

Chapter 21

Multiple Factors of Workforce Development that Affect the Efficacy of Training Transfer to the On-the-Job Performance of Public Health Care Workers

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ABSTRACT

This article investigated the multiple factors that affect the transfer of training of classroom instruction to on-the-job performance. There has been a lack of information relative to the effect of multiple factors related to the transfer of training, particularly in the area of public health workforce development. This study was conducted to investigate the multiple modalities that hinder or encourage transfer of training.

INTRODUCTION

Public health organizations worldwide are undergoing major changes in structure, size, technology, and human resources (Gebbie, Raziano, & Sterling, 2009; Kirkpatrick, 1998; Petty, & Brewer, 2008; Phillips, 1997; Yelon & Sheppard, 1999). These changes, along with moving from an industrial age to an information age and from

national to global competition require an upgrade of worker skills (Gebbie, Raziano, & Sterling, 2009; Swyt, 1995; Yu, 2008).

According to Meister (1994), employee skills, knowledge, and attitudes have changed over the past 20 years and will continue to change well into the 21st century. He wrote that, “three broad movements affecting industry: (a) flatter corporate hierarchies, (b) broader roles required of both workers and managers, and (c) a more culturally

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diverse labor force have combined to create a workplace unrecognizable from that which existed in the not so distant past” (p. vii). Human resource specialists will need to address these movements that are bringing changes in employee training and putting greater emphasis on the effectiveness of transfer of training (Foxon, 1997; Garavaglia, 1996; Phillips, 1997).

Workers and managers throughout American industry and particularly in public health are increasingly faced with the reality of skill development (Chávez, Turalba, & Malik, 2006). Skill upgrading is paramount to public health managers and educators (Petty, & Carter, 2011). Proper employee development will facilitate corporate success (Aburdene, 2005; Yu, 2008).

Meister (1994) reported that workers must make the necessary adjustments to maintain a competitive edge. These adjustments include (a) proper performance of the technical aspects of their jobs, (b) reaction to outside pressures, (c) meeting customer expectations, and (d) integration of new technologies. Rosow and Zager (1988) concurred, pointing out American industry’s awareness of the need for increased job performance and the resulting increased expectations in classroom training. Goldstein and Gilliam (1990) agreed, suggesting improved job performance through technical skill development.

Transfer of training is defined as the linkage of attitudes, skills, and knowledge learned in the classroom to the job environment (Newstrom, 1984; Wexley & Latham, 1991). Other researchers (i.e., Kirkpatrick, 1998; Milheim, 1994; Redding, 1990; Yelon & Sheppard, 1999) expanded on this definition by describing training transfer as the accumulation of specific problem-solving skills that are transferable back to the job.

BACKGROUND

The ultimate purpose for having training programs in place is to increase job performance (Camp-

bell, 1988; Druckman & Bjork, 1994; Wexley & Latham, 1991). According to Campbell (1988), transfer of training is a part of the phenomena of the classroom learning experience. Baldwin and Ford (1988) concurred by writing, “for transfer [of training] to have occurred, learned behavior must be generalized to the job context and maintained over a period of time” (p. 63). Kraiger, Ford, and Sales (1993) wrote that training transfer is facilitated by addressing such factors as the work environment and individual characteristics and their immediate effects on training outcomes. Clearly, the factors that inhibit or facilitate transfer of training and the perceptions of trainees toward these factors are critical components to effective training and increased job performance (Beirsner, Ryman, & Rahe, 1977; Petty, Lim, & Zulauf, 2007). The problem addressed in this chapter therefore, was to determine how multiple factors affected the transfer of training of classroom instruction to on-the-job performance. This chapter is based on original research conducted in part by Mark S. Farris (Farris, 2001) in an attempt to develop benchmarks for transfer of training of job competencies from the classroom to the job.

PRESENT PERSPECTIVES

Most studies have focused on the actual training experience rather than the transfer of trained tasks back to the job and task maintenance over time (Huczynski & Lewis, 1980; Petty, 1995). Noe (1986) concurred by writing, “the majority of applied work and academic research has focused on the appropriateness of various instructional methods, needs assessment, and evaluation of methodology” (p. 736). Researchers and practitioners have primarily focused their attention and effort on classroom training and have placed little attention on the transfer of skills back to the job (Petty, & Loboda, 2011).

Increasingly, organizations are experiencing problems because skills acquired in classroom

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