



# Umbrella Summary

## Training Transfer

A Summary of Workforce Research Evidence Relevant to the Child Welfare Field

### What is training transfer?

Training transfer is formally defined as “the degree to which trainees effectively apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes gained in a training context to the job” (Baldwin & Ford, 1988, p. 63). Training transfer has been conceptualized based on three main factors, which are detailed further below.

- ▶ Maintenance versus generalization: Maintenance consists of the degree to which knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) from the learning environment are able to persist over time, whereas generalization consists of being able to take KSAs acquired from a learning environment and apply them to situations or settings that are dissimilar (Blume et al., 2010).
- ▶ Near versus far transfer: Near transfer occurs when KSAs from training are applied to highly similar job tasks, whereas far transfer occurs when KSAs from training are applied to highly different tasks or situations (Blume et al., 2010).
- ▶ Typical versus maximum transfer: Typical transfer is what normally occurs in a work environment, in which over an extended period of time, trainees may choose to apply certain learned skills, but are not given any explicit prompts to do so and not aware of being evaluated on their skill transfer (Huang et al., 2015). In contrast, during maximum transfer, trainees are prompted to maximize their level of effort in order to demonstrate what they have learned. Thus, typical transfer can be considered as what trainees *will transfer*, whereas maximum transfer can be considered as what trainees *can transfer* (Huang et al., 2015).

Because training transfer tends to be unique to the specific content targeted in training, evaluation is largely individualized and should be tailored according to the content and purpose of the training program (Hughes et al., 2020). Thus, training transfer has been measured using a number of different methods (e.g., surveys, observation, scenario-based demonstrations) and criteria (e.g., frequency, quality, work performance; Gegenfurtner, 2011; Hughes et al., 2020). The two most common methods are to assess either use or effectiveness of transfer via self-report surveys (Blume et al., 2010).

Effectiveness of transfer is most often assessed using six items (e.g., “I can accomplish job tasks better by using what I learned in training”, “The quality of my work has improved after using the skills learned in training”; Xiao, 1996). To measure use, trainees are often asked to report how frequently they use a certain skill taught in training, such as on a scale from “never” to

“every day” (Blume et al., 2010). Because there are moderate correlations between self and other-report measurement methods, self-report is often chosen as the simplest source of ratings (Blume et al., 2010).

## What contributes to training transfer?

Training transfer depends largely upon individual differences of the trainee, characteristics of their work environment, and features of the training design.

The following variables are positively associated with training transfer:

- ▶ Individual differences including cognitive ability, conscientiousness, having a learning goal orientation, and job involvement (Blume et al., 2010).
- ▶ Motivation and self-efficacy, especially for open skills (i.e., skills which allow greater freedom and variability in how they are performed) versus closed skills (i.e., skills that should be performed identically each time; Blume et al., 2010).
- ▶ Having greater knowledge post-training (Blume et al., 2010).
- ▶ Having mastery approach goals (i.e., goals to develop competence in a task) and performance approach goals (i.e., goals to demonstrate competence to others; Gegenfurtner et al., 2016).
- ▶ Work environment characteristics like having the support of one’s supervisor, peers, and organization; receiving coaching and feedback; and fear of facing supervisor sanctions (i.e., fear of negative responses from one’s supervisor about performance following training). These factors are known to improve transfer by increasing trainee motivation to do so (Hughes et al., 2020; Reinhold et al., 2018).
- ▶ Working in an organization with a positive transfer climate (Blume et al., 2010). To assess transfer climate, consider adapting the measure by [Burke and Baldwin \(1999\)](#).
- ▶ Training design features like the use of [cueing](#) (i.e., features such as arrows, highlighting, and color coding to attract attention) in training materials, voluntary participation, incorporating pretraining optimistic previews about what trainees can expect to learn, taking a learner-centered approach (i.e., incorporating active application of KSAs through activities such as hands-on tasks, role-play, discussion, feedback, and reflection), and training about declarative or self-regulatory knowledge (Blume et al., 2010; Gegenfurtner, 2011; Xie et al., 2017).

The following variables are negatively associated with training transfer:

- ▶ Neuroticism (Blume et al., 2010).
- ▶ Having mastery avoidance goals (i.e., goals to avoid being incompetent at a task) or performance avoidance goals (i.e., goals to avoid looking incompetent at a task to others; Gegenfurtner et al., 2016).

The following variables are not significantly associated with training transfer:

- ▶ Individual differences including agreeableness, extraversion, openness, and locus of control (Blume et al., 2010).
- ▶ Demographic factors like age, gender, education, and experience (Blume et al., 2010).
- ▶ Interventions that take place after training (e.g., post-training goal setting; Blume et al., 2010).

To explore many of the factors above and assess the transfer potential of training, the Application Potential of Professional Learning Inventory (APPLI) is recommended ([Curry et al., 2011](#)). And for a collection of training transfer articles in human services, see [this issue](#) of Training and Development in Human Services.

## QIC-WD Takeaways

- ▶ Training transfer involves applying KSAs learned in training to one's job.
- ▶ Transfer is often conceptualized in terms of three factors: 1) maintenance versus generalization, 2) near versus far transfer, and 3) maximum versus typical transfer.
- ▶ Positive transfer occurs through three main avenues: individual differences (e.g., cognitive ability, conscientiousness, motivation, approach goals), work environment characteristics (e.g., support, supervisor sanctions, coaching/feedback), and training design features (e.g., cueing, pre-training interventions, voluntary participation, having a learner-centered approach).
- ▶ Measurement of training transfer is often tailored based on training content and purpose but is most often assessed as either use or effectiveness of a skill.
- ▶ For a general measure of transfer effectiveness, researchers or practitioners should consider using the six-item measure from Xiao (1996). More tailored assessments can be developed to align with specific training goals.
- ▶ To assess transfer climate, the measure by [Burke and Baldwin \(1999\)](#) is recommended.
- ▶ To assess training transfer potential, the [Application Potential of Professional Learning Inventory \(APPLI\)](#) is recommended (Curry et al., 2011).

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