UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

BEST PRACTICES AND FACTORS TO ENHANCE TRANSFER OF TRAINING IN OMAN

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By

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Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science

July 2014

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DEDICATIONS

To my great parents,
for their education and all the outstanding lessons in life
I have learned from them.

To the person whom I belong to, share life and love with,
my beloved wife
for her sacrifices and encouragement.

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the Degree of Master of Science

BEST PRACTICES AND FACTORS TO ENHANCE TRANSFER OF TRAINING IN OMAN

By

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July 2014

Supervisor : Ismi Arif Ismail, PhD
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Increasing investments are devoted to human resources development in Oman. Training is an essential component of these investments. This study aims to explore the perceptions of trainers on the best practices to enhance the transfer of training. The study was guided by three main questions: (1) How can we best enhance transfer in Oman, (2) what does affect transfer of training in Oman, (3) who should be involved in the process of training transfer.

Using Swanson and Holton's (2001) and Baldwin and Ford's (1988) models of the transfer of training, the study explores the transfer of training from a systemic and multidimensional perspective that represents the challenge of the transfer of training to performance (Burke and Hutchins, 2007).

The current study employs the qualitative approach to provide answers to the research questions. Semi-structured interviews were used to investigate the views of the participants on the research problem, based on their experiences in the training field. The technique of semi-structured interviews allowed to get in-depth information on the trainers' opinions and, hence, to provide answers to the research questions. Moreover, the gathered data were analyzed qualitatively to suggest the most effective practices (best practices) that should be integrated in the training interventions.

The study participants indicated that trainees' involvement, setting clear objectives, linking training outcomes to the workplace performance, supervisory support, evaluation assignments, post-training discussions, peers training, having supportive work climate, and performance observation as the best practices that enhance the transfer of training in Oman. Moreover, the participants reported some factors that affect training transfer to the workplace, such as expectations, trainees' characteristics, supervisor's or manager's attitude towards training, and work environment. They also determined a list of stakeholders, whom are able to support or hinder the transfer of training. The list includes training designers, trainers, supervisor, managers, peers, top management, and customers or clients of the organizations.

To my knowledge, this could be the first study conducted on the issue of the transfer of training in the Omani context. The conclusions drawn from this study may guide the training managers and planners to take the proper procedures in order to boost the training

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effectiveness and deliver the required results in the workplace. The study may also support the efforts of the training professionals in Oman to uncover the weaknesses in the training process that may hinder the positive impact of training on the work environment.

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Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Master Sains

PERSEPSI JURULATIH TENTANG PRAKTIS TERBAIK BAGI PEMINDAHAN LATIHAN DI OMAN

Oleh:

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Pelaburan yang meningkat telah diberikan kepada pembangunan sumber manusia di Oman. Latihan adalah komponen yang amat diperlukan di dalam pelaburan ini. Kajian ini bertujuan menerokai persepsi jurulatih tentang praktis terbaik bagi membantu pemindahan latihan. Kajian ini adalah berpandukan kepada tiga soalan utama: Apakah persepsi informan tentang praktis terbaik yang menggalakkan pemindahan latihan, apakah factor yang mempengaruhi pemindahan latihan dan siapakah pemegang taruh penting yang terlibat dalam proses pemindahan berkenaan.
Dengan menggunakan model pemindahan latihan Swanson dan Holton (2001) serta Baldwin dan Ford (1988), kajian menerokai pemindahan latihan dari perspektif yang sistemik dan pelbagai dimensi yang dilihat mampu memberikan gambaran yang jelas tentang cabaran memindahkan latihan kepada prestasi seseorang (Burke dan Hutchins, 2007). Untuk tujuan ini, kajian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif. Temubual semi-struktur telah digunakan bagi mengkaji pandangan informan tentang permasalahan kajian berdasarkan pengalaman mereka dalam bidang latihan. Teknik temubual semi-struktur ini membolehkan pengkaji mendapatkan data yang mendalam tentang persepsi pakar dan menjawab persoalan kajian. Malah, data yang terkumpul kemudiannya dianalisis bagi mendapatkan cadangan praktis yang paling berkesan yang perlu diintegrasikan dalam intervensi latihan.

Informan berpendapat bahawa penglibatan jurulatih, pembentukan objektif yang jelas, perkaitan antara kandungan latihan dan hasil pencapaian tugasan di tempat kerja, sokongan penyelia, penilaian tugasan, perbincangan pasca latihan, latihan rakan sebaya, penyediaan persekitaran kerja yang menyokong dan pemerhatian prestasi adalah praktis yang mampu menyemarakkan pemindahan latihan. Selain itu, informan juga menyenaraikan faktor yang sangat mempengaruhi pemindahan latihan iaitu pengharapan peserta, ciri peserta, sikap penyelia dan pengurus terhadap latihan dan kaitannya dengan persekitaran kerja. Antara pemegang taruh yang penting dalam proses pemindahan latihan adalah perekabentuk latihan, jurulatih, penyelia, pengurus, rakan sekerja dan pengurusan atasan sesebuah organisasi.

Sebagai antara kajian pertama berkaitan pemindahan latihan di Oman, kesimpulan kajian dapat membantu perencana dan pengurus latihan untuk mengenalpasti kelemahan proses latihan sedia ada dan membentuk prosedur yang dapat meningkatkan keberkesanan program latihan kendalian ahli profesional di Oman.

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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

HRD	Human Resource Development
POS	Perceived Organizational Support
ASTD	American Society of Training and Development
TNI	Training Needs Identification
TNA	Training Needs Assessment
ROI	Return on Investment

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The globalization consequences affirmed a high level of competition among organizations and, in order to renew their capabilities for success in today's world, organizations invest an increasing amount of money and effort in developing their human resources. Most of human resource development (HRD) interventions are based on learning activities that involve the acquisition of knowledge, sharpening of skills, or changing of attitudes and behaviors to enhance the performance of employees, which we call training, operationally. Therefore, training is extremely critical to the success and growth of organizations, and it's supposed to provide trainees with new skills, knowledge and develop positive attitudes toward their work duties. Thus, the main goal of training is to provide, obtain and improve the necessary skills in order to help organizations achieve their goals and create competitive advantage by adding value to their key resources (i.e., employees) (Nikandrou, Brinia, and Bereri, 2009). Meanwhile, the need for training is associated to the existing gap in particular skills, knowledge or attitudes that are necessary to elevate the performance of the employees and the organizations. This need is fulfilled through training intervention that is not a goal in itself, but a mean to influence the workplace practices and behaviors. Therefore, the transfer of training is a vital goal of planning, designing, and conducting training programs in any organization.

Accordingly, as organizations become more aware of the potentials embedded in the training activities, they need to ensure that the new training content is delivered to the workplace through adopting particular practices, which obviously will affect both the trainee and the organization performance. Thus, ensuring trained skills are used in the workplace, or transferred to the job, remains of critical importance for HRD researchers and practitioners (Burk and Hutchins, 2008; Saks et al.,2014).

In Oman, beside the economic components of the National Long-term Strategy of Development (1996-2020), the strategy objectives include the training of Omani citizens, promotion of their skills, as well as adoption of policies aiming for promotion of the citizen living standard. According to the official website of the Ministry of National Economy, achievement of the strategy depends on a group of basic dimensions, and one of them is focusing on training and HRD interventions. The strategy focuses on developing human resources and upgrading the skills of Omani nationals to keep them abreast of technological process to manage the dynamics of this progress in a highly efficient way, and face the ever-changing domestic and global conditions (Ministry of National Economy, 2010).

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On the theoretical level of the national planning, there is a strong perception and growing attentiveness of the importance of training, especially in the fields contributing directly to achieve the goals of the Vision of Oman Economy (Oman 2020). The Vision pursues the reinforcing of the HRD and education. A number of policies and strategies were formulated for upgrading of education levels through upgrading of basic education and building a university, technical and vocational training which work towards satisfying the renewable needs of professions and technical skills in the labor market (Ministry of National Economy, 2010).

Consequently, increasing budgets is devoted to the interventions of HRD, which are essentially based on training programs. However, the question is not the significance of training in achieving the Oman development goals, but the effect and the results of training in the work environment. Evaluating training and adopting specific practices to optimize the increasing investments in training should be of a considerable importance, which means a huge need for research and discussion. Currently, the most common approach of training evaluation is a system of measuring satisfaction levels. So called, 'Happy Sheet' reports are usually distributed to the trainees in the last training session. Trainees are asked to record their impressions on the provided facilities, training methods utilized, the training content, and the trainer's skills/knowledge on the training content. It is not clear if there is any subsequent procedure is based on these reports pertaining to ensure the transfer of training to the workplace. These reports may eventually prove that the pre-planned training programs are already conducted, but doesn't prove or investigate any impact of the training in the workplace. Likewise, there is no clear evidence that these reports are used to amend the design of training content or training methods, for instance. The ignorance of the importance of the transfer of training may influence negatively on the expected role of training in improving the performance of individuals and organizations.

1.2 Sultanate of Oman

Oman is one of the Gulf Cooperation Council states . It is located in south-eastern part of the Arab semi- peninsula.. Its shore extends from Hormoz in the north to Yemen republic in the south, so it is open to three seas: Arab Gulf, Oman Gulf and Arab sea. Bordered by UAE and Saudi Arabia in the west, Republic of Yemen in the south, Hormoz bay in the north, and Arab sea in the eastern border, this location has given Oman its historical role in connecting Arab Gulf states with other countries. (Ministry of Information, 2014).

Oman is a middle-income economy that is heavily dependent on oil resources. As a developing country, the oil income allowed the government to achieve steady economic growth. Econmoic diverfication and human resource development are two main pillars of the country strategic plan; Oman 2020.

Education and training were awarded $3.38bn, or 10% of all projected state spending in Oman's budget for 2013, up 25% in real terms on the year before. The

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government's decision to increase its focus on education comes at a time when Oman's private sector is struggling to fill vacancies, despite high unemployment in many regions.

The government is channelling extra funding into education as part of a broader bid to provide its younger generations with the skills and qualifications needed to work in the modern economy.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Training is important to improve employees skills, attitudes, and behaviors in order to help the organizations in achieving their goals in gaining competitiveness in the market. Gaining competitiveness by having smart and knowledgeable employees encouraged many organizations to invest heavily in training and other HRD interventions (Nikandrou et al., 2009; Wilson, Strutton, and Farris, 2002; Yamnill and Maclean, 2001). Although increasing the organizational investment in training indicates a positive organizational attitude, it doesn't ensure that these investments are ending up in the right place. Burke and Hutchins (2007) mentioned that only 50% of training investments result in the organization or individual improvements. Diamantidis and Chatzoglou (2014) stated that despite the fact that orgaizations invest in training, there is considerable evidence to show that training programmes often fail to achieve the planned outcomes. Thus, ensuring the acquired skills, attitudes, and behaviors are used in the workplace, or transferred to the job, remains of critical importance for HRD researchers and practitioners (Burke and Hutchins, 2008; Baldwin and Ford, 1988).

In Oman, the booming economy and the development changes have emphasized the magnitude of training and employee development. In recent years, the public sector has been more concerned about HRD interventions in qualifying it employees. An increasing number of public and private organizations, as well as engage private training providers in their annual training plans make the market of training more attractive for new business. Although there is no accurate information on the size of investments on training in Oman, the common tendency of involving increasing numbers of employees in local and abroad training programs emphasizes the importance of ensuring outcomes and returns of such investment. According to the Ministry of Civil Services, during 2010, a number of 14190 civil service employees attended various training programs. (Ministry of Civil Services, 2010). Likewise, the Ministry of Manpower had declared signing 23 training agreements with private training providers to train Omanis in various fields (Ministry of Manpower, 2010).

The increasing investment of Omani organizations on training, doesn't only show the endeavor of training in Oman, but also raises the question of achieving the training objectives and transferring valuable outcomes in the workplaces. The Institute of Public Management is a government institute established especially to provide high quality training to managers and employees in the public sector. The institute database includes only 8 studies conducted in different aspects of training, not one of

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them were done in the area of the transfer of training. More than the happy sheets, there are no documented reports on practices applied to evaluate the transfer of training in the workplace, and this makes the return of training investments ambiguous. Moreover, the Technical Center of Research in the Ministry of Education, that supervises and supports the educational research, don't have any research on the area of the transfer of training, despite of having 12 educational training centers that hold daily training sessions during the school year.

Al Adawi (2009) studied the processes and techniques of evaluating training programs at the educational training centers in Oman. The study revealed that the training evaluation process was not activated, and the most used instrument was questionnaires. The researcher noticed the absence of specific procedures that can be followed by the training centers, and recommended reconsidering the evaluation process and preparing a practical guide of evaluation.

Reviewing the available Omani research databases indicated the following: (1) a lack of sufficient knowledge about the transfer of training, (2) a limited realization of the significance of the transfer of training procedures and practices, (3) the absence of management commitments on training evaluation and ensuring the training outcomes, and (4) the absence of the appropriate practices that should be adapted to obtain rewarding outcomes of the training efforts and investments.

Thus, with the escalating efforts in maximizing the benefits of HRD interventions and training in Oman and the growing budgets devoted to employees' training, it is important to make sure that these training programs are able to enhance individuals and organizations performance through using effective practices (best practices) that ensure the transfer of training to the workplace. The absence of documented reports or detailed access information on how employees in Oman are transferring the new learning content in the workplace, calls for attention to the serious need to study the practices of the transfer of training in Oman. Thus, to bridge the gap in the topic and to gain in-depth understanding of training transfer in Oman, the current study is carried out using a qualitative approach, where several training stakeholders (trainers, supervisors, and managers) were interviewed to evaluate the status of training transfer in Oman and provide answers to the research questions.

1.4 Research Questions

The current study aims to explore and understand the status of the transfer of training in Oman, by exploring and understanding the practices, the factors, and the stakeholders whom involved in supporting or hindering the transfer of training. The aim of the current study is achieved by providing answers to three research questions. These are:

1. How can we best enhance the transfer of training in Oman?
2. What does affect the transfer of training?
3. Who should be involved in the transfer of training in Oman?

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1.5 Significance of the Study

Ensuring that the skills, attitudes, and behaviors that have been acquired through training are used in the workplace, or transferred to the job is of critical importance for HRD researchers and practitioners (Burke and Hutchins, 2008).The study is important because it propose a refined and consistent practices that may work as a guideline for training professionals and practitioners in Oman to make the best of the training investments as the country is witnessing stepped-up concerns and interests in HRD. The lack of systematic and specific practices designed to support the transfer of training in the Omani context and the absence of previous studies on the same topic indicates the significance of this study.

This study contributes significantly to the topic of transfer of training, by reviewing the existing literature in the Western and the Arabian contexts together, which may present a better understanding of the topic.

Another benefit of this study dwells in encouraging training stakeholders in Oman to consider the transfer of training as a priority during planning, designing, conducting, and evaluating training programs. This study may also recommend a set of practices related to the transfer of training, which are suggested by Omani training stakeholders, who are familiar with the organization climate in the Sultanate of Oman. The successful implementation of the recommended practices will not optimize effectiveness of training programs only, but will boost the targeted outcomes of learning that can affect achieving the national goals in HRD.

This study may provide better understanding to the transfer of training in Oman, and may suggest several supportive practices that may enhance the transfer of training. This study may also, help training planners to design appropriate procedures to guarantee most effective training programs. Although, the current study concentrates on the transfer of training, it may encourage other researchers to explore and examine new topics related to HRD and training in the Omani context.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

The current study is carried out using the qualitative approach to understand the practices, factors, and training stakeholders whom can support or hinder the transfer of training to the workplace in Oman. Thus, the findings of this study are limited to the Omani organizations and any generalization of the results to other country should be taken with caution.

The limited databases and previous research about the transfer of training in Oman, is another limitation facing this study. Using a qualitative approach helped in pursuing the holistic understanding of the study problem. The finding of this is limited and should be verified using other methods before generalizing the study findings.

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1.7 Definitions of the Key Terms

The current study uses terms that require specific definitions. The following is a list of those terms and their definitions:

Transfer of Training. In this study, the transfer of training is operationally defined as the application of skills, behavior or knowledge learned in training sessions in the workplace. Baldwin and Ford (1988) consider positive transfer of training as the degree to which trainees successfully apply in their jobs the skills they gained in the training sessions.

Trainee Characteristics. In this study, trainee characteristics are operationally defined as the individual factors and traits that affect the training outcomes (i.e., motivation, personality, expectations, and trainee self-efficacy). This definition is based on the literature (e.g., Cheng and Ho, 2001; Lim and Johnson, 2002; Lim and Morris, 2006).

Training Characteristics. In this study, training characteristics are operationally defined as the elements and components of the training programs such as the clarity of the objectives, relevant to trainees' tasks, the learning content, the methods used by the trainer, the degree of interaction within the learning session and the effectiveness of evaluation activities. The availability of such characteristics explains the level of the training effectiveness.

Organization Characteristics. In this study, organizational characteristics are operationally defined as the organizational elements that can support or hinder transfer of training such as the degree of supervisory support, the opportunity to apply the new learning, organizational climate, and the organization structure.

1.8 Summary

Clearly, as the Omani government and organizations in both public and private sectors continue to devote large investments in training, they increasingly expect those investments to return in the form of competitive workforce and improved performance. As researchers, we have an significant role to play in helping organizations improve their understanding of the training process, its success factors, and the most effective ways to optimize its impact. In the spirit of this lofty objective, this study is conducted.

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