a description of the enormous investments done and the accompanying ambiguity in the field of Training and Development to establish the need for studying Training Effectiveness. Further, the theoretical background of each variable is explained in detail. Based on the recent studies in this field, alternate arguments are deduced and a new model for research is proposed. Finally, the plausible limitations of the proposed model is discussed and the article concludes by asserting that the variables in study are lesser focused but easier to implement in real time.

Keywords: peer group interaction, transfer climate, transfer motivation, training effectiveness

1. Introduction

Time and again, many studies have reported the increasing investment in training interventions and the consequent dissatisfaction with the outcomes of such trainings. American Society for Training and Development published its State of the Industry Report 2013 based on a survey covering 475 organizations in United States, which states that an estimated 165 billion dollars are spent annually on learning. A whopping 62 percent of this expenditure is spent internally, 27 percent for external services and the balance for tuition reimbursements. The average training hours have increased to 30 and the average cost per learning hour is close to 90 dollars. Despite such focus and investment, the benefits, both realized and perceived, are not at par with the expectations. For the last few decades, many researchers have studied the effectiveness of training. Initially, the focus was mostly on the content and delivery of training. But lately,

researchers have acknowledged the importance of effective transfer of training and the favorable conditions that augment such transfer. As mentioned in Burke & Hutchins (2008) the extent of the training transfer problem varies from 10 percent to 50 percent. Deficient results from training interventions and ambiguity in the transfer process calls for more focused research in this area.

2. Theoretical Background

The effectiveness of any training intervention depends more on the transfer climate prevailing in the organization rather than on the content and delivery. This is so because the effectiveness should be measured in terms of the implementation or operationalization of the learned skills and capabilities and not on the learning that has happened during the training. A trainee may learn satisfactorily during the training but may fail to implement any of those skills on the job. This is attributed to many external factors that are conducive or hostile, the sum of which can be termed as transfer climate. It can also be defined as the situations, observable or perceived, that can facilitate or inhibit application of learned capabilities and skills. Authors like Goldstein and Ford have termed a positive transfer of training as the paramount concern for organizations (Blume, Ford, Baldwin, & Huang, 2010). A positive and favorable transfer climate is an outcome of various personal and environmental characteristics. One key personal characteristic is the individual motivation to learn or attend the training program. Another characteristic is the opportunity to perform or apply learned skills, wherein the transfer motivation that a trainee possess mediates the successful application of skills (Gegenfurtner, Veermans, Festner, & Gruber, 2009). Motivation acts as an effective moderator in the relationship between positive transfer climate and effectiveness of training program (Blume, Ford, Baldwin, & Huang, 2010).

Motivation is defined as the willingness of an individual to expend energy towards a particular set of behaviors and in a training context this could be the willingness to attend, learn and apply skills. Noe (1986) states that motivation to transfer mediates the relation between learning and behavior change. Motivation is not just an individual phenomenon and in the context of team trainings or training done in groups, motivation at community or team level merits attention (Gegenfurtner, Veermans, Festner, & Gruber, 2009). Many factors play as powerful motivators, both at individual and team level. A few among them are team belongingness, opportunity to self-manage and participation in the group (Tabassi & Bakar, 2009). Participation in the group is a function of the work culture and conducive team environment that prevails in an organization. A supportive environment, without any individual effort by the trainee, prompts, facilitates and rewards transfer (Roberson, Kulik, & Pepper, 2009). A sign of such positive and supportive team environment is the multitude of peer interactions that happen in an organization. Such interaction can happen at any time, before or after the training. In most cases the transfer happens after some time delay and not immediately after the training. Hence it can be considered that the transfer follows such peer interactions that happen either just before or just after the training. It has also been empirically proven that pre training motivation to learn predicts the post training motivation to transfer (Gegenfurtner, Veermans, Festner, & Gruber, 2009). Evidence also suggest that motivation to learn impacts the application of learning by influencing the post and pre training activities of the trainees (Weissbein, Huang, Ford, & Schmidt, 2011). There are many activities that are undertaken by the trainee prior to and immediately after the training intervention. An inevitable influence on these activities will be from the Peer Group Interaction that happen simultaneously with these activities. Such peer interactions facilitate group activities. Thus Peer Group Interaction has an impact on the motivation of the trainee, both prior and post training intervention.

3. Proposed Research Model

Most studies in training and development arena are temporal and Baldwin and Ford (1988) called for a dynamic perspective to better understand the motivational factors of training transfer. Here is where the importance of peer group interaction comes. Numerous factors affect training transfer, of this, peer group interaction and support that happens before and after the training, brings in a different dimension to this dynamic perspective. As per the popular perception, training transfer motivation after the training intervention, decreases over a period of time. Support from various quarters can mitigate this effect. Supervisory support is a crucial one in this direction, but more effective and sustainable is the support from peer group. Peer group support in a negative climate can achieve the same degree of transfer as that of a positive climate (Martin, 2010). Support by organizational environment is a crucial factor that determine the transfer of training. Nevertheless, the role of feedback given by the environment cannot be undermined (Bossche, Segers, & Jansen, 2010). Integrative literature studies have confirmed that the number of ties or feedback sources, frequency of feedback and the helpful nature of the feedback will positively influence the transfer of training (Bossche, Segers, & Jansen, 2010). Feedback is the crux of a positive interaction in any work environment concerning the groups. This indicates that as the peer group interaction increases the motivation to transfer also increases. While making this argument, it is assumed that the nature of such interactions are positive and supportive.

Peer group support and interaction thus can influence the effectiveness of training programs through trainee motivation and positive transfer climate. Two different characteristics of a positive transfer climate are situational cues and consequences, of which the former deals with peer support and opportunity, and the latter deals with punishment and feedback (Grossman & Salas, 2011). Interesting to understand here is the method in which a peer support enhances the motivation of the trainee. It helps reduce anxiety and builds confidence, thus adding to the motivation and an augmented effect will be seen in scenarios where superior support also exist (Martin, 2010). A peer group network facilitates timely flow of information that can result in intermittent feedback leading to improvement in performance. Such feedback invokes self-assessment and can also give an impression of how important the trainee is for the group and organization. The proposed research model is given in Figure 1.

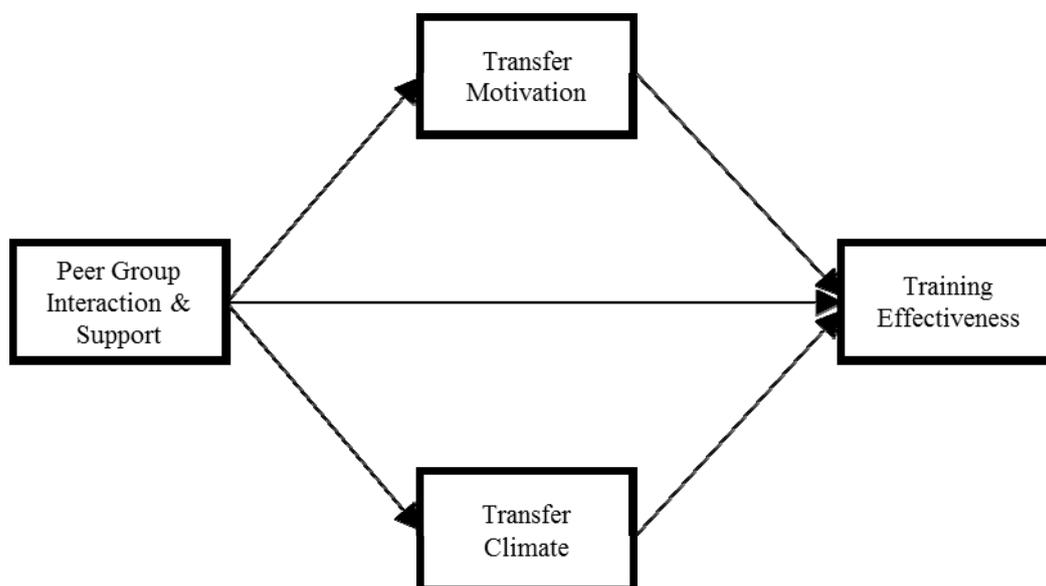


Figure 1. Proposed Research Model

H1: Peer Group Interaction is positively related to Training Effectiveness.

H2: Transfer Motivation mediates the relationship between Peer Group Interaction and Training Effectiveness.

H3: Transfer Climate mediates the relationship between Peer Group Interaction and Training Effectiveness

4. Limitation

Peer Group Interaction need not always result in a positive and conducive environment. This can be a battle field of the professional politics and rivalry that exist. If the nature of the interaction is not supportive and encouraging the influence of peer groups on the trainee may be counter-productive as well. This study has assumed that all the interaction to be positive and in a real time scenario the case may be opposite or mixed, where in the effects may not be visible at all. A further in-depth analysis of peer group interaction is required to negate this limitation.

5. Conclusion

The importance of transfer climate stems from the fact that an organization cannot increase the investment to improve the content and delivery of training on an on-going basis. A sustainable method is to create a conducive environment that can facilitate transfer of all the learned skills with maximum effectiveness. The cost required to initiate peer group interaction and the efforts required to maintain the same, are minimal and the organization reaps multi-faceted benefits out of such peer group activities. Organizations can evaluate training programs based on transfer outcomes and use it for performance reviews (Burke & Saks, 2009). Currently only 2.6 percent of the training budget is utilized for training effectiveness evaluation as most organizations doesn't have the clarity on how to evaluate training programs (Burke & Hutchins, 2008). The methods to create a positive transfer climate can be developed as a best practice that can be horizontally deployed across the organization.

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