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Insight: Leadership training, organisational context, and transfer of learning – a case study

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Abstract

The transfer of learning remains a topic of interest with appeal for both researchers and practitioners. This research explores the transfer of learning from a leadership development training course from multiple perspectives and challenges traditional views on the relationship between formal training and work-based forms of learning.

The research adopted a qualitative case-study approach and took a holistic, longitudinal, view of a leadership development training course offered by a large financial services organisation in New Zealand. Forty four course participants, their managers, peers and subordinates, course trainers and the organisation's senior executives were involved over three time periods. Social processes were found to have limited influence on enhancing the transfer of learning but had significant influence on inhibiting transfer. Managerial and organisational support were particularly influential barriers to transfer, whereas peer and subordinate support were found to have much less influence on transfer. The role of formal training was viewed in a new light with the finding that formal training complemented other forms of workplace learning and acted as a vehicle for socialisation and the transfer of tacit knowledge.

In contrast to the traditional view that formal training is irrelevant to the community of practice concept, this research found that formal training could facilitate participation, identity development and practice in established communities of practice as well as providing a basis for the formation of new communities of practice.

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