

## Multi-dimensional influence of learning organization and transfer climate on transfer of training

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### Abstract

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The purpose of the study explores the relationship among organizational learning culture, transfer climate and transfer behaviors through preliminary literature review. Conceptual model to link learning organization culture, transfer climate and transfer behavior will be provided for future empirical research. The review of the extensive literature review illustrated that work environment factor affected individual transfer behavior more than training design and content factors. Especially, the result indicated work system factor interacted with people factor. For future empirical research, transfer climate is posited as a mediator between organizational and individual variables and is expected show multi-dimensional influence on individual transfer behavior to conduct this idea into practice setting.

***Key words:** learning organization culture, transfer of training, transfer climate*

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### I . Problem Statement

Transfer of training has been defined as the degree to which trainees apply and generalize their newly gained knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors to their work and maintain the knowledge, skills, or abilities over a period of time (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Tracey et al., 1995; Ford & Weissbein, 1997).

Huczynski and Lewis (1980) developed a transfer model to illustrate the interaction of course content, individual motivation, and the work environment. Their model identified three training phases including pre training, training, post training. Baldwin and Ford

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(1988) provided theoretical frame work to view the transfer process as a systematic model. Three aspects of systemic framework include training input, training outcome, and conditions of transfer. They classified training inputs as combinations of three factors including trainee characteristics, training design, and work environment.

Recent research has consistently reported that the work environment can greatly influence trainee characteristics including motivation and abilities and opportunity to perform learned behavior on the job (Kupritz, 2002; Yamnil & McLean, 2001; Rouiller & Goldstein, 1993). Certain organizational factors in the work environment have been identified as facilitating or impeding transfer (Lim & Johnson, 2002). Tannenbaum and Yukl (1992) determined that aspects of post training environment can encourage, discourage, or even prohibit the application of new skills on the job. Traditionally, work environment factors affecting training transfer can be separated into two categories: work system factors and people factors (Lim & Johnson, 2002; Hawley & Barnard, 2005, p.66). Work system factors include items related to culture such as open communication style, resistance to change, opportunity to use training, and match between training goals and organizational goals. People-related factors include support from supervisors and co-workers, and availability of a mentor.

According to Baldwin and Ford (1988), transfer research is problematic as it focuses solely on the individual level of analysis. In terms of level of analysis, transfer climate research indicates that there are often reliable differences in other climate factors across workgroups within an organization as well as across different organizations (Holton III et al., 2004). Yamnil and McLean (2001) contend that trained knowledge, skills, and attitudes at the individual level are embedded in the social system contexts with broader contextual constraints originating at higher system levels (p.205). For example, organizations and departments within organizations can differ in terms of goal orientation, time orientation, formality of structure, and interpersonal orientation (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1969; cited in Baldwin & Ford, 1988, p.94).

However, current research on transfer climate is limited in that it has not attempted to attribute low frequency of transfer behavior to higher level of context such as culture and system factors. So far, most of research has exclusively focused on interpersonal relationships as antecedents of specific transfer behavior rather than on systematic and organizational variables (Kozlowski & Salas, 1997).

Therefore, the investigation of the relationship between organizational learning culture and transfer climate is expected to show multi-dimensional influence on individual transfer behavior in training transfer system framework. For example, the failure of training can be attributed not to lack of supervisor support but to lack of system connection to its environment to encourage continuous learning of its members due to lack of resources.

There are several researches to investigate the relationship between organizational learning culture and other variables. Bates and Khasawneh (2005) developed a research framework regarding the relationship between organizational learning culture, transfer

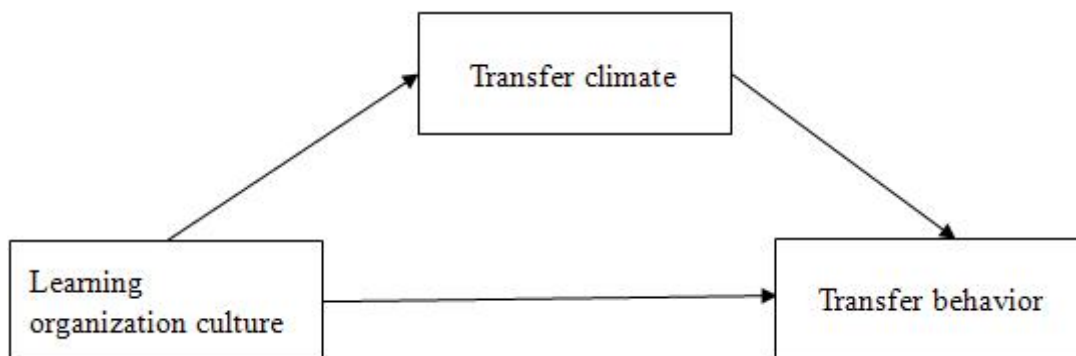
climate, and innovation variables. They used transfer climate as a mediator variables to connect organizational learning culture with innovation. Egan (2002) explored a relationship between learning organization concept and motivation to transfer. Egan et al. (2004) examined the effects of organizational learning culture and job satisfaction on motivation to transfer learning and turnover intention. This stream of research can be step stone to explore the relationship between organizational learning culture and transfer climate.

## II. Research Methods and Research Questions

This study addresses the following research questions. Using Torraco's (2005) guide for conducting integrative literature reviews, the literature will be examined and evaluated with the goal of answering the following research questions.

1. Among work environment characteristics, have learning organization culture exhibited strong empirical support for influencing transfer outcomes?
2. In terms of multi-level analysis, does transfer climate mediate between organization level variables and individual level variables?
3. How should future theoretical and empirical transfer research proceed given our findings?

[Figure II-1] depicts the conceptual model to delineate hypothesized relationships among constructs.



[Figure II-1] Conceptual Model

## III. Research Methods and Research Questions

### 1. Organizational learning culture and transfer climate

Organizational culture refers to the 'shared meanings and manifestations or organizational behavior and emphasizes the common beliefs, values and assumptions of organizational members (Kopelman et al., 1990). It is a consequence of commonly accepted assumptions and produces automatic patterns of perceiving, thinking, feeling, and behaving (Schein, 1990).

Compared with organizational culture, organizational climate can be defined as an individual psychological state affected by organizational conditions like culture, structure, and managerial behavior (Burke & Litwin, 1992; cited in Bates & Khasawneh, 2005). Climate is therefore not the work environment per se but the way in which people respond to it; it is the 'perceptual medium' through which culture and other work environment factors influence job-related attitudes and behaviors (Kopelman et al., 1990). According to Holton III et al. (1997), the work environment can affect the transfer of learning to the job through its transfer of training climate. The transfer climate is defined as a mediating variable in the relationship between the organizational context and an individual's attitude toward the job and behavior on the job. The transfer climate may either support or inhibit its application on the job. Organizational culture differs from organizational climate in that culture is based on beliefs that are shared organization-wide, while climate is based on what an individual senses in and about the organizational environment (Reichers & Schneider, 1990). In effect, climate emerges from aspects of the organizational context that individual employees perceive to be important and influential in their work (Bates & Khasawneh, 2005).

While organizational culture can facilitate or inhibit transfer of learning to the workplace like other work environment characteristics, organizational learning culture can be hypothesized to have positive effects on transfer climates out of its definition. Organizational learning culture encourages continuous learning and dialogue and inquiry to improve knowledge and financial performance (Yang et al, 2004). In that transfer behavior can be facilitated from the supportive climate and culture, these two constructs have many commonalities. Since learning organization concepts aim at strategic performance of the organization, it appears to be reasonable for the researchers to connect learning organization concepts with innovation outputs.

## **2. Organizational learning culture and transfer of training**

Although little research are known about the direct relationship between organizational learning culture and transfer behavior, some research illustrates a possibility of linking organizational learning culture and transfer behavior. There is a research to examine the relationship between organizational learning culture and transfer climate (Bates & Khasawneh, 2005) and there is another research to investigate the relationship between transfer climate and transfer behavior (Rouiller & Goldstein, 1993). Also, Garvin (1993)

defines a learning organization as an organization skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge. Goh (1998) contends that learning organization should have five core strategic building blocks including culture that encourages experimentation and the ability to transfer knowledge across organizational boundaries.

### **3. Transfer climate and transfer of training**

The transfer climate can influence the extent to which that person can use learned skills on the job (Holton III et al., 1997). The work environment can influence the motivation to transfer of learning to the job as well as an individual's ability through its transfer climate. Noe (1986) hypothesized that individual motivation is influenced by work environment characteristics such as perceptions of workgroup support and task constraints.

Kontoghiorghes (2004) included systematic factors such as job utility, career utility, training accountability, and intrinsic and extrinsic rewards as a training transfer climate in addition to supervisory and peer support, opportunity to use factors. According to his more systemic model, the significance of the work environment can be highlighted by the fact that nine of the eleven predictors of the motivation to learn as well as five out of six for the motivation to transfer model pertained to organizational environment variables. That research illustrated transfer of training issues should be dealt with systematic perspectives embracing other system related factors.

Tannenbaum and Yukl (1992) stated that there has been limited research examining the affects of the post-training environment on the transfer process. After their analysis, increased attention has been paid to the examination of how elements in the post-training environment can encourage or prohibit the transfer of post-training behaviors (Bates et al, 2000 Rouiller & Goldstein, 1993).

Huczynski and Lewis (1980) found the single most important factor influencing the trainee's intent to transfer was the supervisor's management style and attitude. Further, the authors found the organizational factors which inhibit training transfer were overload of work, crisis work, and failure to convince older workers. The analysis of Huczynski and Lewis is important in setting the stage for investigating factors beyond trainee characteristics and training design which may inhibit or enhance the transfer of training (Short, 1997). Employees who perceive that a training program is important to the supervisor will be more motivated to attend, learn, and transfer trained skills to the job (Baldwin & Ford, 1988). Supervisory support for training could include encouragement to attend, goal-setting activities, reinforcement activities, and modeling of behaviors (Russ-Eft, 2002).

Rouiller and Goldstein (1993) found that when manager trainees were assigned to business units that had a more positive transfer climate, they were rated as better

performers of the behaviors previously learned in training. Xiao (1996) extended the work of transfer climate by looking beyond the western cultural context. His analysis showed that organizational variables that encourage application of knowledge, skills, and abilities promote the transfer of training. Xiao concluded that training develops only potential capacity in individuals, and that organizational factors either facilitate or inhibit the use of learned behavior on the job.

Though transfer climate consists of many factors, it is generally accepted in the transfer climate literature that interpersonal factors played more important role than any other factors such as constraints, opportunity to use, resistance-openness to change (Bates et al., 2000; Lim & Johnson, 2002). Among interpersonal factors, supervisory support has been established in the literature as a most critical factor influencing the entire transfer process (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Russ-Eft, 2002; Lim & Johnson, 2002; Hawley & Barnard, 2005). Although past research has focused more on the importance of supervisor support and training transfer, increases in the use of teamwork on the job are calling attention to the importance of peer support or coworker support on training transfer (Hawley & Barnard, 2005; Short, 1997). Supervisor and peer usually help trainee to set learning goals, gives assistance, and offers positive feedback in work settings. Depending on the perception of work environment, trainee can be encouraged or discouraged to use learned skills on transfer environment. For example, employees working in similar jobs in different departments or divisions may experience different levels of support related to using newly acquired competence in the job situation (Washington, 2002).

Lim and Johnson (2005) classified work environment factors into two factors: organizational level and individual level factors. In the participant interviews, the most influential organizational level factors were organizational commitment for training, the match between trainee's department goals and the new learning, and a supportive and open communication climate. It is remarkable that this study include systematic and cultural variables as organizational level factors in addition to interpersonal variables.

In case of individual level work environment factors, three factors appeared to influence transfer more than others; discussion with supervisors to use the new learning, the supervisor's involvement or familiarization with the training, and receiving positive feedback from the supervisor. It is important to note that the three most important factors relate to the trainees' immediate supervisor.

## **IV. Instrumentation**

### **1. Measure of Organizational learning culture: DLOQ**

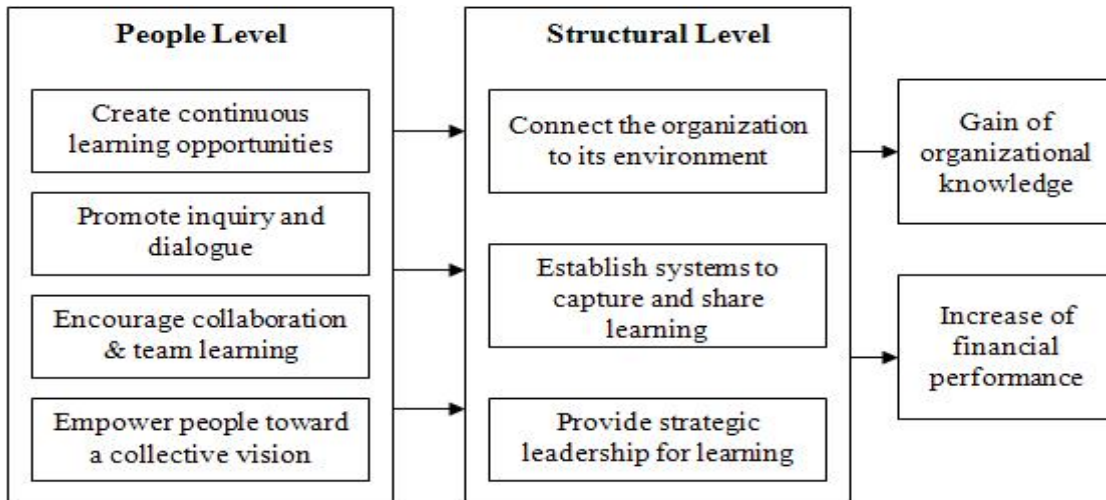
Organizational culture could facilitate or inhibit transfer of training in work settings. However, learning culture could have positive effects on training transfer through medium of transfer climate. Rouiller and Goldstein's (1989) study suggested that organizational transfer climate was a predictor of whether employees transferred skills developed in learning activities (Egan, 2002).

For this study, dimensions of learning organization questionnaire (DLOQ) developed by Watkins and Marsick (1996) will be employed. It has been proved to be well-validated instrument to measure the aspects of organizational learning culture. This instrument was developed based on a critical review of both the conceptualization and practice of learning organization construct. Supporting validity evidence and acceptable reliability estimates for the instrument was obtained from several sources (Yang, et al, 2004).

According to Watkins and Marsick (1996), a learning organization is defined as one that learns continuously and transforms itself and tied to the strategic performance of the organization. Learning organization model is characterized by three key components - 1) systems thinking, 2) learning perspective, 3) strategic perspective (Yang et al. 2004). System thinking emphasizes the ability to see the interrelationship among variables rather than linear cause-effect chains. Learning perspective in organization facilitates the learning of all of its members to meet its strategic goals. Strategic perspective focused on the knowledge outcome and management to lead to improvement in the organization's performance, and ultimately its value, as measured through both financial assets and non financial intellectual capital (Watkins & Marsick, 1996 cited in Yang et al., 2004).

They identified seven complementary action imperatives that characterize organizations toward the concept of the learning organizations (Ellinger et al., 2002). Seven distinct but interrelated dimensions of a learning organization is characterized by embracing individual, team and organizational levels (Yang et al., 2004). First, continuous learning represents an organization's effort to create continuous learning opportunities for all of its members. The second dimension, inquiry and dialogue, refers to an organization's effort in creating a culture of questioning, feedback, and experimentation. The third dimension, team learning reflects the spirit of collaboration and the collaborative skills that undergird the effective use of teams. The fourth dimension, empowerment, signifies an organization's process to create and share a collective vision and get feedback from its members about the gap between the current status and the new vision. The fifth dimension, embedded system, indicates efforts to establish systems to capture and share learning. The sixth dimension, system connection, reflects global thinking and actions to connect the organization to its internal and external environment. The seventh dimension, strategic leadership, shows the extent to which leaders think strategically about how to use learning.

Dimensions of learning organization are selected to measure organizational learning culture because it fits the assumption that the relevant research should consider the interconnected influences between individual, team, and organizational level variables and the congruence between content areas within each level (Kozlowski & Salas, 1997; Yamnil & McLean, 2001).



[Figure IV-1] Nomological Network of the Dimensions of Learning Organization and Performance Outcomes (re-cited from Yang et al. (2004))

## 2. Measure of transfer climate: Learning Transfer System Inventory (LTSI)

Transfer climate variables have been studied and classified into constructs by several researchers. First, Rouiller and Goldstein (1993) developed a conceptual framework for operationalizing the transfer climate construct. They proposed that transfer climate consisted of two general types of workplace cues in eight dimensions.

The first type of workplace cues are situation cues which serve to remind or provide the opportunity for trainees to use what they have learned on the job. There are four dimensions included: a) goal cues that serve to remind trainees to use their training, b) social cues, including the behavior and influence processes exhibited by supervisors, peers and/or subordinates, c) task cues including the design and nature of the job itself, and d) self-control cues which concern various self-control processes that permit trainees to use what has been learned (Rouiller & Goldstein, 1993). The second type of workplace cues is consequence which refers to on the job outcomes which affect the extent to which training is transferred. There are four dimensions included: positive feedback, negative feedback, punishment, and no feedback.

Holton III et al. (1997) developed an instrument to measure transfer climate based on the contribution of the transfer climate construct by Rouiller and Goldstein (1993). They eliminated fourteen as inappropriate out of previous instrument by Rouiller and Goldstein and added seventeen items after reviewing the sixty-three items (Holton III et al., 1997). Holton III et al. (1997) found the hypothesized structure of previous model was generally not supported. Based on analysis, the following seven transfer climate constructs are suggested (Holton III et al., 1997).

1. Supervisor support refers to the extent to which supervisors reinforce and



support use of learning on the job. Item content included setting goals to use learning, giving assistance, and offering positive feedback.

2. Opportunity to use is the extent to which trainees are provided with or obtain resources and tasks that enable them to use their new skills on the job. Items covered availability of equipment, financial resources, materials and supplies, and other information necessary to use their training on the job.
3. Peer support measures the extent to which peers reinforce and support use of learning on the job. Item content included setting goals to use learning, giving assistance, offering positive feedback, and having equipment similar to that used in training.
4. Supervisor sanction refers to the negative responses of the supervisor if training is not used on the job. Items addressed indifference to use of training, negative feedback, active opposition to use of training, and no feedback at all.
5. Personal outcomes - positive refers to the degree to which application of training on the job leads to positive outcomes or payoffs for the individual. Items included raises, career development, and advancement.
6. Personal outcomes - negative refers to the degree to which application of training on the job leads to the negative outcomes for the individual. Items included reprimands, being overlooked for raises, and so on.
7. Resistance - openness to change refers to the extent to which prevailing group norms are perceived to discourage use of new skills. Items included the degree to which colleagues ridicule employees for use of training or resist new skills.

The main difference between these two validated instruments lies in the viewpoint of climate. Holton III et al. (1997) suggested that people do not perceive transfer climate by psychological cues as Rouiller and Goldstein (1993) suggested. But rather, people perceive transfer climate by the group giving the cues. It is the organizational referent of the climate that people perceive and not the psychological factor of the cue. The resulting solution suggested additional constructs and indicated that transfer climate was perceived according to organizational referents (Holton III et al, 1997).

This instrument will be employed for the study. First, it fits the assumption that climate is not psychological perception but a medium between organizational context and individual's attitude and behavior on the job. Second, a construct validation using factor analysis was well conducted on the transfer climate constructs and instrument proposed by Rouiller and Goldstein (1993) and then have expanded instrument that incorporated additional constructs (Holton III et al, 1997). It has been still on being updated and validated through various studies.

### **3. Measure of transfer behavior: Customer satisfaction leader**

To assess the dependent variable, perceived transfer of training, nine items will be used. Unlike prior two predictors, transfer behavior will be measured in terms of individual level. Those nine items were developed by Park (2007) because those were specifically related to the training contents, including becoming customer satisfaction leaders - more specifically, developing customer relationship skills and customer management skills. These nine items were also validated by four HR researchers and practitioners. The result of the factor analysis on these questions showed that those items could construct one variable. The reliability of this variable was .84.

## V. Conclusion

Learning organization dimensions deal with learning in pursuit of organizational knowledge and financial performance (Watkins & Marsick, 1996; Ellinger et al, 2002 Yang et al, 2004). Organizational learning culture measured by DLOQ can be a good predictor of transfer climate because organizational aspect of strategic learning is connected with the facilitating role of transfer climate. Transfer climate is similar to organizational learning culture in that it aims at change of learned behavior for the purpose of improving organizational performance.

The investigation of organizational learning culture with transfer climate could compensate for the lack of systematic perspective which transfer climate research has shown over the periods. Structural level constructs of learning organization will help to analyze the underlying cause of specific transfer climate which were not seen in previous studies to use transfer climate as an antecedent of transfer behavior rather than mediator. The employment of transfer climate as a mediator will be conducive to analyze the unique role of transfer climate distinct from organizational learning culture.

Current research on transfer of training showed work environment factors play a greater role than training design and trainee characteristic factors (Kontoghiorghes, 2004). This study could contribute to transfer climate research by providing theoretical link between organizational level, group/process level and individual level constructs.

The limitation of this study is that it does not provide any result and findings based on empirical studies. It only offered conceptual framework to be researched in real business settings. Also, data analysis section should be compensated for prior to carrying out empirical research. The interconnected nature between people related factors and system related factors will be expected to emerge out of subsequent future empirical studies. For future research, transfer behavior could be measured and compared from various time lines (immediately, three months after, six months after) after the training suggested by previous research (Lim & Johnson, 2002).

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## 국 문 초 록

### 학습조직과 전이풍토가 학습전이에 미치는 다차원적 영향

전정호

이 연구의 목적은 예비적인 문헌연구를 통해서 조직의 학습문화와 전이풍토가 개인의 전이행동과 어떤 영향을 미치는지 밝히는 것이다. 관련된 문헌의 분석을 통해서, 전이풍토가 조직관련 변인인 학습문화와 개인관련 변인인 전이행동을 매개한다는 연구모델이 성립되었다. 선행연구의 결과는 개인의 전이행동에는 훈련의 디자인이나 내용보다는 일터의 환경변인이 더 큰 영향을 미친다는 것을 시사하였다. 특히 학습문화와 전이풍토의 하위변인의 분석을 통해서, 일터의 시스템요인과 인적인 요인이 상호작용한다는 사실이 지적되었다. 추후의 연구를 통해서, 개인이 인지한 전이풍토가 실제로 조직차원의 변인과 개인차원의 변인을 중개하는 지를 경험적으로 증명하고, 이를 통해서, 개인의 전이행동에는 다양한 차원의 변인이 개입되어 있다는 사실을 보여주고자 한다.

**핵심 되는 말 :** 조직의 학습문화, 훈련전이, 전이풍토