

## When Does Training Stick? The Moderating Role of Workplace Flexibility in Learning Transfer

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**ABSTRACT:** The present study aims to investigate the association between Learning and Development Opportunities (LDO), transfer of learning for the retail/FMCG industry employees in GCC considering workplace flexibility as a moderator. The study is relevant for the central question of generalization from training to on-the-job-performance in settings with limited work context and high turnover. It provides an insight on the performance of L&D systems within a constrained operational framework though GCC retail and FMCG sectors, where N-Oil GDP contributions are quite substantial. It is found that the transfer of learning is a positive correlate of LDO, although the elaboration on this relationship can be stronger with elements related to workplace flexibility. To the extent that transferring training experiences is important, so too are high degrees of autonomy and task discretion. It also looks like no amount of training will close the gap between how you should be working and how you are working unless it happens under a manager who will let develop the tools they've learned. Based on the job demands-resources (JD-R) theory, we extend the current literature in showing that workplace flexibility is a significant resource for facilitating LCT. The research emphasises the importance of embedding flexibility in HR policies to promote effective training. Therefore, it ends with the practical implications for HR managers aiming at maximizing training inputs in retail/FMCG industry of GCC.

**KEYWORDS:** Learning and Development, Transfer of Learning, Workplace Flexibility, Retail/FMCG, GCC

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### Introduction

With the fast-paced nature of today's business environment, companies across the globe are investing heavily in Learning and Development (L&D) to stay ahead both performance-wise and to keep their competition in check. IFEELSMART business The worldwide retail and FMCG industry are hit particularly hard by these trends as it struggles to face the challenges of digital transformation, evolving customer expectations and an increasingly mobile workforce. Economic diversification is at the heart of the GCC, and especially in Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, Bahrain and Oman retail and FMCG plays an increasingly important role. Non-oil GDP is a large contributor to which retail makes its own contribution and it's this dynamic which will see Saudi Arabia and Qatar, in their competing (Vision 2030 and Vision 2035) economic transformation programs jostling to compete with one another.

The GCC retail FMCG sector is unique and only exists in its own formation. It relies on a youthful, multicultural work force that depends largely on expatriate labor. Workers are in and out more quickly than they are in most Western economies, and attachment to a job is undermined by inflexible hours, long work weeks and lack of discretion over tasks. In this view corporate bodies are spending huge amount for training and development of their employees based on the assumption that by so doing employees' performance would increase which ultimately led to higher service quality and eventually satisfy customers. But a stubborn question persists: does all the training really "stick" and when is it translated into behavior in the actual workplace context?

The literature in human resource development has long indicated the "transfer problem. Yet companies invest billions each year into training programs, many of which still struggle to prioritize the lessons learned and new skills developed in an educational setting. Baldwin and Ford's (1988) classic transfer model specified that three key contributors to the application of learning on the job – training design, trainee characteristics, and work environment – were critical mediators of transfer. At three decades removed and counting, research continues to show that training delivered in an environment not conducive to productivity rarely achieves long-term results.

This issue is particularly prevalent in the GCC retail and FMCG sectors. Yes, they may have product knowledge training and customer service workshops or even digital systems learning, but the application of these skills is restricted due to rigid working patterns and intense manager direction, with little autonomy. A salesman who has been trained to adapt selling experiences would have trouble improvising steps if tight performance scripts are implemented. Likewise, a cashier trained in conflict resolution may never have the opportunity to use his expertise when required to adhere to restrictive scripts.

This discussion raises the question that how can organizations maximize their training investments to actually drive behavioral change and performance improvement in the GCC retail/FMCG sphere?

### Workplace Flexibility as a Missing Link

One reason may be what's called workplace flexibility. Flexibility is about how much autonomy workers have over when and how they manage their time, work on tasks or controlling what happens next. Although much research has emphasized supervisor support, or the role of organizational culture in facilitating transfer, structure flexibility as a key factor has been understated. In literal sense, flexibility allows learners to first try out new skills, behaviors and practice it in their daily work.

And while inflexibility might be counterintuitive in retail and FMCG, sectors where operational efficiency is key, try dealing with no toilet paper again. Standardization can be an issue for those businesses that are looking to keep their outlets consistent. But early indications are that when you allow front line staff the flexibility to put their trained skills to good use, new innovative and effective ways of working appear. This study proposes that the impact of training on transfer is moderated by workplace flexibility (it does not substitute for it); rather, these findings demonstrate how workplace flexibility leverages offerings of education and their positive outcomes.

## Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. Do LDOs influence the transfer of learning among GCC retail/FMCG employees?
2. Does workplace flexibility moderate the relationship between LDO and transfer of learning among GCC retail/FMCG employees?

## Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are;

1. To investigate the impact of Learning and Development Opportunities on Transfer of Learning on the retail and FMCG employees in the GCC
2. To examine the moderating role of workplace flexibility on the relationship of Learning and Development opportunities and Transfer of Learning on the retail and FMCG employees in the GCC,

## Literature Review

### Learning and Development Opportunities

#### L&D as a Strategic Lever

The value of L&D is recognised enthusiastically. Training strengthens engagement, employability and performance. In knowledge economies, it's the foundation of both innovation and adaptability. But meta-analyses show its effects are wildly inconsistent. Hakvoort et al. (2025) observe that the average impact of training is a factor inducing an intensity glottal gesture on employment in positive, but small and largely carried by mechanisms of reinforcement.

The argument is whether the L&D results are fixed or contingent. On the one hand, investigations demonstrated that well-organized programmes yield similar improvements in productivity across sectors. On the other hand, retailers in GCC overspend on training and do not see measurable return, citing structural inflexibility and high turnover as some issues. This indicates that training is not a sufficient but necessary prerequisite for improvement.

#### L&D in retail and FMCG

Research in retail/FMCG is limited compared to healthcare and education. Where studies exist, findings are mixed. Bäckström (2023) report that Swedish retail workers appreciated training but could not implement it due to tightly scripted workflows. In the retail sector in GCC, training tends to focus on compliance and product knowledge rather than soft skills and flexibility (Al-Ghunaimi & Awashreh, 2022).

These studies show that although LDO develops capacity, its impact is very context-dependent. Results Like GCC retail, results in standardized service environments are more about employee discretion to use new knowledge rather than the quality of training. This indicates that workplace flexibility is a non-observed variable.

## Transfer of Learning

Transfer of training the extent to which learned skills are used on the job is a bogeyman. O'Neill and Murphy (2025) supported this and further established that less than fifty percent of all students transfer. Shen et al.

(2024) underscore the impact of environmental support and demonstrate that behavioral methods such as implementation intentions might even increase transfer. Hakvoort et al. (2025), but they caution that differences in methodologies between studies could impede generalization.

In sum, the literature reflects a recurrent controversy between the autonomy and primacy of individual motivation and 'will for transfer' relative to contextual enablers. Fu et al (2023) highlight the importance of learner self-efficacy and proactivity, while it posits that structural resources, such as time, tools, and freedom explain more variance. These results indicate that both matters, however, the weight of them may vary across industries. For service positions, transfer is especially important. van Doorn et al. (2023) suggest that the increasing use of digital technology and the heightened customer agenda increase skill complexity, application, therefore, being a competitive imperative. But retail employees are closely tracked and there is less room for improvisation.

## Workplace Flexibility

### Definitions and Dimensions

Flexibility encompasses schedule control, task discretion, and decision-making autonomy (Kossek et al., 2024). It can be structural (formal policies) or psychological (perceived latitude). Both forms affect whether employees feel empowered to apply training.

### Flexibility as an Enabler of Transfer

Studies consistently link flexibility to stronger application of skills. Aguas (2024) finds it enhances resilience, while Harper et al (2022) report it supported digital skill transfer during COVID-19. He also adds that employees with autonomy are nearly twice as likely to use new training on the job.

### The Paradox of Flexibility

Flexibility is not universally positive. Kossek and Kelliher (2023) warn of the dangers of badly managed flexibility. Kossek et al. (2024) contend that the consequences depend on framing—institutionalized versus discretionary flexibility. In sum, these results seem to indicate a conditional enhancer role for flexibility on training effectiveness. "In a world of standardisation that we find in retail for GCC, even small amounts of flexibility can mean the difference between whether training sticks or not, she said. However, to our knowledge there has been no empirical investigation of flexibility as a moderator of transfer in this industry our research fills this void.

### Self-Directed Learning

SDL is widely regarded as a predictor of learning outcomes. Fu et al (2023) show that SDL enhances adaptability and lifelong learning, while Houghton et al. (2021) found it critical in remote work transitions. Yet Arianpoor et al. (2024) argue SDL's impact is muted without structural enablers, raising doubts about its universality.

Taken together, the literature highlights an unresolved debate: whether SDL is best understood as a stable trait or as a context-dependent behavior. If stable, it should predict outcomes across contexts. If contingent,

its effect depends on organizational conditions. In GCC retail, motivated employees may still be constrained by rigid scripts. Thus, SDL may matter most when paired with flexibility, making its role potentially secondary to structural enablers.

### Learning Transfer Environment

The transfer environment has moral and environmental support (Reinhold et al., 2018). Yaghi and Bates (2020) focus on managerial and peer support, whereas Mdhlalose (2022) emphasizes tools and materials. Literature suggests that the different foci have resulted in divergent operationalizations of the transfer context. Using the transfer environment as a mediator, this research describes that L&D effects are transferred into behavior through social and structural supports, with flexibility as its boundary condition.

### Job Performance

Performance includes task, contextual, and adaptive aspects (Pelgrim et al., 2022). These factors are significant to be included in service sectors (Ali Siddiqui & Siddiqui, 2021). Goulart et al. (2022) found that the factors influencing these dimensions are training as compared to efficiency measurements, however some argue GCC's retailers barely measure them.

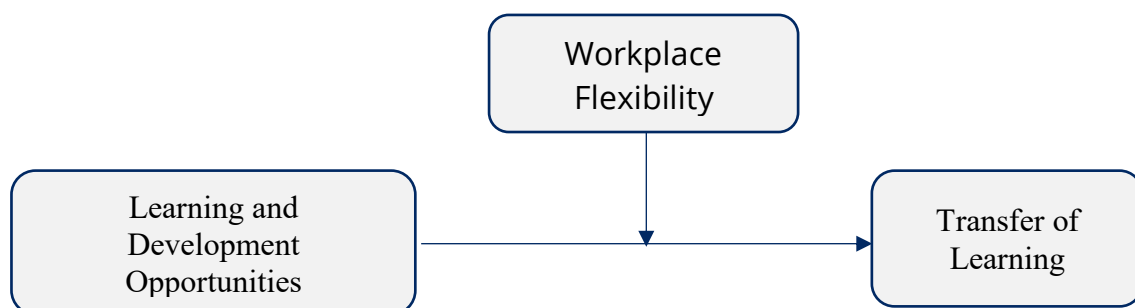
This is a gap while training inculcates adaptability, the assessment does not easily recognize or reward it. Our research addresses this by considering performance as a multidimensional construct and drawing clear links with transfer so that not just the amount of training input, rather the application of skill is responsible for outcomes.

### Theoretical Framework

According to JDQ-R THEORY, resources serve as a buffer against demands and foster motivation. Training and flexibility are capital, but their interaction is an issue: LDO is building capacity (humans' capability to learn), while flexibility provides points of removal or application. It also promotes JD-R in digital settings, which is further encouraged with this integration.

### Conceptual Model and Hypotheses

Figure 1



- ▶ H1: LDO positively influences transfer of learning.
- ▶ H2: Workplace flexibility moderates the LDO and transfer of learning

## Methods

### Research Setting and Sector Justification

This study is situated in the GCC retail and FMCG sector, with data collected from organizations in Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia. This sector is chosen due to its economic significance, High investment in L&D.

### Target Population and Sampling

The target population comprises retail and FMCG employees in the GCC who have undergone at least one formal training intervention in the past 12 months. This includes frontline staff (cashiers, sales associates, merchandisers), supervisors, and mid-level managers. A stratified random sampling was used through dividing the organizations in strata such as luxury retail, FMCG supermarkets, specialty retail. Within each stratum, employees were randomly selected to ensure diversity of roles and functions.

- ▶ **Sample Size:** Following SEM sample size recommendations, a minimum of 300 participants is needed for regression analysis. To account for nonresponse and incomplete surveys, the target sample will be 400–450 employees.
- ▶ **Eligibility Criteria:** (a) full-time employment in retail/FMCG, (b) completion of training in the past year, (c) minimum of six months tenure in current role (to ensure exposure to work environment).

### Instrumentation and Measures

The survey instrument will consist of four major sections: demographics, LDOO, workplace flexibility, and transfer of learning. All items will be measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Established scales will be adapted to fit the retail/FMCG context.

### Demographics and Controls

Demographic information will be collected to contextualize responses and serve as control variables:

- ▶ Gender, age, education level
- ▶ Job role (frontline, supervisor, manager)
- ▶ Job tenure and total work experience
- ▶ Employment type (permanent, contract)
- ▶ Nationality (expatriate, national)
- ▶ Hours of training completed in the last 12 months

### Learning and Development Opportunities (Independent Variable)

LDO will be measured using a scale adapted from Noe & Wilk (1993) and subsequent updates in HRD research. Items will capture availability, relevance, and organizational support for training. Example items:

- ▶ "My organization provides adequate training programs to develop my skills."
- ▶ "I am encouraged to participate in learning opportunities."
- ▶ "The training opportunities offered are relevant to my job."
- ▶ "There are enough resources to support my development."

### Transfer of Learning (Dependent Variable)

Transfer of learning will be measured using adapted items from O'Neill (2025). Learning Transfer System Inventory (LTSI). Items will focus on the extent to which employees apply acquired skills and knowledge on the job. Example items:

- ▶ "I regularly apply what I learned in training to my daily work."
- ▶ "The knowledge and skills gained in training are useful for my job."
- ▶ "I feel confident transferring new skills into my tasks."
- ▶ "My performance has improved as a result of applying training."

### Workplace Flexibility (Moderator)

Workplace flexibility will be measured using validated scales on job autonomy and work design (Kossek et al., 2023). Items will be adapted to retail settings:

- ▶ "I have flexibility in deciding how to complete my tasks."
- ▶ "I can adjust the sequence of my work to apply new skills."
- ▶ "My work schedule allows time for practicing what I learned in training."
- ▶ "I have some control over how I deliver customer service."

### Scale Validation

A pilot test with 30 employees will be conducted to assess item clarity and contextual appropriateness. Content validity will be ensured through expert review by HRD professionals and academics.

### Data Analysis

The data was analyzed through using regression and moderation analysis. Hayes PROCESS was used for moderation analysis. SPSS was used as data analysis software.

## Results and Discussion

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics*

| Variable                     | Mean  | SD    | Min | Max  |
|------------------------------|-------|-------|-----|------|
| Learning & Development (LDO) | 3.00  | 1.14  | 1.0 | 5.0  |
| Workplace Flexibility (Flex) | 3.00  | 1.10  | 1.0 | 5.0  |
| Transfer of Learning         | 3.00  | 1.13  | 1.0 | 5.0  |
| Training Hours (last 12M)    | 17.95 | 11.35 | 0.0 | 96.0 |
| Age (years)                  | 35.05 | 7.86  | 18  | 60   |
| Tenure (years)               | 5.40  | 3.74  | 0.5 | 29.7 |

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the main study variables and continuous controls. The mean scores for the three focal constructs (LDO, Workplace Flexibility, and Transfer of Learning) were around the midpoint of the 1–5 scale, suggesting variability across respondents.

### Correlations

Correlations among the three focused constructs were all positive (Table 2). As shown in the table below, high correlations between LDO, WF and TL are significant at 0.01. The association between TL and LDO is 0.427, indicating a moderate level of association between them, but similarly, the association for WF and LDO is also

moderate (0.346), and both were positive. Finally, LDO and WF also have a moderate relationship with 0.492, which also confirms the absence of a Multicollinearity problem.

Table 2

Correlation Matrix

| Variable                                   | 1      | 2      | 3 |
|--------------------------------------------|--------|--------|---|
| Learning & Development Opportunities (LDO) | 1      |        |   |
| Transfer of Learning                       | .427** | 1.     |   |
| Workplace Flexibility (WF)                 | .346** | .492** | 1 |

### Reliability

Table 3 shows the reliability analysis of the scales below. Cronbach's Alpha value shows that all scales have values above 0.70, which is acceptable and in the range.

Table 3

Reliability of Scales

| Variable              | Items | α    |
|-----------------------|-------|------|
| LDOO                  | 5     | .866 |
| Workplace Flexibility | 6     | .870 |
| Workplace Flexibility | 6     | .888 |

### Regression Analysis

Regression analysis was carried out to ascertain the cause-and-effect relationship between LDO (independent variable) and TL (dependent variable). The results of the regression analysis are detailed in the tables below.

Table 4

Model Summary

| Model | R                 | R square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1     | .438 <sup>a</sup> | .251     | .258              | 530                        |

a. Predictors: (Constant), WF

Table 4 shows the summary of the regression analysis. As shown in the table, R = 0.438 represents no more than a correlation between the LDO and TL. The magnitude of R2 is 0.251, which indicates that LDO explains 25.1% of the variation in TL.

Table 5

ANOVA

| Model      | Sum of squares | df  | Mean Square | F      | Sig               |
|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|--------|-------------------|
| Regression | 8.271          | 1   | 8.274       | 32.766 | .000 <sup>b</sup> |
| Residual   | 42.361         | 184 | .323        |        |                   |
| Total      | 50.632         | 185 |             |        |                   |

a. Dependent Variable: LDO

b. Predictors: (Constant), TL

The ANOVA of the regression analysis is presented in Table 5. In this table, the most relevant statistics are the value and its significance. In the table, here it has been mentioned the value is 32.76 of *f*, and a significant value of 0.000 shows that the adjusted model was a good fit.

Table 6  
*Coefficients*

| Model |            | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients | t      | Sig. |
|-------|------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|------|
|       |            | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                      |        |      |
| 1     | (Constant) | 2.74                        | .310       |                           | 11.244 | .000 |
|       | LDO        | .364                        | .070       | .403                      | 6.990  | .000 |

a. Dependent Variable: TL

Table 6 is the beta value, which represents the regression coefficients. It exhibited that the unstandardized beta value of the coefficient is 0.364 and positive, which means a one-unit change in LDO will make a 0.364 unit change in TL in also same direction. Likewise, the value of the standardized coefficient expresses the relation between X and Y, which is 0.403. The t-value is 6.990, which is greater than the critical value of  $\pm 1.96$ . In addition, *p* is less than the recommended threshold of 0.05. Therefore, it is hypothesized that LDO has a positive and significant association with TL. Thus, H1 is supported. As per the earlier studies, LDO has emerged as one of the significant predictors of TL across various sectors.

Moderation Analysis

Moderation is a parameter which makes the strength of relationship between it's independent variable and dependent variable change. Put simply, the moderator either enhances or diminishes the relation between IV and DV. In present study, the model WF was considered as a moderator between the LDO and TL relationship. To conduct moderation analysis, the current study adopts Preacher and Hayes (2014) PROCESS Macro approach. Since PROCESS Macro is charged with having 92 models, and the appropriate model section is determined on the context of study. Here, the model of this study indicates that LDO is IV, TL as DV and WF as moderator. This was in the realm of straightforward moderation, and for this kind of model, we recommend a Model 1 from PROCESS Macro (Hayes, 2018). Thus, Model 1 by Hayes's (2018) PROCESS Macro was used by the researcher. The summary results are presented in the tables below.

Table 7  
*Model Summary*

| R   | R Square | MSE | f     | Df1 | Df2 | p    |
|-----|----------|-----|-------|-----|-----|------|
| .59 | .34      | .15 | 59.46 | 3   | 185 | .000 |

The model summary of the regression analysis is reported in this table. As depicted, the value of *R*<sup>2</sup> is 0.44 which shows that the IDV and moderator combinedly explain 59% variation in the dependent variable TL. The value of *f* is also too high, i.e., 59.46 and the *p* value is less than 0.05, so the study model is best fitted.

**Table 8**

*Coefficients*

|          | Coeff. | se  | t    | p    | LLCI | ULCI |
|----------|--------|-----|------|------|------|------|
| Constant | 4.01   | .88 | 4.81 | .000 | 1.38 | 4.63 |
| LDO      | .84    | .18 | 4.79 | .000 | .61  | 2.14 |
| WF       | 1.59   | .17 | 8.78 | .000 | 1.43 | 2.49 |
| Int_1    | .18    | .04 | 4.86 | .000 | .11  | .29  |

As reported in the above table.8, LDO is positively and significantly related to TL. Workplace flexibility is also significantly related to TL. In addition, the interaction effect is also significantly related to TL. To decide whether the moderator moderates the relationship will depend on the t and p value of the interaction effect. As seen, the t and p values of the interaction effect are significant, showing that the moderator moderates the relationship between LDO and TL. This result is also confirmed by the lower-level confidence interval (LLCI) and upper-level confidence interval (ULCI) because there is no zero in both LLCI and ULCI. Therefore, hypothesis 2, which stated that WF moderates the relationship between LDO and TL, is accepted. The hypothesis is tested in the light of previous literature. WF is a key moderator for the relationship between LDO and TL. LDO contributes to this by providing transfer of learning in the organizations. However, the influence of these behaviours is heavily masked by current workplace flexibility. The extent to which ACRTs are in use from a perspective that allows the sharing of information, knowledge, and learning is a key limitation to their successful implementation, such that every project is able to benefit from organisations generating knowledge.

This research addressed the influence of Learning and Development LDO on transfer of learning, among employees in GCC retail/FMCG sector with workplace flexibility as a moderator. The findings were supportive for both hypotheses. The first of these is the positive and significant relationship between LDO and transfer, which aligns with a commonly held expectation that formal training will get employees using their knowledge and skills back on the job. Second, the relationship was moderated by workplace flexibility in such a way that workplace flexibility strengthened the positive impact of LDO on transfer. In other words, under high flexibility for employees reporting their level, the effect of LDO on transfer was robust and positive, but under low perceived flexibility, this relationship diminished.

The results of this study are consistent with international studies indicating that organizational support and job design influence the outcomes of training. For example, Blume et al. (2010) discovered that work environment variables such as supervisor support were important predictors of transfer in a meta-analysis. Likewise, Western studies have stressed the importance of autonomy as a significant antecedent to transfer of training. But in two important ways, the findings represent a big step forward from previous research. First, the concept of work-life balance pertaining to workplace flexibility is relevant for understanding the underlying construct of organizational support. While supervisor support plays a crucial role, our study suggests that structural aspects (e.g. flexible hours, autonomy over tasks) are also significant elements. Second, by focusing on the GCC retail/FMCG industry, the paper emphasizes contextual forces that are not present within western markets. In the GCC, a lot of people are expats, so they do not really get to make decisions, and it makes things harder. This is moderated mediation i.e. the moderator to community

participation and personal collective efficacy relationship is stronger than the environment and parenting contribution dimensions.

The results are theoretically and practically important. They are suggestive of the fact is that LDO on its own does not always generate transfer. Instead, it's the company in which he or she works notably, how much freedom is given to people on the job that determines if employees will be able to apply what they have learned.

This is particularly pertinent in a region (GCC) with its retail/FMCG sector where the operational outlook is harsh and staff are conditioned to work within challenging working hour constraints, rigid shift patterns and task assignment.

### **Theoretical Contributions**

This study supports implications for wider training and employee performance literature in several aspects. First, placing the results within the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) theory perspective, the findings harbour that LDO are a job resource. The job resources, e.g., learning new skills at work provides the employees to fulfill job demands and promote their personal development. Yet, resources could not exist in isolation. In the present study, workplace flexibility was a second order facilitative resource to provide employees with resources for transforming training into work practices.

Second, the research is consistent with Adult Learning theory that adults learn best when they can draw upon information to solve problems and generate meaning in a self-directed way. The moderating effect of flexibility supports this premise: employees with autonomy to make decisions and manage tasks will have more opportunity to experiment, adjust, and blend new skills. On the other hand, in a static environment, adult learning principles are not observed since there's no time for an employee to practice or experiment.

Thirdly, this study contributes to the transfer of training literature, which has long recognized the “transfer problem”. A lot of places spend a fortune on L&D but don't see performance go up. One such contextual factor flexibility in the workplace is the focus of this study. The study shows that the conditioned facilitating prerequisite for training investments to work is flexibility.

Lastly, the results contribute to the transfer literature within the under-researched GCC retail/FMCG domain. Most of the literature regarding transfer of training has emerged in Western contexts. By concentrating on GCC workers, the current study supplies evidence from an unusual labor market with various expatriates' workforce, high pace of economic development and high turnover.

### **Practical Implications**

There are certain practical implications of the research study. Firstly, the findings imply that training and skill transferring are utmost important for the employees. Hence, organizations should provide trainings and necessary skills to the employees if and when required.

Secondly, HR policies should clearly embed flexibility in talent management practices. This could be in the form of flexible working hours, possibilities to rotate jobs or staff being afforded even just the opportunity to suggest changes around the process that they have learned about. In-session flexibility (i.e., offering opportunities to alter the break time to practice) might even enhance transfer.

Third, organizations need to take a system perspective to LDO investments. Too frequently, training becomes a separate effort. Our results demonstrate that optimization of training outcomes is heavily dependent on the design of the work environment.

The link between learning and competitiveness For GCC retailers that are pursuing both efficiency and service quality, training and development is crucial in ensuring their success to remain competitive.

And fourth, the results reinforce the importance of leadership attitudes. Leaders and managers need to press their workers to practice new skills and give them some breathing room to apply them. One that emphasizes control over learning and undermines investment in training. On the other hand, leaders that create an environment where their teams are able to adapt and innovate pave the way for transfer to happen.

## Limitations

This study nevertheless has limitations that need to be addressed.

- ▶ Firstly, the cross-section of this study, but the dynamic process of training transfer was difficult to reflect in one time point for weeks or months. The evidence would be stronger in longitudinal studies with more causal evidence.
- ▶ Second, the study's focus was restricted to the retail/FMCG industry. Despite the comparison mainly applying to a GCC context, this is an industry critical to their economies, and so lessons may not directly transfer to other industries, such as healthcare, finance, or education, that do not enjoy the same flexibility and training dynamics. Thirdly, the study did not directly assess acculturation or expatriate status. They could influence perceptions of flexibility and willingness to transfer training, which might be tested in future research.

## Future Research Directions

Several lines of investigation are now possible as a result of our work.

This suggests a focus for future studies to track employees over time in order to see if flexibility consistently moderates the LDO and Transfer relationship at individual points of intervention.

Future research might explore the role of supervisors and teams. Multilevel models would account for the cross-level effects (e.g. team level flexibility and individual-level perception on training). Comparing retail with other sectors (for example, hospitality, healthcare and logistics) would allow researchers to ascertain whether the nature of flexibility-related impact is consistent or varies between domains.

Given the growth of e-learning and AI-based training platforms in GCC organizations, a focus for future research is to investigate whether digital flexibility (e.g., self-paced modules) interacts with workplace flexibility to facilitate transfer. Because GCC workforce is multi-cultural, cross-cultural research may explore whether flexibility perception differs according to nationality, culture and contract type. They explore how reforms at a governmental level (e.g., working hours laws, labor rights) could impact organizational flexibility and in turn the learning transfer.

## Conclusion

Our results support the need to contextualize inferences about training effectiveness. Training and Development is an important factor for the transfer of skills, but it depends on the conditions in any organization. In the retail and FMCG sector in the GCC, work flexibility also proves to be a game changer; training 'sticks' when there is space and room for employees to apply what they learn of their own accord.

In theory, this study also extends the JD-R framework and transfer literature by suggesting flexibility as a main moderator. For practitioners, HR professionals, and policy makers, the research suggests integrating training with flexible work design for maximum ROI. These are lessons that bear pointing out in a business sector that is extremely cyclical and totally about who can make what the cheapest.

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