



# The influence of the organisational context on training motivation

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## Abstract

The study examines the influence of individual and organisational factors on motivation and training. In particular, personality factors such as innovativeness, proactivity and dominance, work-related factors such as job involvement, and organisational support for training. These have all been found to influence training motivation viewed as a multidimensional construct. The aspects observed include motivation to learn and to obtain professional skills, the motivation to put new knowledge acquired in training into the workplace and the motivation to undergo training for the purpose of increasing status and social and company standing. The study was carried out on a sample of 382 adult employees in public and private organisational contexts and has confirmed that a number of individual, work and organisational factors act together to influence training motivation.

## 1 Introduction and hypotheses

Continuous learning and training are regarded as strategically essential for the innovativeness and competitiveness of organisations. Studies on training have focused their attention on methods, on content and on situations, which foster learning and the modification of behaviour to improve performance and organisational results. Recent research is moving towards seeking to understand the complex system of factors lying behind training, including particularly individual and organisational factors whose interaction contributes to an improvement in the improvement of individual performance and organisational results. Over the last ten years there have been a number of reviews and studies that have put forward theoretical models and empirical results capable of illustrating the characteristics and processes of the person that is undergoing training and the work context in which the training is taking place. It remains however the case that the totality of individual and organisational factors, and the system of relationships that subsists between these, is still largely yet to be explored.

Training motivation is, from among the individual characteristics, that which has been most the subject of the attentions of psychological research, as can be illustrated for example by the recent meta-analysis by Colquitt, LePine and Noe (2000) in which they produce a synthesis of their main results which may be regarded as an essential basis for understanding its role in training and personal development processes.

Tannenbaum and Yukl (1992) have stated that training effectiveness is not solely determined by the quality of analysis of training needs and planning but also by the person's ability to learn and the person's motivation. Training motivation thus plays an important role in the acquisition of knowledge and the ability to use such knowledge to improve work activity and performance in the workplace.

Motivation before training is seen as preparation for learning, increasing attention levels and the levels of new knowledge acquired. Studies show that people that are motivated to learn are better able to acquire knowledge to transfer what they have learnt to the work place (Baldwin and Ford, 1988; Goldstein and Ford, 2002).

Several empirical studies have sought to understand training motivation, its antecedents and its consequences. In one of the first conceptual models advanced, Noe (1986) identified motivational influences on training efficacy and made a distinction between the motivation to learn (the desire to acquire the knowledge imparted in the training) and the motivation to transfer (the desire to use the knowledge and skills learnt in training, in the place of work).

Empirical results show that training motivation is determined by individual characteristics, such as personality factors (such as locus of control, conscientiousness, anxiety, positive and negative emotionality and self efficacy), by cognitive ability, and by demographic factors and by variables linked to the individual's work and career (including levels of involvement in the work and the organisation and career prospects). The characteristics of the context itself seem also to play a role in determining motivation and some early results show that the working environment climate (Quinones, Ford, Seago, & Smith, 1995) and the support of colleagues and superiors in their participation in the training process (Birdi, Allan & Warr, 1997) particularly influence the transfer and application of knowledge and skills acquired in training to the actual working context.

If individual characteristics seem most often to be predictors for *learning motivation*, context characteristics seem most often to contribute to *application or transfer motivation* of knowledge to work and the actual organisation.

A recent study by Battistelli, Lemoine and Odoardi of 2007 took as its starting point that training motivation was likely to be a multidimensional construct of the *motivation to acquire new knowledge and work skills*, of the *motivation to apply acquired skills to the work place* and the *individual's motivation to improve his professional standing*. These three different aspects seem to be influenced by personality, by individual characteristics associated with the work itself and by specific expectations of the results that would be achieved. It is further supposed that three different types of personal aims explain the three components of training motivation. That is, the objective of increasing personal knowledge and skills for a growth in potential and being on top of the job, the objective of improving work performance and competence, and that of opening up greater opportunities for advancement and achieving higher professional standing.

On the basis of the first results obtained on training motivation it may be supposed that the motivation to transfer knowledge and skills to the workplace is most greatly influenced by the characteristics of the working context (organisational atmosphere, support from superiors, characteristics of the work that permit the use of new skill and competences and working conditions most suited for the application of new knowledge and skills). It is nevertheless suggested that also the organisational context is capable of influencing motivation for learning. If the personnel are working in an organisation that backs and supports training and continuous skills development, this may act as a stimulus to the desire to learn and thus foster a growth in motivation to learn.

Organisational context factors influence pre-training motivation with

direct effects on learning (Hicks & Klimoski, 1987) and on the transfer of what is learnt into application. Contextual effects have generally been conceptualized in two ways: as tangible *situational constraints* that affect motivation and learning, or as *perceptions* of organisational features, events, and processes that convey meaning about the importance and relevance of training, which in turn influence motivation and learning. For example Mathieu and Martineau (1977) suggest that situational constraints such as insufficient job information, equipment, supplies, money, and time hinder motivation to learn.

As regards the *perceptions* of persons, that is to say the configurations and events people perceive as being supportive of training, Quinones (1995) showed that it is the interpretation and meaning ascribed to the training by the organisation that determines motivation and actual learning by the trainees. If there is a perception that the organisation attributes real value to training, then people are more motivated to take part. The atmosphere and the culture of the organisation, the climate for transfer of the knowledge and skills, interpersonal support both from superiors and colleagues determine the importance of training and has an effect on both the motivation and the learning process of the trainee (Quinones, 1995).

Based on the above, this study proposes to examine the roles played by diverse factors, both individual and at the organisational level, on training motivation seen as a multidimensional construct: *motivation to learn new things and job skills, motivation to apply what has been learnt to the job and motivation to increase standing and position in the company* (Battistelli, Lemoine, Odoardi, 2007).

The personal characteristics under examination are *proactiveness, innovativeness* e *la dominance*. The proactive personality identifies opportunities and acts upon them. People with this disposition demonstrate a desire to act and persevere until they obtain significant changes. The proactive personality has a tendency to initiate and maintain actions that directly modify surrounding circumstances (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Frese, Kring, Soose and Zempel, 1996).

Innovation is a personality characteristic typical of people who tend to seek out activities and work where they are constantly stimulated to be creative and to change existing systems and processes. This aspect is deemed to be particularly important in training, especially as supporting the desire to improve oneself through learning.

Dominance in personality regards the tendency to want to have an influence on others. Individuals with a high dominance factor have been found to be more likely to find themselves in positions of leadership and are more likely to be concerned about achieving high social status.

*H1. Personality traits influence trainee motivation for learning. In particular, individuals with an innovation personality have a good motivation to learn and to acquire new job skills, individuals with proactive personality have good motivation to improve professional competencies for application at work, and individuals with dominant personalities show good motivation to improve status and position.*

Studies of training have shown the importance of other characteristics related to professional career and job. One of the constructs is job involvement, defined as psychological identification with one's work and the degree to which it is central to the person and his/her identity (Brown, 1996; Lodhal & Keiner, 1965). From an individual perspective, job involvement has been considered key to personal growth and satisfaction at the workplace, as well as to motivation and goal directed behaviour (Lawler & Hall, 1970). Research has indicated that people who are highly involved in their work are better motivated for training that is expected to increase working skills and performance (Martineau et al., 1993).

*H2. Job involvement primarily influences the motivation to learn for the purpose of applying to this to work.*

With regard to the relationship with the job and the organisational environment, the *desired characteristics of the job* have been considered these are the specific elements that the person would like to find in the job and in organisation. They reflect the individual work preferences and would expect that people who prefer a challenging job will be more highly motivated to learn and to train in order to improve their performance at work. The work characteristics are those of a challenging job, where the individual may continuously improve job skills and performance, of a job permitting innovation and of well-organised job that is prescribed by superiors, with low levels of autonomy and responsibility.

*H3. High motivation to acquire work-related knowledge and skills is typical of those who prefer stimulating and constructive work while the motivation for training that will improve status and standing is primarily found in those who prefer well-organised employment that has been laid out and is supervised by others.*

As regards the more specifically organisational features, the study has focussed on the backing provided by the organisation for the training process. Such support seems to have a particular influence on transfer-to-work motivation of knowledge and skills learnt in training. There may however also be an influence on the motivation for new knowledge and job skills.

*H4. The influence of the perception of support on the part of the organisation on motivation and the application of skills acquired in training and on motivation to acquire new knowledge and job skills.*

## 2 Method

### 2.1 The sample

382 employees took part in this study, 39% being males and 61% females. Participants were from different types of organisations, with employees from the public sector accounting for 62% and those from the private sector 38%. Average participant age was 37.55 years, ranging from 20 to 60 years. The educational level ranged from 38% with vocational training, 50% with a high school diploma and 12% were university graduates. The questionnaire was given to by the researchers to participants at the beginning of their training.

### 2.2 Measures

Motivation to learn (Battistelli, Lemoine, Odoardi, 2007) was elicited by asking participants to indicate “what are your reasons for attending this training programme”? All the ensuing statements begin with “I would like...” or “I want...” or “I hope...” and the replies were graded on a scale of 5, from 1) not very important to me to 5) very important to me. A total of 16 items measuring different degrees of motivation to learn were worked out, including the *motivation of improving status and position* (6 items, for example: “I hope it will help my career advancement”); the *motivation to apply (transfer) knowledge and job skills* (6 items, e.g. “I want to improve my work”); the *motivation to acquire new knowledge and skills* (4 items, e.g. “I would like to acquire new competencies in my work”).

Personality was measured using twenty-six items with the responses made on a five-point scale ranging from (1) “absolutely false about me” to (5) “absolutely true about me”. Eight items addressed issues of *proactivity* on scale by Bateman & Crant (1993). A sample item is “When something is going badly, I immediately look for a solution”. Six items addressed *personal initiative*, which indicates an individual’s disposition to change, to be innovative and to introduces changes into the work process (Battistelli & Odoardi, 1997, 2004). An example is the affirmation, “I feel attracted to situations that are in a constantly changing state”. Six items were aimed at measuring *dominance*, or the tendency for the person to engage in activity in which he or she is dominant or a leader. An example: “I like to to guide the work of others”.

Vocational involvement was measured by eight items using Lodhal and Keiner’s scale (1965), including “I am personally involved in my work” and “my work is an important part of my life”.

The desired features of the job were measured using ten items (Battistelli & Odoardi, 2004). These identified the most important elements the participants wished to find in their work. Six items focussed on *learning and development*, expressing a desire for work that emphasises the opportunity of acquiring or de-

veloping knowledge and skills (e.g. “working in a context that fosters growth in the work place”). Four items expressed the desire to for *supervision*, indicating a desire for a job that is organised and supervised by others (e.g. “having my work constantly supervised”).

Organisational support for training was identified with the help of six items, based on POS (Eisenberger et al., 1996), investigating the specific support provided by the organisation in the field of training and development. An example of this was the affirmation “my organisation is excellent at proposing training activities”.

### 3 Results

All of the scales have already been used in previous studies and verified as accurately reflecting the aspects under consideration. This study therefore presents its results based on the reliability of the scales employed, the description results and the system of relationships between the variables by way of verification of the hypotheses.

Table 1  
MEAN, STANDARD DEVIATION, CRONBACH'S ALPHA\* (DIAGONAL) AND CORRELATIONS BETWEEN VARIABLES.

|  | Mean | DS    | 1      | 2      | 3      | 4      | 5      | 6      | 7      | 8      | 9      | 10    |
|--|------|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|
| 1. M_MSP   | 3.15 | .956  | (.87)  |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |       |
| 2. M_AL  | 3.69 | .808  | .543** | (.84)  |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |       |
| 3. M_ACC   | 4.28 | .701  | .379** | .638** | (.88)  |        |        |        |        |        |        |       |
| 4. P_I   | 3.73 | .772  | .347** | .463** | .495** | (.88)  |        |        |        |        |        |       |
| 5. P_P   | 4.04 | .639  | .317** | .406** | .377** | .614** | (.85)  |        |        |        |        |       |
| 6. P_D   | 3.13 | .864  | .260** | .157** | .113*  | .434** | .412** | (.86)  |        |        |        |       |
| 7. CLAV  | 3.07 | .764  | .002   | .233** | .149** | .310** | .296** | .326** | (.81)  |        |        |       |
| 8. CL_A  | 4.16 | .690  | .351** | .615** | .704** | .538** | .425** | .130*  | .087   | (.91)  |        |       |
| 9. CL_S  | 2.60 | .798  | .426** | .304** | .043   | .096** | .212** | .150** | .211** | .099   | (.81)  |       |
| 10. SOF  | 3.00 | 1.027 | .259** | .207** | .168** | .291** | .160** | .102*  | .421** | .186** | .315** | (.87) |
| ** p < .001  |      |       |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |       |
| *The Cronbach alpha is a measure of scales coherence.. |      |       |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |       |

1. M\_MSP. Motivation for improvement in status and position
2. M\_AL. Motivation to apply training to workplace
3. M\_ACC. Motivation to acquire knowledge and job skills
4. P\_I. Innovativeness
5. P\_P. Proactiveness
6. P\_D. Dominance
7. CLAV. Job involvement
8. CL\_A. Desired job characteristics: learning and development
9. CL\_S\_. Desired job characteristics: supervision
10. SOF. Support for training on the organisation's part

To test the hypotheses and to understand the relationships between variables, a series of multiple regressions have been carried out according to the stepwise method. The results can be seen in tables 2, 3 and 4.

**Tabella 2**  
Regression analysis on learning motivation

| Dependent variable | B    | SE   | $\beta$ | t      | p    | R <sup>2</sup> |
|--------------------|------|------|---------|--------|------|----------------|
| M_ACC              |      |      |         |        |      |                |
| CL_A               | .624 | .042 | .616    | 14.719 | .000 | .500           |
| P_I                | .129 | .039 | .142    | 3.294  | .001 | .517           |
| SOF                | .144 | .040 | .183    | 3.574  | .000 | .526           |

**Tabella 3**  
Regression analysis on motivation for transfer (application)

| Dependent variable | B    | SE   | $\beta$ | t      | p    | R <sup>2</sup> |
|--------------------|------|------|---------|--------|------|----------------|
| MAL                |      |      |         |        |      |                |
| CL_A               | .590 | .052 | .507    | 11.245 | .000 | .374           |
| CL_S               | .210 | .040 | .207    | 5.247  | .000 | .434           |
| P_I                | .118 | .050 | .113    | 2.366  | .018 | .453           |
| SOF                | .082 | .037 | .091    | 2.223  | .027 | .460           |
| CLAV               | .092 | .043 | .087    | 2.118  | .035 | .465           |



**Tabella 4**  
**Regression analysis on motivation for improving personal status and position**

|                    | B    | SE   | $\beta$ | t     | p    | R <sup>2</sup> |
|--------------------|------|------|---------|-------|------|----------------|
| Dependent variable |      |      |         |       |      |                |
| MMSP               |      |      |         |       |      |                |
| CL_S               | .406 | .054 | .336    | 7.580 | .000 | .176           |
| CL_A               | .363 | .060 | .264    | 6.015 | .000 | .269           |
| SOF                | .172 | .048 | .160    | 3.560 | .000 | .295           |
| PD                 | .162 | .048 | .147    | 3.360 | .001 | .314           |

#### 4 Discussion and conclusions

This research has tended to confirm results already to be found in the literature on the role of certain personality characteristics and job involvement in training motivation and has added results regarding the influence of organisational factors such as company support and the desired features of the job and the working environment.

As had been thought, a number of individual and organisational factors work together to determine training motivation. The results, in relation to the three categories of motivation used, confirm that the motivation to acquire new knowledge and job skills, show that such motivation is primarily influenced by desired job characteristics, by an innovative personality and by organisational support and backing for training and development. The motivation to apply what has been learnt by trainees to the workplace is influenced by the desired job characteristics, in both of the aspects considered, by an innovative personality, by organisational support and by job involvement.. Training motivation as a desire to improve status and standing is primarily influenced by job characteristics, by both aspects considered with the supervision strand being prevalent, by support from the organisation concerned for training and development, and by a dominant personality. The hypothesis that organisational support is not only a determining factor for the transfer motivation, for the application of acquired knowledge and skills, but also a determining factor for motivating learning and improvement in personal status is confirmed by these results. Even if no global model has been tested, these results strongly suggest that that factors relating to the individual (personality characteristics such as proactiveness, innovativeness and dominance), those relating job involvement and organisational factors (organisational support) together contribute to jointly determining both the motivation to learn and the motivation to transfer or apply such knowledge and skills to the workplace, as well as the motivation to

undergo training with a view to obtaining career enhancement.

The organisational context is a determining factor in influencing the decision to take part in training by representing the positive. It is moreover determinant in influencing the individual in the application of such newly acquired competence in his or her work, such as to render the training effective and efficient. The results of this study tend to confirm the hypothesis that training is not an individual activity, associated with the trainee's learning and ability and desire to improve performance, but is rather founded on organisational conduct capable of constructing a relationship between the individual and the organisation that fosters the will and the motivation to learn, grow and develop skills required in the workplace and by the organisation concerned.

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