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# Evaluating the efficiency of leadership training programmes in Spain

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## Abstract

Leadership abilities, and especially social abilities related to emotional intelligence are key factors to team management and the performance increase it generates in companies. For this reason, leadership training is an essential part of development plans in organizations. Also applying learning to work place is equally important. Evaluating learning transfer is a critical condition in order to measure training results and to assess training efficacy within organizations. This article presents the results of an analysis of the factors affecting the transfer of the learning acquired within various leadership programs, in several Spanish companies, by means of the LTSI questionnaire developed by Holton and Bates (1998, 2000). The results show a clear intention to transfer learning, but a low level of support offered by the organization so as to enable trainees to apply learning. In addition, the trainees assessed exhibit an obvious lack of personal capacity to transfer what they learned.

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## 1. Introduction

Emotional Intelligence is a personal characteristic of human beings (Donaldson-Feilder & Bond, 2004:187), although it also implies the relationship with others, as presented in Goleman's model (1996:42) who first described the five abilities composing Emotional Intelligence: knowing one's own emotions, controlling one's own emotions, self motivating in order to achieve an objective, recognising other people's emotions (empathy) and relating with the others based on the emotions exhibited (social competency). Other authors carried out a similar classification. Mayer and Salovey (1997) identified four dimensions: detecting emotions, using emotions, understanding emotions and regulating emotions.

The four dimensions refer to one's own emotions as well as to the emotions of the others. For this reason we can state that social abilities are part of Emotional Intelligence.

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According to Quoidbach and Hansenne (2009), Emotional Intelligence is related to the results of a work group and to the internal cohesion exhibited. This explains why Emotional Intelligence training, and particularly social abilities training is such an important part of HRD programmes in companies. It is of great importance that leadership be part of the development of management as it highly impacts managers' work efficacy. Leaders are key parts of organizations and based on the emotional competencies they possess, deeply influence and motivate the rest of the workers so that they contribute to the organization's success (House et al., 1999:184). Various investigations show that leaders who possess high levels of emotional intelligence positively impact the work satisfaction of their subordinates (Langhorn, 2004; Wong & Law, 2002) and encourage positive behaviours which are beneficial to the company (Wong & Law, 2002).

Training within organizations, either in leadership or technical skills is an important tool to achieve the strategic objectives. Evaluating the results and impact of training is necessary in order to better understand its effects and to improve some of its elements. Measuring learning transfer is essential because it indicates the degree to which training was applied to the work place and consequently whether training was so efficient as to be a rentable investment for the company.

There are various authors who developed models to assess training transfer and the elements which influence it (Noe, 1986; Baldwin and Ford, 1988; Holton, 1996; Kraiger, 2002; Pineda, 2002; Russ-Eft and Preskill, 2005; Cheng and Ho, 2001). Holton and Bates (1998, 2000) elaborated an instrument to measure the factors influencing learning transfer to the work place, the LTSI (Learning Transfer System Inventory). Specifically, the questionnaire examines 16 factors acting as facilitators or barriers to learning transfer. Identifying such factors and diagnosing them allows us to determine the actions necessary to generate changes and improvements in participants' performance. The factors refer to the general training carried out in the company on one hand and to the specific training trainees attend in concrete cases. The first category comprises: Performance Coaching, Performance Self-Efficacy, Adaption to Change, Transfer Performance Outcomes Expectation, Transfer Effort-Performance Expectations; on the other hand, the factors referring to specific training are: Personal Outcomes Negative, Personal Outcomes Positive, Peer Support, Supervisor Sanctions, Supervisor Support, Learner Readiness, Motivation to Transfer, Opportunity to Use, Personal Capacity, Transfer Design, Content Validity.

In addition, and as a novelty, in the third version of the LTSI another factor was introduced, Transfer Intent, which refers to the predisposition of the trainees to apply learning to the work place and according to the scientific literature (Ajzen, 1991) it is considered to be a predictor of the subsequent behaviour, in other words a predictor of learning transfer.

This study aims to identify the factors which determine the transfer or the application of the learning acquired in leadership training programmes, on a sample of 110 trainees who hold senior and middle management positions in various Spanish companies, by means of the LTSI questionnaire.

## **2. Methodology**

We evaluated 110 senior and middle managers who had previously participated in leadership training programmes. This training was related to Emotional Intelligence, a key aspect, widely present in leaders' training. The classroom training lasted more than seven hours, and the contents included efficient negotiation, interpersonal abilities and time management amongst others.

The sample consisted of the senior managers and middle managers of various Spanish companies –both from the public and the private sector– who voluntarily participated in this study. The constitution of the sample was based on the opportunity criteria, also taking into account the calendar of the training actions.

We administrated the LTSI questionnaire, comprising 55 items on a Likert scale from 1-5 (totally disagree – completely agree). Once having filled out the questionnaire, the data was collected and analysed with the SPSS statistics pack. We carried out a construct validation by means of an exploratory factorial analysis, with an Eigen value superior or equal to the unit, and factorial charges superior or equal to 0.40; we also carried out a subsequent descriptive analysis and a comparative of the averages.

### 3. Results

Aiming to validate the LTSI, we carried out a confirmatory factorial analysis of the overall sample of 1,042 participants in training who collaborated in the study. The results indicate that the LTSI questionnaire was validated in the Spanish context.

The data obtained with respect to the diagnosis of the factors affecting transfer of learning in the case of leadership training (see fig. 1) shows that if the factor scores lower than 3 on a scale to 5, it is considered to be a barrier to transfer (coloured in red). If the score is between 3 and 3.99, the factor is considered to be a weak catalyst and it is displayed in yellow. Finally, if the factor scores higher than or equal to 4, it is acting as a strong facilitator to learning transfer and it is displayed in green.

The results suggest that senior and middle managers exhibiting an elevated intent to transfer (4.06 out of 5) and strongly believe that if they make an effort to apply training, their performance will improve (4.04 out of 5). Moreover, we notice no supervisor sanctions when trainees apply training to their work place (1.56 out of 5).

Nevertheless, the trainees perceive four out of the 16 factors to be barriers to learning transfer. These factors are: Personal Outcomes Negative (1.56), Performance Coaching (2.54), Supervisor Support (2.68), and Personal Capacity (1.88). This means that the trainees who participated in leadership training do not see themselves able to transfer learning, do not have enough coaching aimed at improving performance and do not receive sufficient support from their supervisors in order to apply learning.

The rest of the factors show that although they do not directly threat transfer, they neither completely enable it. This requires a series of actions to be taken in the company in order to enhance the power of these factors and convert them into real catalysts to training transfer.

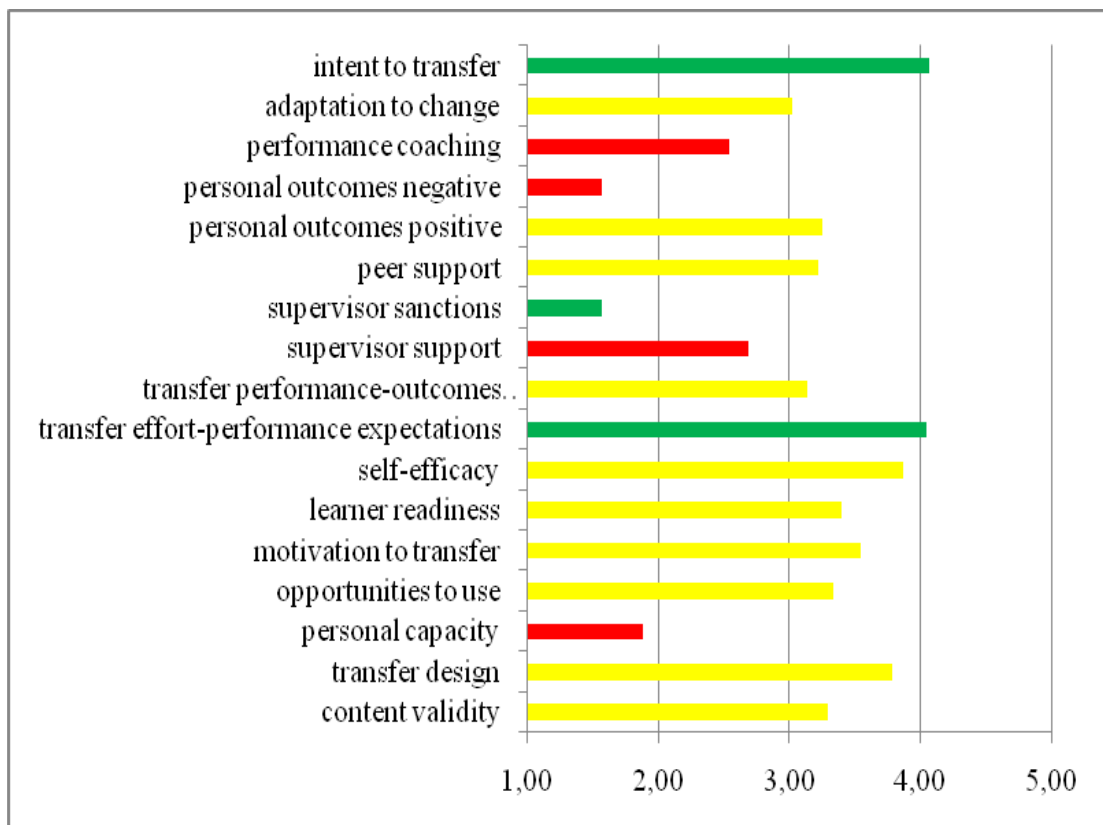


Figure 1. Learning transfer factors affecting leadership programmes.

We carried out a comparative analysis of the scores obtained by the senior managers and those obtained by middle management, by means of an ANOVA test, as we were faced with a sample bigger than 50. The results of the homogeneity of the variances test generated the statistical Levene and its meaning. We noticed that the significance results are higher than 0.05 which lead us to assume that the demographic variances were equal; in other words, there is no significant difference between the two analysed groups (senior and middle management).

#### 4. Conclusions

The Emotional Intelligence training of the leaders is a key aspect to the success of the companies, but, as the results of the present study show, we need to improve the efficacy of these programmes. The senior and middle managers exhibited a high intent to transfer, trust that their effort would generate an increase of their performance and they perceive no supervisor sanctions when applying training to the work place. These three factors act as facilitators to transfer. Companies who invest in leadership training programmes have the opportunity to enhance the effect of these factors which will translate into a higher overall quality of these programmes.

Nevertheless, we detect some important barriers to the trainee applying the newly acquired emotional intelligence skills to their work place. One of the most important barriers is the lack of or low supervisor support, which combined with the low amount of coaching received hinders the trainee's applying of the emotional intelligence learning.

These barriers can be overcome if the organization introduces Human Resources policies to improve their transfer system. Such concrete actions could consist of implementing a Competency based Management and strengthening the leadership skills of the managers. The personal results negative and the lack of personal capacity to transfer also act as barriers and could be overcome by means of following-up with the trainees' processes (coaching, follow-up sessions).

The learning transfer factors diagnosis shows us the factors which should be enhanced and the factors which should be improved in order to make leadership training programmes more efficient so as to generate results for the company. As various authors suggest (Holton and Bates, 2000; Burke & Hutchins, 2008), the results of the diagnosis should be utilized to introduce positive changes in the company and to make training more efficient so that the investments be rentable. Leadership training programmes help managers be more emotionally intelligent and provide them with the tools to manage teams more effectively. The results of this study and, ultimately the improvement proposals aim to advance in this complex quest: providing companies with emotionally intelligent leaders.

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