The Sequence and Duration of Performance Outcomes: An Analysis of the Transfer of Training in National Sport Organizations

Patti Millar, Brock University
Julie Stevens, Brock University

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Significance & Purpose:

The lack of professional development (PD) for Canadian national sport organization (NSO) managers and the dearth of literature addressing the transfer of training outcome process in a nonprofit sport organization inspired this research. Within sport, a tremendous amount of time and effort is committed to the “on-the-field” performance of athletes and coaches and, as a result, the professional development of sport managers is neglected (Stuart, 2009). As such, it is important to examine whether training sport administrators will improve “off-the-field” performance. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which training influences the individual performance of Canadian NSO managers, and the organizational performance of Canadian national sport governing bodies.

HRM literature indicates that various performance benefits result from developing a knowledgeable and skillful workforce. Training provides sport leaders with the skills and knowledge that are required to overcome the challenges inherent in the Canadian sport system and contribute to the attainment of organizational goals and objectives (Taylor, Doherty, & McGraw, 2008). Unfortunately, training programs for sport managers are rarely developed and implemented and therefore these sport leaders fail to benefit from professional development opportunities.

Transfer of training (TT) research identifies three major outcome factors relating to training evaluation – learning, individual performance, and organizational performance. Yamnill and McLean (2001) developed a concise framework for the evaluation of the transfer of training that captures these outcome variables, as well as three mediating variables. While learning and performance are critical outcome factors, training evaluation must also incorporate the mediating variables that influence the transfer of learning to individual and organizational performance (Lim & Morris, 2006). A change in performance will only result from training if trainees acquire new knowledge and skills (Kirkpatrick, 1959). The mediating factors relate to three categories – motivation to transfer, training design, and organizational climate – and refer to a range of cognitive and psychomotor constructs, design and training content, and support and opportunity to apply training material, respectively (Holton, Bates, & Ruona, 2000). Given its inclusion of both outcome and mediating factors, the Yamnill and McLean (2001) model was utilized as the theoretical frame for this study.

A quasi-experimental quantitative methodology was utilized for this study. A two-day training program, called the Risk Management Workshop (RMW), was administered to managers within Canadian NSOs. A total of 10 workshops were included in this study, with a total sample size of 70 (N = 70). The participants in each training program were senior staff and executive volunteers. Workshop attendees completed the same HR Training and Performance Survey at six time series: prior to, immediately following, and three, six, nine and twelve months after the RMW. The survey included seven demographic items and 85 5-point Likert scale items to measure learning, individual performance, and organizational performance outcome factors, as well as motivation to transfer, training design, and organizational climate mediating factors. Paired-samples t-tests and ANOVA were conducted to determine if and where significant differences between the time-series measures for each of the outcome variables exist. Correlation analyses were conducted to uncover any significant relationships between the outcome variables. Lastly, the Preacher and Hayes’ (2007) bootstrapping method of multiple mediation was conducted to test the impact of the three mediating variables (training design, motivation to transfer, and organizational climate) upon the learning-individual performance relationship.

First, the results demonstrate that significant differences existed between the various time-series for the learning and performance outcome variables, which indicates training has a direct impact on both learning and performance. Second, the results reveal learning, individual performance, and organizational performance are positively correlated. Finally, the results indicate training design, motivation to transfer, and organizational climate significantly mediate the relationship between learning and individual performance.

The findings generate important discussion regarding the nature of the changes in performance outcomes that result from training transfer. In terms of duration, immediate changes in all three outcome variables were found following training. Learning and organizational performance levels at the three month time period and beyond remained close to the levels found immediately following the workshop, indicating that a long-term change in these two outcomes occurred.
performance levels decreased at the three-month measure, indicating that a short-term change occurred. In terms of sequence, immediately following the workshop, the learning and individual performance scores were significantly correlated and, at the three-month time-series, all outcome variables were significantly correlated, a trend that continues to be found throughout the three final time-series. This indicates that over time, learning leads to improved individual performance and, onto, improved organizational performance, which suggests there is a sequence to the changes in performance outcomes that arise from training transfer.

The key finding of this study align closely with both Yamnill and McLean’s (2001) TT model and Goodman and Dean’s (1982) process because it highlights the sequential nature of performance change that occurs as a result of training. For example, the first outcome involved a change in learning, which reflects Goodman and Dean’s (1982) stage one (knowledge acquisition). The second outcome involved a change in individual performance, which resembles Goodman and Dean’s (1982) stage two (acquisition of new behavior) and stage three (preferred use of new behavior). The third outcome involved a change in organizational performance, which compares with Goodman and Dean’s (1982) stage four (appropriateness of change) and stage five (value of change).

The findings suggest that it is possible to identify the timeline of when learning and performance outcomes increase and decrease following training. From a practical standpoint, this information may help training facilitators determine the most opportune times to provide professional development to NSO managers. Not only is there a need for PD workshops to be offered in the first place, but understanding when the impact of training begins to fade will help facilitators strategically plan follow-up training sessions. The RMW is ultimately aimed at triggering organizational change as it seeks to train sport leaders about how to better manage their organizations. The value of this study is that it highlights that on-going professional development may increase and sustain “off-the-field” performance.