Transfer Of Learning To The Workplace -
A Study Of Middle Management Training In One Large Organisation In New Zealand

A Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Education with an endorsement in Guidance Studies at Massey University.

Christine Marion Lyons

2000
ABSTRACT

This study, of "transfer of learning", examined the experiences of thirty-four Middle Managers/Team Leaders in one organisation. The Team Leaders, all enrolled in the Open Polytechnic, were studying five "Management Unit Standards".

The study was conducted in two phases; Phase 1 (quantitative) questionnaires and Phase 2, (qualitative) interviews. Questionnaires sent to thirty-four Team Leaders asked the Team Leaders ninety-one questions which related to: communication within their organisation, senior management practices, their work area and their feelings about the job in general. The qualitative phase comprised two interviews separated by five months. In Interview 1, consenting participants were asked to select three competencies, to implement on the job, out of the thirty they were studying. They hypothesised the strategies they would use to implement them on the job and the perceived outcomes. Five months later participants were asked if they believed they did or did not achieve their hypothesised objectives, and what helped and could have helped them. Thirteen themes emerged from analysis of the qualitative data and these were triangulated with the results from the quantitative data. These thirteen themes reflected the five main issues which were discussed in the Literature Review: (1) The emotional climate within the organisation and students’ psychological attitudes towards (a) management (b) the respondents working colleagues, (c) external customers and (d) the learning itself; (2) The concept that mistakes are part of the learning process as an accepted organisational philosophy; (3) Organisational attitudes on action learning procedures and practices; (4) Respondents’ attitudes and feelings of being valued and rewarded by their managers and higher management; (5) Change and restructuring within an organisation and the effect that this can have on transfer of learning. The issues affected the participants’ ability to “transfer” their newly
acquired management competencies in as much as only two of the sixteen participants undertaking **Phase 2** of the study, believed they were able to implement on the job (**transfer**), all three competencies they selected. All participants believed that there were influencing factors, affecting their ability to achieve their hypothesised outcomes.
Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge my husband Jack and my daughters Imelda and Nicole for encouraging me over many years in my passion for education. My mother, Margaret MacDougall, sister Annie MacDougall, mother-in-law Bea Lyons for being so patient and listen to my constant barrage of ideas, hunches and feelings which I voiced through my extroverted thinking personality. I would like to thank Massey Library for their energy and dedication in obtaining and supplying me with more reading material than at times I knew what to do with, also John O’Neill, my supervisor, for his guidance, assistance, tolerance and invaluable input. A big thank you to a very dear and close friend Helen Chipper for her unfailing support, and ability to endure such in-depth discussions late into the night. Finally I would like to acknowledge the participants and the organisation that they belong to, as without them, this study would not have been possible.
**Table of Contents**

- Table of Contents  
- Figures, Tables and Summaries.

- **(Chapter 1) Introduction**  
  p. 1 - 7

- **(Chapter 2) Literature Review**  
  p. 8  
  - Management Development  
    p. 9 - 20  
    p. 20 - 28  
  - The Nature of Learning and Approaches to its Development.  
    p. 28 - 35  
  - Transfer of Learning, Individual and Organisational  
    p. 35 - 42  
  - Evaluation of Learning  
    p. 42 - 54  
  - Barriers to Transfer of Learning within Management Development  
    p. 54 - 63  
  - Summary  
    p. 64 - 67

- **(Chapter 3) Methodology**  
  p. 65 - 74  
  - Introduction  
  - Delimitations and limitations of the study  
    p. 75 - 76  
  - Research questions  
    p. 77 - 80  
  - Assumptions and Rational for Design  
    p. 80 - 86  
  - The Role Of The Researcher  
    p. 86 - 88  
  - Setting and selection of participants  
    p. 88 - 89  
  - Ethical considerations  
    p. 89 - 94  
  - Data Collection Procedures  
    p. 94  
  - Quantitative procedure  
    p. 94 - 97  
  - Instrument  
    p. 97- 100
• Qualitative procedure p. 100 - 106
• Data Presentation and Analysis Procedures
  • Quantitative analysis p. 107 - 108
  • Qualitative analysis p. 108 - 111
• Verification Process p. 111 - 113
• Summary p. 113

(Chapter 4) Results (Outcome Of The Study)
• Introduction p. 114 - 117
  (1a) Quantitative, Phase 1, demographics results p. 117
  (1b) Quantitative statistical data from questionnaires p. 117 - 129
  (2a) Qualitative, Phase 2, Interview 1 (list of competencies and number of Team Leaders who selected each). p. 130 - 133
  (2b) Qualitative, results from Interview 11 (number of Team Leaders who believed they did or did not achieve their competencies). p. 133 - 134
  (2c) Thirteen themes identified from Interview 11 p. 135
  (3) Triangulation of results p. 135 - 155
• Summary p. 156 - 157

(Chapter 5) Discussion
• Introduction and Discussion p. 158 - 169

(Chapter 6) Conclusion p. 170 - 174
• References p. 174 - 199
Appendices

1. Cameron's measures of organizational effectiveness.
2. Team Leader's questionnaire for quantitative methodology, Phase 1.
3. Team Member's questionnaire for quantitative methodology, Phase 1 (data obtained was not used).
4. Portion of a letter sent to supervisor re new study
5. Participant consent form.
6. Letter from National Training Manager. (participant's organisation)
7. Information letter to participants written by researcher.
8. Pre-interview letter
9. Follow up letter sent by independent intermediary.
11. Key research question (Interview One)
11a Summary sheet outlining the research questions for Interview One (qualitative methodology)
12. Summary sheet outlining the research questions for Interview Two (qualitative methodology)
13. Thank you letter from the researcher.
14. Unit standard 1983
15. Unit standard 1984
16. Unit standard 1985
17. Unit standard 1987
18. Unit standard 1988
19. Year Study Time Planner for Units Standards
20. Newspaper Article
21. Summarised Results from Interview One
22. Summarised Results from Interview Two
List of Maps/Tables and Boxes

Figure 1 Development techniques  p. 17
Figure 2 Hard and soft data  p. 51
Figure 3 Trainers’ perceptions of barriers to  p. 74
            on the job.
Figure 4 Concept map  p. 69
Figure 5 Objectives outcomes model  p. 76
Box 1 Competences studied by Team Leaders  p. 106
Table 1 Process Road Map for Thesis  p. 116
Table 2 Question 10, Qualitative Analysis
        Overall I am satisfied with my job  p. 119
Table 3 Question 3 Qualitative Analysis
        I have a clear idea of what I am expected to  p. 119
            do in my job.
Table 4 Question 9 Qualitative Analysis
        Most of the time I have too much work to do  p. 119
Table 5 Question 5 Quantitative Analysis
        There are too many unreasonable  p. 120
            deadlines in my job.
Table 6 Question 15 Quantitative Analysis
        The boss teams me with respect.  p. 120
Table 7 Question 24 Quantitative Analysis
        My immediate boss does a good job at  p. 120
            motivating staff.
Table 8 Question 20 Quantitative Analysis
        I have a good working relationship  p. 121
            with my boss.
Table 9 Question 17 Quantitative Analysis
        My immediate boss does his or her job well.  p. 121
Table 10  Question 32 Quantitative Analysis
There is a *us and them* between management and other employees.  

Table 11  Question 33 Quantitative Analysis
*I believe senior management usually acts on the issues raised by staff.*

Table 12  Question 39 Quantitative Analysis
People in my work area do a good job.

Table 13  Question 48 Quantitative Analysis
My work area provides excellent service to our external customer.

Table 14  Question 40 Quantitative Analysis
People in my work area work well as a team.

Table 15  Question 41 Quantitative Analysis
*Moral in my work area is good.*

Table 16  Question 51 Quantitative Analysis
I am kept fully informed about changes affected my job.

Table 17  Question 54 Quantitative Analysis
I often hear about things happening within the organization through the radio and newspaper first.

Table 18  Question 59 Quantitative Analysis
I get the opportunity to say what I want at team/staff meetings.

Table 19  Question 61 Quantitative Analysis
I am proud to say I work for our organization.

Table 20  Question 74 Quantitative Analysis
*Our organization provides good customer service.*

Table 21  Question 70 Quantitative Analysis
There is a lot of doubling up of work within the organization.

Table 22  Question 63 Quantitative Analysis
Overall our organization is a good employer.
Table 23 Question 78 Quantitative Analysis
I believe the organization is committed to developing its people with the appropriate training they need.

Table 24 Question 79 Quantitative Analysis
I believe the organization is committed to developing its people with the appropriate management training they need.

Box 2 Competencies selected by Team Leaders

Box 3 Qualitative Methodology
Numbers of participants who believed they did or did not achieve their competencies

Table 25 Question 1 Quantitative Analysis
I really enjoy my job.

Table 26 Question 43 Quantitative Analysis
People in my work area are proud of what they do.

Table 27 Question 68 Quantitative Analysis
Change is being managed well within our organization.

Table 28 Question 31 Quantitative Analysis
Senior management genuinely listen to the needs of employees.

Table 29 Question 16 Quantitative Analysis
My immediate boss gives me support when things go wrong.

Table 30 Question 36 Quantitative Analysis
Overall the management of our organization is good.

Table 31 Question 27 Quantitative Analysis
My immediate boss regularly tells me how I am doing.

Table 32 Question 29 Quantitative Analysis
My immediate boss has set me clearly defined goals.
Table 33  Question 30 Quantitative Analysis  
*My immediate boss has measured my performance against these goals.*  

Table 34  Question 56 Quantitative Analysis  
*I believe the communication within the organization is good.*  

Table 35  Question 69 Quantitative Analysis  
*Overall management is very supportive of employees.*  

Table 36  Question 73 Quantitative Analysis  
*There is good co-operation between work areas.*  

Table 37  Question 32 Quantitative Analysis  
*There is an “us and them” feeling between management and other employees.*  

Table 38  Question 37 Quantitative Analysis  
*Management can be trusted to keep their word.*  

Table 39  Question 76 Quantitative Analysis  
*The organization gives me the opportunity to obtain enough operation training to do my job effectively.*  

Table 40  Question 84 Quantitative Analysis  
*I am encouraged to learn new techniques and current trends in operational training.*  

Table 41  Question 85 Quantitative Analysis  
*I am encouraged to learn new techniques and current trends in management education training and development.*  

Table 42  Question 81 Quantitative Analysis  
*The organization is equitable in its allocation of resources for operational training? (i.e. everyone has equal opportunity and access)*  

Box 4  Barriers to transfer of learning