



The Moderating Effect of Transfer Climate on the Joint Relationship between Trainees' Personality and Transfer Training

Yip Foon Yee

Inti International University, Persiaran Perdana BBN, Putra Nilai, 71800 Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Objective – The aim of this study is to examine the joint relationship between the Big Five personality and transfer climate on transfer of training. Drawing on trait activation theory, this study examines how the relationship between Big Five personality and transfer of training is moderated by supervisor support and opportunity to perform.

Methodology/Technique – The sample of this study consists of 183 police officers who have attended driver training in one of the police training centres in Malaysia. Three sets of questionnaires comprising of the Big Five inventory, driving knowledge test, driving competency, and transfer climate were distributed to the respondents pre-training, post-training, and after two months of training. The data was analysed using statistic package for social science (SPSS) Version 19.0 and SmartPLS 3.0.

Findings – A high level of agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness to experience were found to encourage increased transfer of training. Opportunity to perform moderated the relationship between agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience and transfer of training which is congruent with the trait activation theory.

Novelty – The findings of this research emphasise the importance of the joint relationship between personality and situational factors on transfer of training. These findings allow the researcher to understand how opportunity to perform enables trainees to express their personality and enhance their performance.

Type of Paper: Empirical.

JEL Classification: M12, M19.

Keywords: Big Five Personality; Transfer of Training; Supervisor Support; Opportunity to Perform; Trait Activation Theory.

1. Introduction

Rapid development in Malaysia has further encouraged the police to attend training to improve their performance (Bakar, 2016). PDRM has expended approximately RM 365 million to improve the quality and quantity of infrastructure in its training centers (Malaysian Royal Police Annual Report, 2008).

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* Corresponding author: Yip Foon Yee

E-mail: foonyee.yip@newinti.edu.my

Affiliation: Inti International University, Persiaran Perdana BBN, Putra Nilai, 71800 Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia

Nevertheless, human resources training and development which are practiced in public sector organisations is still not fully effective in encouraging their employees to apply their newly learnt knowledge, skills, and abilities within the workplace (Azmar, Romle, & Ismail, 2015). Despite its failure, transfer of training is critical to evaluate the extent to which trainees generalize and apply newly learnt knowledge and skills in the work setting.

The factors that enhance transfer of training are grouped under three broad categories: trainee characteristics, training design, and work environment (Blume, Ford, Baldwin, & Huang, 2010). Many researchers have approached transfer of training from two distinct perspectives, namely: contextual and dispositional perspectives. The contextual perspective emphasizes the importance of work environment in the successful transfer of training which encompasses transfer climate, organisational support, and follow-up (Blume et. al., 2010). In contrast, the dispositional perspective highlights the key role of trainees' characteristics in ensuring the successful transfer of training (Bhatti, Ali, Isa, & Battour, 2014). These two distinct perspectives have been frequently scrutinized in previous studies. However, studies which examine the combination of these two perspectives on transfer of training is minimal and that area remains neglected.

Several studies have argued that there is a mixed relationship between personality and transfer of training due to the work environment (Morrell & Korsgaard, 2011). Recent literature also demonstrates a lack of understanding of how work environment facilitates (or inhibits) the influence of personality on transfer training (Judge & Zapata, 2015; Noe, Tews, & Michel, 2017). By filling this gap, the present study investigates two work environments, supervisor support, and opportunity to perform as potential moderators of the relationship between personality and transfer of training. The purpose of this study is to examine the moderators of the relationship between the Big Five personality traits and transfer of training. The present study adopts the trait activation perspective of the role of Big Five personality traits and examines two potential moderators in influencing the relationship between Big Five personality and transfer of training.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Trait Activation Theory

The concept that a specific situation influences the way personality affects job performance has been formalized in a theoretical model designed by Tett and Burnett (2003). Based on the trait activation theory (Tett & Burnett, 2003), individuals behave in accordance with their personality when they are in a situation that facilitates the expression of their personality. Cues which portray expression and suppression, such as organisational culture, co-workers and support from superiors, as well as the nature of the job, are expected to moderate the relationship between personality traits and work behaviour (Tett & Burnett, 2003). Within the literature on training, it is determined that supervisor support and opportunity to perform are positively correlated with transfer of training (Huang, Ford, & Ryan, 2017; Noe, Clarke, & Klein, 2014).

2.1.1 Supervisor Support

Supervisor support refers to an employees' general belief that supervisors provide support and encourage employees to attend training and incorporate their newly learnt knowledge and skills into their job. Previous research indicates that strong supervisory support weakens the positive relationship between personality and performance. Based on the trait activation theory, supervisor support might motivate employees that do not possess the Big Five personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness to experience). Those individuals who receive strong supervisory support may perform better than those who possess the traits of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness to experience. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Support from supervisors moderates the relationship between the Big Five personality traits and transfer of training such that the relationship will be stronger when supervisor support is low.

2.1.2 Opportunity to Perform

Organisational culture is one source of trait-activation cues. In the present study, organisational culture is defined as organisations which provide opportunities to allow employees to apply their newly learnt knowledge and skills within the workplace. Traits are more likely to influence a person's behaviour when the situation is weak, ambiguous and does not push for conformity from all people. A positive organisational culture which promotes many opportunities to perform should weaken the relationship between trainees' personality and transfer of training. Fuller Jr, Hester and Cox (2010) indicate that when people score low in positive personality traits but receive strong autonomy and opportunity to perform, their performance is significantly higher as compared to receiving lower autonomy and opportunity to perform. Based on these earlier studies, the present study proposes that personality can be used to predict transfer of training when the opportunity to perform is low. Hence, the following hypothesis is postulated:

H2: Opportunity to perform moderates the relationship between the Big Five Personality traits and transfer of training such that the relationship will be stronger when opportunity to perform is low.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Setting

This study was conducted in one of the police training centers in Malaysia. This study examines driver training as driving is one of the essential tasks of a policemen. Good driving skills are crucial as police officers need to drive their vehicles to patrol, respond to incidents, pursue criminals, and transport criminal suspects (Servino, 2013). A total of 242 individuals initially consented to participate in the study. Of those, 241 individuals completed the training and subsequently participated in the assessment of the Big Five personality traits prior to the training. The final sample consisted of 220 males (92.3%) and 22 females (7.7%). The mean age of the sample was 30.1 years old. 183 trainees who responded to the second survey.

3.2 Measurement

The personality of the trainees was assessed using the Big Five Inventory. In the Big Five Inventory, each broad five-factor construct represents six facets (Soto & John, 2009). Construct validity evidence supporting this measure is reported in Hamby, Taylor, Snowden, and Peterson (2016). The internal consistency reliability of the present study estimates for openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism in this study were 0.72, 0.79, 0.72, 0.84, and 0.82, respectively. Supervisor support, opportunity to use, and transfer of training were extracted from the Learning Transfer System Inventory (LTSI) (Holton, Bates, & Ruona, 2000). The Learning Transfer System Inventory (LTSI) demonstrates excellent reliability (Massenberg, Schulte, & Kauffeld, 2017). The internal consistency estimated for supervisor support and opportunity to perform is .72, and .85 respectively.

3.3 Data Analysis

The present study adopts PLS-SEM to assess the research model. The purpose of the present study is to investigate the moderating effect and prediction factors related to transfer training. PLS-SEM is selected as it can predict key target constructs and explore the extension of an existing structural theory. Thus, it is deemed suitable for the present study's research objective.

4. Results

The first stage of analysis involves analysing the reliability and validity of the measurement model. The second stage involved the analysis of the structural model.

4.1 Results of the Measurement Model

The proposed model was evaluated for internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity to establish the adequacy of the latent variables.

According to Hair (2013), as a rule of thumb, a measurement item loads highly if its loading is above 0.60 and does not load highly if the coefficient is below 0.40. As shown in Table 1, most item loadings were higher than 0.5 and were significant at 0.05. All Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and composite reliability results exceeded the cut-off values of 0.5 and 0.7, respectively. Hence, all of the values of all items in the present study have exceeded the recommended threshold values. Thus, all items used in this study have demonstrated satisfactory convergent validity and internal consistency reliability. The rule of thumb of Fornell and Larker's criterion is the square root of the AVE must exceed the correlation between the measure and all other measures. All square roots of AVE in the present study exceeded the off-diagonal elements in their corresponding row and column. Thus, they meet the Fornell and Larker's (1981) criterion of discriminant validity. It can be concluded that the measurement has discriminant validity.

Table 1. Factor Loading, Composite Reliability and Average Variance Extracted.

Construct	Item	CR	AVE
Extraversion	E1 = 0.78 E2 = 0.81 E3 = 0.83	0.85	0.65
Agreeableness	A1 = 0.61 A2 = 0.74 A3 = 0.69 A4 = 0.77	0.80	0.50
Conscientiousness	C1 = 0.77 C2 = 0.77 C3 = 0.84 C4 = 0.55	0.83	0.55
Neuroticism	N1 = 0.68 N2 = 0.83 N3 = 0.64	0.76	0.52
Openness to experience	OTE1 = 0.63 OTE2 = 0.67 OTE3 = 0.83 OTE4 = 0.67 OTE5 = 0.77	0.84	0.52
Opportunity to perform	OTP1 = 0.74 OTP 2 = 0.76 OTP 3 = 0.78	0.80	0.57
Supervisor support	SS1 = 0.81 SS2 = 0.79 SS3 = 0.67 SS4 = 0.60	0.81	0.53
Transfer of training	TOT1 = 0.73 TOT2 = 0.70 TOT3 = 0.63 TOT4 = 0.77	0.80	0.50

*CR= Composite reliability; AVE= Average Variance Extracted

4.2 Assessment of the Structural Model

To test the moderating effect, the interaction term must be analysed. As shown in Table 2, only the interaction between opportunity to perform and personality traits (agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience) was negatively significant ($\beta = -0.72, -0.42$ and -0.67 respectively, $p < 0.05$). The R^2 of each model between agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience and transfer training is good, being 0.91, 0.73, and 0.90 respectively. The size of the effect of each model is also considered to be large, which explains that the degree of opportunity to perform has a significant effect on the path between agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience and transfer of training.

In terms of supervisor support as a moderator, the interactive effect of supervisor support on the relationship between personality traits and transfer training was identified to be insignificant. It is estimated that there is no moderating effect of supervisor support, peer support, and reward on personality traits (agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness to experience) and transfer of training.

Table 2: Summary of Moderator Effect

Moderator	Description	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness	Openness to experience	Extraversion	Neuroticism
Supervisor support	Interaction	-0.12	-0.24	0.02	0.07	-0.43
	R-square	0.36	0.57	0.38	0.22	0.16
	Effect size	-0.08	0.14	-0.05	0.08	0.06
Opportunity to perform	Interaction	-0.72*	-0.42*	-0.67*	-0.44	0.46
	R-square	0.91	0.73	0.90	0.19	0.18
	Effect size	0.58	0.33	0.59	0.05	0.07

*p<0.05

5. Discussion

In this section, the results of the present study support the interactionist view of personality, particularly the ‘trait activation theory’. Previous research indicates that opportunity to perform moderates the relationship between personality traits and performance (Fuller, Hester & Cox, 2010). These findings show that the opportunity to perform provided by organisations weakens the positive effect of personality on transfer training. This finding provides insight into how personality is more likely to make a difference in work behaviour. The findings are consistent with previous research (Fuller Jr, Hester, and Cox, 2010; Mischel, 1977). Misheal (1977) postulates that “weak” situations which lack resource and opportunity to perform encourage individuals to express their personalities. In the present study, positive personalities such as agreeableness and conscientiousness can be initiated when there is low opportunity to perform.

Moreover, the findings also show that when the situation is threatening (e.g. low opportunity to perform), individuals with openness to experience tend to show improvement in transfer of training. Openness to experience appears to pay intellectual and creative premium when the situation is threatening which result in improved transfer of training. Harrington (2012) states that a stressful workplace is created when there is lack of opportunity to use a learned skill. It is believed that such conditions will stimulate conscientious people to express their characteristics to cope with the stressful situation. These results conclude that personality traits are more likely to influence a person's behavior when the situation is weak, ambiguous and does not push for conformity from all people (Larsen & Buss, 2008).

The findings of the present study do not support the hypothesis that supervisory support moderates the relationship between the Big Five personality traits and transfer of training. The results of the study are not consistent with previous studies which state that supervisor support weakens the positive relationship between personality and performance (Kamdar, Van Dyne, Chen & Kao, 2014). The absence of significant moderating effect between supervisor support on the relationship between personality and driver competency may be explained by the nature of the sample. The police force is a highly centralized and hierarchical organisation and police officers are expected to behave according to rules and regulation prescribed without question (Kula & Guler, 2014). The present study suggests that supervisor support of police officers rarely considers their subordinate's views and feelings which might lead subordinates to think that supervisory support is not important for them. Moreover, Knies and Leisink (2014) report that low levels of supervisory support is typically provided by police management. This highlights the fact that supervisory support might not be the most appropriate moderator for police organisations.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that only the opportunity to perform mediates the relationship between personality and transfer of training whereas supervisor support does not.

The results of this study should be interpreted in the context of several limitations. First, the sample of present study was composed primarily of male police officers. Although the police force is a male-dominated occupation, this raises questions about the generalizability of the results. Another limitation of the present study is that this study measures the dependent and other variables which were obtained from the same method: a questionnaire. This method is at risk of method bias. To minimize method bias, the measures for the dependent and other variables were obtained from different time lags as suggested by Podsakoff, MacKenzie and Lee (2003). The data for the present study was taken across two different time periods.

Further research is needed to replicate and extend the results of this study. The present results extend the research on training transfer by providing evidence that opportunity to perform moderates the relationship between personality (agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience) and transfer of training. Thus, future research may focus on developing more elaborated models which are similar to the one examined in the present study, by adding further organisational constructs such as transfer climate, peer support, job characteristics, and rewards. Future research may also wish to further investigate informal training programs rather than traditional training programs. For example, exploring how other organizational factors moderate the relationship between self-efficacy and transfer of training. Martin (2010) also suggests that individual differences such as the interaction between self-efficacy or motivation and transfer climate are more likely to influence transfer of training.

The results from this study provide useful insight for managers and consultants. The present findings demonstrate that low opportunity to perform may encourage individuals to express their personality, leading to better application of newly learnt knowledge and skill within the workplace. This is an important practical consideration because practitioners may encourage trainees to express their personality traits to optimize the transfer of the skills acquired in training. In addition, the results of this study provide a better understanding of the personality characteristics that produce maximum impact on transfer training in certain situations. Moreover, the findings suggest that HR practitioners should personalize training programs and work assignments based on personality and transfer climate factors.

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