

## **Transfer of learning in IT and ITeS industry in Mangaluru: Facilitators, Inhibitors and strategies**

Mr.Thrishanth Kumar, Research Scholar, Department of Post Graduate Studies and Research in Commerce, Mangalore University, Karnataka.

### **ABSTRACT**

Organizations have regularly expressed the need for employees who can learn and work effectively in a team atmosphere. Their aspiration to enhance return on investment from training must understand the variables associated with transfer of learning so that they can promote those which facilitate transfer and to limit those which inhibit transfer. A study which examines those factors perceived to be connected with the transfer of learning from the training to the work situation is presented. They identified potential facilitators and inhibitors to transfer of learning by examining a range of individual characteristics and workplace features associated with these obstacles and enablers. It was found that trainers were more pessimistic than their trainees about the extent to which successful transfer was achieved. The main factors inhibiting the transfer of learning in IT and ITeS sector were associated with the working environment to which trainees returned and included the low approachability of superiors and colleagues to new ideas and their strong commitment to rules and procedures which inhibited improvement and expansion. However, identified less than 25 to 30 percent of the knowledge and skills acquired in trainings were actually applied in workplaces. The paper revealed that some individual, motivational and environmental factors were found to be related to transfer of learning.

**Key words:** Transfer of learning, facilitators, inhibitors, strategies, training.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The field of human resource development (HRD) and HRD professionals are responsible for developing effective HRD programmes within organisations. According to Werner and DeSimone (2005), there are a number of challenges to HRD, including increasing workforce diversity, competing in a global economy, eliminating the skills gap, meeting the need for lifelong learning, and facilitating organisational learning. The increasing complexity of the workplace demands more on-the-job training and a more educated and trained workforce (Hudson, 2002; Newman & Hodgetts, 1998). With the increasing costs for advanced training, many organisations are trying to become more aggressive in determining the value of training upon employees' performance, and in turn the value of the employees' performance upon the continuous growth of the organisation.

The skills and performance of employees in the workplace are critical to the success of every organization. Many organizations spend an immense sum of money on training, believing that training will improve their employees' performance and enhance the firm's productivity (Yamnill, 2001). Many billions of dollars are being spent

annually on training (Holton, Ruona, & Leimbach, 1998) and employers are now questioning the return on their investment.

Transfer of learning, the degree to which trainees apply to their jobs the knowledge, skills, and behaviours learned in training, is now widely acknowledged to be the paramount concern of organisational training initiatives (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Tannenbaum & Yukl, 1992). Persistently low estimates of the application rates generated from corporate training expenditures suggest that, despite an explosion of literature attention to transfer in recent years, the “training problem” remains acute (Anthony & Norton, 1991; Garavaglia, 1993). Unfortunately, estimates suggest that no more than 10 percent of these expenditures typically result in transfer to the job (Baldwin and Ford, 1988; Holton & Baldwin, 2000; Kupritz, 2002).

Theories and research fields have emerged to analyze how individuals, or trainees, apply the knowledge and skills gained in training to their real-world workplace environment. This aspiration to successfully transfer learning has intensified in recent years due to economic challenges, an evolving workforce, and increased organizational focus on measuring and justifying investments. Information Technology (IT) and Information Technology Enabled Service (ITES) industries are the prime movers of the service sector.

It's clear that organizations are still missing some fundamental steps to ensure the transfer of training; these steps include the development of an overall learning transfer plan, a strategy for reinforcing the application of learning post-training, a clear

way to measure if and to what extent learning is applied on the job, and manager involvement during the pre- and post-learning phase. The research has resulted in a proposition of factors influencing learning transfer are suggested following terms (1) Facilitators (which denominate factors with positive influence), (2) Inhibitors (factors with negative influence) and (3) Strategies (action plan).

### **Training:**

The word "Training" is an encompassing term, which is often used, in describing changes occurring in our behaviours because of an experience we have encountered at some point in our lives.

Training is defined as ‘any attempt to improve employees’ performance on a currently held job or one related to it (Bernardin, 2003)

Training is a process, which is planned to facilitate learning, so that people can become more effective in carrying out aspects of their work (Bramely, 1991), Davis & Davis (1998) offer a comprehensive definition of training. Here are the key points of their definition:

- Training is always a process, not a programme to be completed.
- Through training skills are developed, information is provided, an attitude are nurtured.
- Training helps worker quality for a job.
- Training facilitates training.
- Training should always hold forth the promise of maximising learning.

Training is a planned process to modify attitude, knowledge, skills, values and work habits through learning experience to achieve effective performance in an activity or range of activities. It is a relatively systematic attempt to transfer knowledge or skills from one who knows or can do to one who does not know or cannot do (Megginson et al., 1993). Its purpose, in the work situation is to develop the abilities of the individual and satisfy the current and future needs of the organisation (Manpower Services Commission, 1981 quoted in Reid & Barrington, 1997).

## Education

Education is associated with having a purely academic orientation that is consisting mainly of acquisition of knowledge with attainment of being evaluated by written examination. The basic purpose of education is to develop in an integrated way an individual's intellectual and social understanding, and work performance (Harrison, 2000)

Education is defined as, activities which aim to develop the knowledge, skill, moral values, and understanding required in all aspects of life rather than a knowledge and skill relating to any limited field of activity (Manpower Services Commission, 1981 quoted in Reid & Barrington, 1997:7)

Therefore education means, more than simply developing the technical expertise or task competence used in a narrower sense 'education' can also mean a course, programme or learning event that usually involves a period of study organized by an educational institution.

## Learning

A generally accepted definition of learning is "a relatively permanent change in behaviour that occurs as a result of practice or experience" (Bass and Vaghan, 1967:8).

The term learning indicates 'any experience or event whose outcome (whether or not intended) develops or changes people's knowledge, skills, values or behaviour (Harrison, 2000)

Learning is therefore a continuous process and 'learning to learn' is the most fundamental learning of all (Honey, 1998, Armstrong, 2001)

It is increasingly acknowledged that an organisation's potential for long term survival, growth and excellence will be largely depending upon its ability to continuously create, nurture, and sustain a positive learning environment (Brown, 1996; Senge, 1990).

Organisational culture plays a key role in shaping and reshaping the learning environment and the elements of cultural and environmental climate may support or hinder continuous individual, team and organisational learning process and outcomes (Nevis et al., 1995; Tjepkema et al., 2002). It needs to be appreciated that organizations do not perform the actions that produce the learning; it is individual members of the organisation who behave in ways that lead to it, although organisations can and should create conditions which facilitate such learning (Argyris, 1992; Walking and Marsick, 1993).

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ways that lead to it, although organizations can create conditions which facilitate such learning (Argyris, 1992).

It refers to the process of ‘**unlearning**’ what has wrongly (inappropriately) learnt over the years, ‘**relearning**’ new things which are relevant for the current and future needs, and getting oneself committed to the continuous process of learning and development. Hence learning involves change (Stewart, 1996) and an individual has to ‘learn to change’, ‘change to learn’ and ‘learn to learn’.

### **Development:**

The term development is defined as, “Process of enhancing an individual’s present and future effectiveness” (Fibrin, Tichy and Devanna, 1984). Development is a long- term process designed to enhance personal potential and effectiveness (Megginson et al., 1993)

According to Harrison (2000), the term development is used to denote learning experiences of any kind, whereby individuals and groups acquire enhanced knowledge, skills, values or behaviour. Its outcomes unfold through time, rather than immediately, and they tend to be long-lasting.

### **Transfer of Learning (TL)**

The terms ‘transfer of learning’ and ‘transfer of training’ are usually found mutually exclusive in training and development literature. However, transfer of learning relates to generating knowledge and information through education, which refers to the capacity to generalise and learn by analogy. Active learning is an important

criterion for transfer to occur. Active learning requires the learner to be involved in the learning process by making conscious effort to learn. The psychological processes of logical thinking and reasoning facilitate the process of recognising and solving problems in new contexts by applying the solution or analogy from the previously acquired knowledge and skill (Misko, 1999). This process is also called ‘case based reasoning’ in transfer of learning.

Learning transfer is perhaps one of the biggest challenges facing the learning and development field. Research shows that 60 percent to 90 percent of job related skills and knowledge acquired in a programme still are not being implemented on the job (Phillips et al., 2004)

Transfer of learning is a fundamental assumption of educators. We trust that whatever is learned will be retained or remembered over some interval of time and used in appropriate situations (Ripple & Drinkwater, 1982, p.1947).

Transfer of learning is the application of skills and knowledge learned in one context to another (Cormier & Hagman, 1987)

Transfer of Learning is the application of skills, knowledge, and/or attitudes that were learned in one situation to another learning situation (Perkins, 1992).

Transfer of learning is the goal of all training and learning interventions. We know that the often the learning context is different from the context of real-life application. However, the training objective is not achieved until the learning transfers from one context to another.

It is widely acknowledged that meaningful and effective ‘transfer of learning’ from the place of training to the work place will justify investment in training and development initiatives of any organization. Training and development should not become expenditure but it should result in strategic investment in human capital which, in turn, would generate social and economic dividends in the form of improved processes (efficiency) and products (effectiveness). Transfer of learning calls for a conducive and congenial environment in the workplace and the place of training.

### **Major Facilitators, Inhibitors and Strategy of transfer of learning from the place of training to the workplace:**

#### **Facilitators:**

The facilitators, who teach or instruct programmes, need reaction and learning data immediately after the programme is conducted. This input allows them to make necessary adjustment. Later, they need summary information about application, impact, and Return on Investment (ROI) data, if available. A facilitator is an individual whose job is to help to manage a process of information exchange. While an expert’s role is to offer advice, particularly about the content of a discussion, the facilitator's role is to help with how the discussion is proceeding. In short, the facilitator's responsibility is to address the journey, rather than the destination.

#### **Inhibitors:**

Inhibitor is a substance that retards or stops an activity. Some time lack of facilities or resources and lack of higher authority

encouragement also includes in inhibiting factor.

#### **Strategy:**

Strategy is an action that managers take to attain one or more of the organisation’s goals. Strategy can also be defined as, “a general direction set for the company and its various components to achieve a desired state in the future. Strategy results from the detailed strategic planning process”.

#### **Facilitating factors of Transfer of Learning:**

- Favourable transfer climate, Supervisory support, sufficient resources, Support for freedom, Support for creativity, Coworker attitude.

#### **Inhibiting factors of Transfer of Learning:**

- Heavy workloads, Lack of supervisory support, Lack of timely and proper feedback, rigid rules and conservativeness of the organization, Lack of freedom to introduce change, Lack of encouragement for innovation, Lack of facilities and other resources.

(Sources: Mamatha.S.M (2009), “Policies and practices of evaluating corporate training and development programmes in Karnataka- an empirical study”)

According to Baldwin and Ford (1988), work environment characteristics of learning/ training transfer consist of (a) supportive organisational climate, (b) pre-course discussion with boss (supervisor or

manager), (c) opportunity to use knowledge and skills, and (d) post-training goal setting and feedback.

According to Tannenbaum and Yukl (1992), previous research and scientific literature available on transfer of training with focus on the influence of organisational context is limited. Giving an account of training research literature of the period from 1987 to 1991, Tannenbaum and Yukl (1992) clustered the work of training researchers' literature and previous studies into the following main categories:

- a) Training needs analysis: including organisational analysis, task analysis and person analysis.
- b) Design of training: including instructional foundations, performance improvement approaches mental models, metacognition and learning skills.
- c) Training delivery methods: including simulations, games, high-technology methods and behaviour modelling.
- d) Trainee characteristics: including trainee abilities, skills, motivation, attitudes, expectations, self-efficacy and aptitude treatment interactions.
- e) Pre-training environment: including environmental cues, signals, trainee input and choice, and pre-training preparations.
- f) Post-training environment: including transfer environment, and post-training activities.
- g) Training evaluation: including evaluation design and analysis, and criterion issues.

h) Training for specific populations: including management development, training needs assessment for managers, leadership training programmes, mentoring, and team training.

Research continues to stress that the effectiveness of employee learning and development programs can be greatly impacted by parameters other than the development programmes themselves (Combs & Luthans, 2007)

### IT and ITes Industry

The IT and ITES industries in India are increasingly being viewed as a growth engine of the Indian economy, contributing substantially to increase in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), urban employment and exports. As a proportion of national GDP, the sector revenues have grown from 1.2 per cent in the financial year 1998 to an estimated 7.8 per cent in the financial year 2012.

According to the NASSCOM Indian IT-BPO Industry 2012 report, the Indian IT-BPO industry is estimated to achieve revenues of US\$ 91.7 billion in the financial year 2012, with the IT software and service industry accounting for US\$ 60 billion of revenues. Furthermore, direct employment in the sector will reach nearly 2.53 million, an addition of 256,000 employees, while indirect job creation is estimated to touch 8 million. This amounts to the net value-added by this sector, to the economy as 3.5–5.1 per cent for the financial year 2012.

Although the IT-ITES industries are somewhat similar, yet there are certain major differences in the level of people

interface, professional demands and competence of the employees. The IT sector is specifically more knowledge-oriented, may be  $24 \times 7$ , flexible, and requires relatively more creative solutions to the business issues. On the other hand, the ITES sector is more service-oriented, may be  $24 \times 7$ , rigid, stressful and relatively monotonous and repetitive.

### Transfer of Training: Literature Review

Formal employee training typically involves learning new knowledge, skills, attitudes or other characteristics in one environment (the training situation) that can be applied or used in another environment (the performance situation) (Goldstein and Ford, 2002). Presumably, what was learned in training should be applied to performance on the job. However, a common experience is that learning from a formal training program is not carried back for application on the job. In their study of sales training at Xerox, Rackman and Ruff (1991) reported there was an 87% of loss of skills within one month of the completion of the training. Baldwin and Ford (1988) note some estimates that suggest only 10% of training outcomes are transferred back to the job. With reported annual training investments exceeding \$50 billion in the United States (Industry Report, 2000), the amount of dollars wasted by non-transfer can be staggering.

The issue of carry-over from training to the performance situation is referred to as the problem of the "transfer of training." Baldwin and Ford (1988) define the positive transfer of training "as the degree to which trainees effectively apply the knowledge, skills and attitudes gained in a training context to the job" (p. 63). This basic

definition has been elaborated in two related ways. First, there can be transfer to "near" situations (similar to the training conditions) and/or to "far," dissimilar situations (Laker, 1990). A second elaboration is that of *generalizing* learned skills to different settings, people and situations (far transfer) as well as *maintaining* the application of learned skills over time (Ford and Weissbein, 1997). Given the stakes involved, it becomes very important to understand the dynamics of transfer in order to look for ways to minimize transfer losses while improving the yield from any training program. While the question of transferability of training has been present in the field of applied psychology nearly from the start (e.g., Thorndike's work in the early 1900's considered the transfer of learned behaviors from one setting to another), specifically focused interest on transfer in the context of formal organizational training only surfaced in the mid-1970's. This paper was intended a primer on transfer of training in work settings. The early theoretical musings on transfer was examined first, followed by a review of the ways by which transfer was operationally measured. Then, the research literature on transfer was examined. Finally, the research findings were summarized in a series of propositions about managing transfer of training

### Literature summary and research gap:

The proposed research on the topic, '**Transfer of Learning in IT and ITes industry in Mangaluru: Facilitators, Inhibitors and Strategies**' is still in its infancy stage. So far the researcher reviewed nearly 20 research articles on the proposed topic. Out of these 20 articles reviewed thirty one are foreign studies and five are

Indian studies. No much study conducted on transfer of learning in IT and ITeS industry. Further, almost all articles examined but not much link between present research area. No study on proposed topic was made in software industry in India or in Karnataka. Therefore, it could be stated at this stage that the proposed field of investigation was under researched area.

### **Statement of the research problem**

As cited in most of the previous studies, transfer of learning shows under researched area in the area of human resource development. Accordingly the proposed study 'Transfer of Learning in IT and ITeS industry in Mangaluru: Facilitators, Inhibitors and Strategies were undertaken for further investigation.

### **Objectives of the Study:**

The central purpose of this proposed study is to identify the key factors which predict 'Transfer of Learning in IT and ITeS industry in Mangaluru: Facilitators, Inhibitors and Strategies. The specific objectives of proposed study are:

1. Factors which facilitated transfer of learning from the training place to workplace settings;
2. Barriers to transfer of learning from the training place to workplace settings;
3. Implications for designing and delivering training that nurture transfer of learning
4. Effective strategies for facilitating transfer of learning and

### **Research Methodology:**

The study was qualitative in nature. It is partly explanatory and partly diagnostic in nature. Here attempt was made to identify whether training and development programmes are contributing in results as to prove that expenditure of training or an investment on human capital which will yield rich dividends in the long run through gathering and interpreting from purposive sampling of 10 to 15 IT and ITeS industry which includes software, BPO and call centre.. The data collection process involved approaching different organizations by using available industry directories. Nasscom has mentioned few best IT and ITeS industry in India and was taken such industries for further study. Here random sampling method used and target audience included those employees who received training from their company from recent past, that is, within two years. The nature of workforce includes executives and non- executives in each selected industry and selected 20 to 25 respondents representing from each category of industry with a help of pretested structured written questionnaire was personally administered.

### **Scope and Limitations of the Study:**

The study concentrated only to IT (Software) and ITeS( BPO and Call Centre) industry in Mangaluru. The conceptual framework adopted by this study includes Transfer of Learning, facilitators, inhibitors and strategies. Since the geographical domain of the study was confined only to Mangaluru city, the research conclusions drawn based on the findings of this research study could not be generalised so as to make them applicable to other parts of the country or other nations of the world. The study

threw sufficient light on predictors of employee learning aspect after taking related training from the same industry or sponsored company.

### Survey Methodology

Conducted an email survey consisting of close-ended questions to decision makers and influencers of learning in IT and ITeS sector. The survey was distributed throughout Mangaluru city and mentioned sector employees replied to the survey; however, not all respondents answered every question. The survey was anonymous unless respondents elected to receive results, in which case specific contact information was required.

**RESPONDENT PROFILE:** More than 150 survey responses came in the field of IT and ITeS industry in Mangaluru.

### MAJOR FINDINGS

1. Respondents job title -Others-37percent, Team or project/program manager-36 percent, Senior-level manager-11percent, Functional area leader-9percent, Human Resources/Training & Development/Learning & Development- 7percent.
2. 32.8percent of the respondents agreed that a formal process or system for ensuring that training is applied successfully at their organization and remaining 67.2 percent no agreed.
3. 32 percent of the respondents opined that of training or learning is applied back on the job, and 68 percent opined not applied back on job.
4. While considering primary method utilized to prove or measure the

estimation of learning transfer respondents said Informal feedback-36.2percent, simply a guess-22.6percent, Surveys-20.1percent, Formal interview/discussion-13.2percent, and detailed analysis-08percent.

5. 59.9 percent of the respondents agreed that a systematic approach that prepares a trainee to transfer or apply learning after training to their job and workplace environment and remaining 41.1 percent not agreed.
6. While considering program design strategies to ensure that the trainee is able to transfer the learning to the workplace- Design the training program around organization's business needs-45%, Establish specific goals between trainee and their direct report/manager- 32%, The specific learning activities to specific business outcomes-12%, Make sure the learning modalities simulate the actual work environment- 07%, Other-4%.
7. Majority (70 percent) of the respondents opined that organization expect managerial support involvement as part of the learning transfer process.
8. Most (58 percent) of the respondents agreed that trainee's peer group, or co-workers, positively or negatively influence the ability to apply what they've learned at your organization.
9. Employees felt that following are the strategies are most important for the transfer of learning at their organization- Trainee's ability (time, resources, responsibilities) to apply percent, Manager support 24 percent, Instruction/training approach

simulates actual work environment 22 percent, Post-instruction reinforcement 10 percent, Reward/consequences for transfer of learning 6 percent, Preparation in advance of training instruction 5 percent and 3 percent other.

## Conclusion

Transfer of learning is the objective of most learning programs and it has important implications for the extent to which a learning program will benefit an organization and provide a return on investment. However, learning transfer continues to be a problem, and has not improved significantly over the last 15 years, with about one-third of employees not applying what they learn immediately, and only about one-third continuing to apply what they learn one year later. A number of barriers are associated with the transfer problem and occur throughout the learning process.

Organizations can improve learning transfer by including various activities before, during, and after learning. Activities at all three time periods were found to predict the learning transfer, especially those that occur before and after. The good news is that they are relatively easy to implement and they are not costly. Organizations have much to gain by including transfer-relevant activities. Therefore, it might be useful to conduct a learning transfer audit to determine the extent to which our organization currently uses the different activities before, during, and after learning, and on the basis of our findings, determine what activities we need to include and when.

While learning transfer continues to be a problem for many organizations, it is possible to do something about it. By incorporating transfer activities, organizations can lower the barriers to transfer and increase the probability that employees will return to work ready, willing, and able to apply what they learned to their job.

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MANGALORE UNIVERSITY,  
MANGALURU, KARNATAKA

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THRISHANTH KUMAR  
RESEARCH SCHOLAR