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Spanish steps key to transfer training: Education key to skilled and adaptable workforce

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Spanish steps key to transfer training

Education key to skilled and adaptable workforce

In an ever-changing business environment which requires organizations to respond rapidly to shifting situations, new demands are placed on employees – and those seeking positions – who are expected to assume multiple responsibilities, adapt to changing procedures and demonstrate a broad knowledge of the job. Achieving a competent workforce in the face of such change requires continuous training.

Few business leaders would disagree with the need for such learning but many might – and plenty do – criticize the effectiveness of training, particularly how much of what is learned is transferred to the job – what one researcher dubbed the “transfer problem.”

Then, there are those people who, rather than being sent on training sessions by an employer, are self-motivated to do so to get a job, or a better job, by gaining skills to improve their employability. They want to stay up-to-date and gain or retain their own competitive edge. For them, and their potential employers, it is essential that what they learn is relevant and can be effectively applied to work.

According to some research, people oriented toward opportunity tend to use training as a means of compensating for some deficiency or achieving an external objective (getting a job, improving skills to better suit job market requirements). People oriented toward development tend to view training as a way of continuing to grow and staying up-to-date. Whatever the circumstances of the training or trainee, the need to transfer that learning to a job remains paramount.

An analysis of the transfer of learning to the workplace with regard to job-related training courses in Spain was carried out by Dr Ana-Inés Renta-Davids, Professor José-Miguel Jiménez-González, Professor Manel Fandos-Garrido and Professor Ángel-Pío González-Soto of the Department of Pedagogy, Virgili University, Tarragona.

Job-improvement motivation significant predictor of transfer of learning

In Spain, as elsewhere, the government and companies are becoming aware of the importance of training results and their impact in the workplace, especially when enhancing workers' knowledge and abilities is part of the public agenda. The assessment and improvement of work-related training courses is therefore becoming a priority which goes beyond the number of training programs delivered or the numbers of participants who have attended.

Job-improvement motivation was found to be a significant predictor of transfer of learning. It has been argued that adults' participation in work-related training is marked by current economic and social conditions, such as competitiveness, the knowledge economy and technological development. For this reason, as a previous researcher noted, adults are increasingly “mobilized” to participate in training but not necessarily “motivated”. The

current research indicates that the higher level of job-improvement motivation is related to a higher level of transfer of learning. This means that participants who believe that a training program is an opportunity to improve their job prospects show a higher level of transfer.

The study was conducted in the context of a work-related training course within the framework of the Professional Training for Employment Subsystem in Spain which is involved in three types of training activities:

1. work-related training courses offered by social agents and educational providers;
2. tailored training organized according to demand from businesses; and
3. complementary research and development actions.

The scheme is organized under a tripartite model that is co-funded and regulated by the government, employers and unions. Work-related training courses are offered to employed and unemployed workers to help them gain and improve their knowledge and skills in a number of different knowledge domains that are usually related to their professional experiences. Participation is free of charge and voluntary. The courses are subsidized by public funding, and participants receive a certificate at the end of the course which lasts between 30 and 60 hours.

Both delivery and marketing a course should be considered

The training design features studied, in terms of relevance and efficiency, emerged as significant predictors of transfer of learning. As trainees' perception of courses as being relevant to their jobs was clearly critical, educational providers should ensure that courses are relevant and tailored to specific needs. Efforts should also be made not only to ensure that courses are relevant but also to advise potential attendees about the content and goals of the course.

Both delivery and marketing of the course should therefore be considered. To foster participants' perception about the relevance of training courses to their work, educational providers should clearly communicate beforehand the possible benefits, content and expected outcomes. This would enhance transfer of learning outcomes and improve training impact, which is critical considering that this type of training is publicly funded and is expected to be effective and show tangible results.

Training efficiency, studied here in terms of learning results, is also a significant predictor of transfer of learning. The results show that a higher score in training efficiency is associated with a higher score in transfer of learning. This means that when participants perceived they had learned the content of the course, they perceived that they had transferred that learning back to their workplace. Trainees' characteristics, studied here as motivations to participate in training, influence the outcomes of transfer of learning. The type of motivation to participate is a significant predictor of transfer of learning in voluntary courses. This result shows the importance of pre-training factors in providing a better prediction of transfer of learning.

The study results suggest that autonomy, variability and complexity, as particular features of a job position, are positively associated with transfer of learning. Some authors have argued that employees should have opportunities to participate in different work situations

Participants who believe that a training program is an opportunity to improve their job prospects show a higher level of transfer.

Employees should have opportunities to participate in different work situations to create their own ways of handling them.

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to create their own ways of handling them. In this respect, organizations should transform work conditions to make their workplaces far more conducive to facilitating behavior change. Certainly, the search for a deep enough understanding of how organizations can facilitate the transfer of learning still has a long way to go.

Comment

This review is based on “Transfer of learning: Motivation, training design and learning-conducive work effects” by *Renta-Davids et al. (2014)*. They investigate the transfer of learning in work-related training offered to participants by an educational provider in Spain – the Professional Training for Employment Subsystem.

Reference

Renta-Davids, A.-I., Jiménez-González, J.-M., Fandos-Garrido, M. and González-Soto, A.-P. (2014), “Transfer of learning: motivation, training design and learning-conducive work effects”, *European Journal of Training and Development*, Vol. 38 No. 8, pp. 728-744.

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