

Personality traits, social support, and training transfer

Mediating
mechanism
of MTIWL

The mediating mechanism of motivation to improve work through learning

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Received 17 August 2016
Revised 4 March 2017
27 April 2017
Accepted 30 May 2017

Abstract

Purpose – Substantially few or no known empirical studies have explicitly focused on the higher-order construct of motivation in human resource development (HRD), namely, motivation to improve work through learning (MTIWL) as a mediator linking personality traits and social support to training transfer. Hence, the purpose of this paper is to redress the inadequacy by exploring the role of MTIWL as a mediator on such relationships.

Design/methodology/approach – Consistent with positivism, quantitative data based on self-rating were collected from 131 trainees attending management training programs organized by a public sector training provider in Malaysia.

Findings – The findings indicate that personality traits (i.e. conscientiousness, extraversion, and agreeableness) and social support (i.e. perceived organizational support and peer support) influenced training transfer via the mediating role of MTIWL. Supervisor support, nonetheless, was not a significant predictor of training transfer through MTIWL.

Originality/value – This study focuses on a more holistic motivational construct than simple motivation in HRD. The focus on MTIWL extends the existing understanding of the underlying motivational influences that link dispositional and situational factors to training transfer in occupational settings.

Keywords Quantitative, Malaysia, Personality traits, Social support, Transfer of training, Big Five personality traits, Motivation to improve work through learning

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Organizations yearn to achieve performance improvement and to do so, it is imperative that trainees are capable of incorporating new learning acquired from training programs into their daily job tasks (Baldwin and Ford, 1988; Blume *et al.*, 2010; Wenzel and Cordery, 2014). This capability is known as “training transfer” and is often defined as the extent to which a trainee applies new knowledge, skills, abilities, and other competencies (KSAOs) on the job upon completion of training (Baldwin and Ford, 1988; Baldwin *et al.*, 2009).

Yet, not many trainees have what it takes to effectively apply new learning on the job (Chiaburu *et al.*, 2010; Colquitt *et al.*, 2000; Grossman and Salas, 2011; Hutchins *et al.*, 2013; Pham *et al.*, 2013), leading to more studies in an effort to increase the comprehension of factors that could promote or inhibit training transfer (Baldwin *et al.*, 2009; Blume *et al.*, 2010; Wei Tian *et al.*, 2016). An early and prominent review by Baldwin and Ford (1988) identified trainee characteristics, training design, and work environment as three key factors that could cultivate desired training transfer. They opined that of the three factors, training design received the most research attention, while work environment is the least studied.

To date, trainee characteristics have been studied considerably (Colquitt *et al.*, 2000; Holton, 2005). Nonetheless, prior studies often give less attention to personality traits than ability and trainability (Herold *et al.*, 2002; Tannenbaum and Yukl, 1992). Personality traits are defined as “relatively stable characteristics of individuals (other than ability) that influence their cognition and behavior” (Colquitt *et al.*, 2000, p. 679). Even when personality

