

**Participant Perceptions on the meaning of Supervisor and
Organisational Support in Creating a
Positive Learning Environment**

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ABSTRACT

The literature discusses the importance of providing support for learning, however there is not a clear understanding of the types of support that are beneficial. This thesis comprises a series of three studies that address weaknesses in the literature regarding how organisations can support employee learning and transfer. These studies provide rich data that extend the literature through employing a qualitative methodology in an area dominated by quantitative studies. They give voice to employees' perceptions of what is important to support their learning.

The first study examined the factors that employees perceived as important in creating a supportive learning environment. Together with the sponsorship provided by senior leaders for the organisation's learning agenda, several distinguishing characteristics were identified; learning with colleagues, openness to new ideas and change, building relationships, open communication, sharing the learning, coaching, self-awareness and confidence. The results of this study also indicate that selecting learning cohorts from across regional and functional areas assists in reforming subcultures, which contributes to an overarching culture of learning and thus to a supportive learning environment.

The second study identified the forms of organisational support that were considered to support learning. It also differentiated organisational support from other forms of support. Three unique characteristics of organisational support were identified: alignment, senior management commitment and providing high quality relevant development programs. Alignment was achieved by incorporating organisational strategies, operational plans and values into the program content, and incorporating program learning outcomes into the organisation's business processes; thus reinforcing the use of learning in the workplace. Senior management commitment was signalled through ongoing financial investment, attendance to open programs and acting as guest speakers, or as fellow

participants. Engaging reputable providers to deliver and customise the program content added to perceptions of high quality and relevance, which motivated employees to participate.

The third study investigated supervisor behaviours that impacted employees' ability to transfer. In particular this study enabled the development of the PDA model of supervisor support that shows which supervisor behaviours were found helpful *'prior'* to, *'during'* and *'after'* attending the development program. Supportive behaviours prior to program attendance included discussing the program content, providing encouragement and establishing expectations. Practical support during the program signalled that supervisors endorsed employees' efforts to learn. Meetings after the program helped to consolidate employees' learning by discussing which aspects of their learning they could apply in the workplace, facilitating practice opportunities, providing feedback and encouragement to develop and try new ideas.

The results from this series of studies contribute to the literature by providing clarity on how organisations can create environments that support learning and transfer. The research findings may also assist practitioners and organisations to develop relevant frameworks and practices that consistently support and enhance learning and transfer throughout the organisation.

STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

“The work contained in this thesis has not previously been submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution.

To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.”

Signature:

Date: November 2016

Table of contents

Abstract	ii
Statement of original authorship	iv
List of figures	viii
List of tables	viii
Acknowledgements	ix
Publications arising from this thesis	x
Chapter 1. Introduction	1
1.1. Overview of the transfer literature	3
1.1.1. Work environment factors	4
1.1.2. Training design	6
1.1.3. Trainee characteristics	6
1.2. Supportive organisational characteristics	7
1.3. Research questions	11
1.4. Context for the study	11
1.5. Overview of methodology	13
1.5.1. Research design	18
1.5.2. Ethical considerations	20
1.5.3. Sample	21
1.5.4. Data collection	24
1.5.5. Organisational documentation	25
1.5.6. Interview procedure	27
1.5.7. Data analysis	30
1.6. Thesis structure	34
Chapter 2: Literature review	38
2.1. Organisational learning capability	40
2.2. Training and transfer	42
2.2.1. Work environment	45
2.2.1.1. Supervisor support	45
2.2.1.2. Organisational support	49
2.2.1.3. Peer support	51
2.2.1.4. Constraints to learning and transfer	54
2.2.2. Training design	57
2.2.3. Trainee characteristics	59
2.3. Workplace learning	62
2.4. Organisational learning and the learning organisation	63

2.5. Supportive leadership behaviour	68
2.6. Climate and culture for learning	73
2.7. Chapter summary	77
2.8. Focus of research	79
Chapter 3: Journal article one	82
Declaration of co-authorship and contribution.....	83
3.1. Abstract	85
3.2. Introduction	85
3.3. Context for the study	89
3.4. Study design and methodology	90
3.4.1. Sample	91
3.4.2. Procedure	91
3.4.3. Data analysis	92
3.5. Results	95
3.5.1. Leadership	95
3.5.2. Environmental characteristics	96
3.5.3. Personal characteristics	98
3.5.4. Hindrances.....	99
3.6. Discussion.....	99
3.7. Strengths and limitations.....	103
3.8. Research implications	103
3.9. Practical implications	104
3.10. Conclusion	104
Chapter 4. Journal article two	106
Declaration of co-authorship and contribution.....	107
4.1. Abstract	108
4.2. Introduction	109
4.3. Context for the study	113
4.4. Study design and methodology.....	115
4.4.1. Sample	116
4.4.2. Procedure	116
4.4.3. Data analysis	117
4.5. Results	117
4.6. Discussion.....	123
4.6.1. Alignment	124
4.6.2. Senior management commitment	125
4.6.3. Provide high quality relevant programs.....	127

4.7. Strengths and limitations	128
4.8. Recommendations and conclusions.....	129
Chapter 5. Journal article three	131
Declaration of co-authorship and contribution.....	132
5.1. Abstract	133
5.2. Introduction.....	134
5.3. An overview of the training transfer literature.....	135
5.4. Background to the study	138
5.5. Study design and methodology	140
5.5.1. Sample	140
5.5.2. Procedure	142
5.5.3. Data analysis.....	142
5.6. Results	143
5.6.1. Support prior to the course	146
5.6.2. Support during the course	146
5.6.3. Support after the course	146
5.7. Discussion	148
5.8. Strengths and limitations	152
5.9. Recommendations and conclusions	153
Chapter 6. Discussion and conclusion	156
6.1. Creating a supportive learning environment	157
6.2. Organisational support for learning	163
6.3. Supervisor support for learning and transfer	166
6.4. Contributions of the Research	169
6.4.1. Contribution to Theory	169
6.4.2. Contribution to Practice	171
6.5. Strengths and limitations of the study	173
6.6. Directions for future research	176
6.7. Thesis summary	177
References	179
Appendix A. Leadership program overview	197
Appendix B. Invitation to participate	198
Appendix C. Information sheet	199
Appendix D. Consent form	200
Appendix E. Interview question guide	201

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1	Framework for the studies.....	2
Figure 1.2	Data extract with codes applied	33
Figure 1.3	Thesis structure	37
Figure 2.1	Learning/Renewal in Organizations: Four Processes Through Three Levels (Crossan et al., 1999 p 525)	66
Figure 2.2	Representative sample definitions of leadership by decade (Rost, 1991 as cited in Ciulla 2003 p12)	70
Figure 2.3	Research framework	81
Figure 5.1	Focus of the study	138
Figure 5.2	PDA model of supervisor support (Lancaster et al., 2013 p 17).....	148
Figure 6.1	Three levels of analysis	157

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1	Summary of learning environment codes and subcodes.....	94
Table 4.1	Structured leadership programmes	115
Table 4.2	Participant demographics	116
Table 4.3	Themes and illustrative quotes	119
Table 5.1	Structured leadership programs	139
Table 5.2	Participant demographics	141
Table 5.3	Results	144

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Lancaster, S; Di Milia, L; Cameron, R; (2013) "Supervisor behaviours that facilitate training transfer", *Journal of Workplace Learning*, Vol. 25 Iss 1 pp 6-22.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Organisational learning capability is recognised as a key enabling factor for economic growth and improved competitiveness in increasingly global markets (Camps and Rodriguez, 2011; Hung et al., 2010; Senge, 2006). Organisational learning is a multi-faceted process that involves the acquisition, dissemination and interpretation of new knowledge and has the ability to impact behaviour (Sinkula, 1994; Slater and Narver, 1995). The emergence and dominance of a learning perspective in the literature has seen researchers using organisational learning constructs to explain strategic issues such as performance, strategic alliances, innovation, market orientation and technology adoption (Bapuji and Crossan, 2004).

The learning organisation literature reports increased opportunities and improved organisational outcomes for organisations that are able to develop their learning capability (Killen et al., 2008; Senge, 2006). Individual learning is considered fundamental to organisational learning as it is the thinking and acting of individuals that produces learning (Argyris, 1995). However, unless employees are able to transfer their learning to the workplace, organisations will be unable to develop their learning capability and thus less likely to improve their circumstances.

Researchers typically agree on the importance of support to learning, although no single conceptualisation of this construct dominates the literature. Kraimer et al. (2011) suggest that this is due to different conceptualisations of support being used depending on the purposes and outcomes of particular studies. Researchers generally examine learning in conjunction with specific desired outcomes such as improved organisational performance (Aguinis and Kraiger, 2009; Killen et al., 2008), financial performance (Di Milia and Birdi, 2010), job satisfaction, team work (Griffin et al., 2001) and customer satisfaction (Pantouvakis and Bouranta, 2013), rather than how to provide support for learning.

The majority of studies that focus on learning and transfer continue to cite Baldwin and Ford's (1988) meta-analytical study on the transfer of training. Baldwin and Ford found that whilst there was an abundance of anecdotal evidence to suggest that support was critical for transfer, there was a lack of empirical evidence to explain the construct. Whilst many studies report the benefits gained by organisations that provide support for learning, what is less clear is guidance for organisations and practitioners in how to provide such support.

There appears to be a 'black-box' process in terms of identifying and defining the types of support that are helpful. To address this gap in the literature I conducted a series of studies that explicitly examine the forms of support that assist learning and transfer. The focus areas for the three studies are: identifying the factors that are important in creating supportive learning environments; the forms of organisational support that promote learning and the supervisory behaviours that assist in training transfer. The framework that guides these studies is shown in figure 1.1

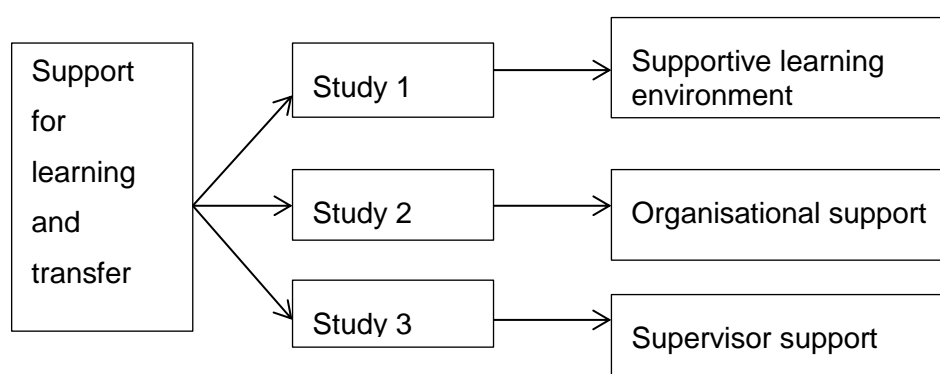


Fig. 1.1 Framework for the studies

Previous research has identified certain factors that impact an employee's ability to learn and transfer their learning to the workplace. A review of the transfer literature is warranted to provide a foundation for the studies. Further related literatures are

subsequently examined to determine if any additional factors should be considered to enhance our understanding of how organisations can create environments that support employees' learning. The purpose of the present series of studies is to contribute to the extant literature regarding support for learning and to assist organisations and practitioners to better understand how they can support employee learning. These studies discuss and build on previous research in order to determine the forms of support that make a positive impact on learning and transfer.

1.1. OVERVIEW OF THE TRANSFER LITERATURE

Estimates indicate that American organisations alone spend in excess of \$164 billion annually on training and development (ASTD Research, 2013). Training is important for organisational learning as it facilitates gaining and creating new knowledge and skills to improve occupational expertise (Camps and Rodriguez, 2011; Gomez et al., 2004). Training and learning are related but they are not the same. Training is a planned approach to learning and development, designed to improve individual, team and organisational effectiveness (Goldstein and Ford, 2002) and learning is the intended outcome of training. It is the process of obtaining new knowledge and insights as a result of experience, practice, instruction or study and results in comparatively enduring changes in behaviour (Salas et al., 2012; Schacter et al., 2010).

Whilst the benefits of training have been well documented (Aguinis and Kraiger, 2009; Bhatti et al., 2013; Blume et al., 2010; Di Milia and Birdi, 2010), there is also research to suggest that attending training does not guarantee learning and use of new knowledge and skills (Cromwell and Kolb, 2004; Kupritz, 2002; Martin, 2010; Rebelo and Gomes, 2011). Providing training to employees is of little value to an organisation unless that training results in learning that is utilised in the workplace and enhances the employees' work performance (Aguinis and Kraiger, 2009; Blume et al., 2010).

Researcher's estimates of the extent of training transfer vary from a low of ten to fifteen percent (Cromwell and Kolb, 2004; Georgenson, 1982; Lim and Morris, 2006) to forty percent (Baldwin and Ford, 1988; Burke and Baldwin, 1999; Burke and Hutchins, 2007; Fecteau et al., 1995; Saks, 2002; Tracey et al., 1995). These estimates suggest the importance of finding strategies to enhance learning, improving organisational productivity and providing a return on the organisation's investment. Evidence suggests that supporting employees to learn makes a difference, but it is not clear which forms of support are beneficial.

Training transfer is defined as the extent to which new knowledge and skills learned during training are applied on the job; "thus the study of transfer of training focusses on variables that affect the impact of transfer of training as well as on interventions intended to enhance transfer" (Aguinis and Kraiger, 2009, p. 209). This literature was first summarised by Baldwin and Ford (1988) and recently updated by Blume et al. (2010). The transfer literature is generally categorised under three areas; work environment factors, training design and trainee characteristics (Blume et al., 2010; Brown and McCracken, 2009; Cheng and Ho, 2001; Clarke, 2002; Martin, 2010). The three categories are reviewed to gain an understanding of what is and what is not known about support for learning and to identify any inconsistencies and gaps in the literature.

1.1.1. WORK ENVIRONMENT FACTORS

Work environment factors are of particular interest to researchers as they are considered directly subject to control and therefore can be actively managed to create environments that are favourable to transfer (Blume et al., 2010). The work environment comprises aspects such as supervisory support (Blume et al., 2010; Burke and Hutchins, 2008; Kontoghiorghes, 2001; Lim and Morris, 2006; Martin, 2010), peer support (Blume et al., 2010; Lim and Morris, 2006; Martin, 2010), opportunities to apply new skills (Burke and Hutchins, 2008; Lim and Morris, 2006)

and the transfer climate (Blume et al., 2010). Factors positively associated with organisational support include opportunities for rewards and recognition (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002), provision of encouragement, clear expectations, time for reflection (Belling et al., 2004) and policies and practices that reinforce learning activities and strategy (McGurk, 2010).

Supervisor support is especially prominent in the extant literature as having a significant impact on skill application and transfer (Burke and Baldwin, 1999; Cromwell and Kolb, 2004; Martin, 2010). Baldwin and Ford (1988) reported that supervisor support was an important factor affecting transfer, but they also noted that little attempt had been made to understand the supervisory behaviours that lead to perceptions of support by trainees. Some two decades later Blume et al. (2010) reiterated the importance of supervisor support, whilst noting that the precise factors are yet to be identified and urging researchers to better understand these forms of support in order to assist training transfer (Blume et al., 2010). Gaining a better understanding of how supervisors can enhance or inhibit transfer may assist organisations to promote greater levels of supervisor support.

Research has also shown that removing barriers to applying newly acquired skills into the work place is critical to transfer (Martin, 2010). A study conducted by McCracken et al. (2012) which focussed on barriers to transfer may help to understand what organisations need to avoid if they wish to provide a supportive learning environment. Such factors include continuous structural change, insufficient resources, limited opportunity to practice new skills and no clear training strategy. Whilst the literature provides examples of support for learning and transfer as well as factors that inhibit it, the literature doesn't provide clear guidelines to assist practitioners' understanding of how or when to provide such support or to remove any barriers.

In addition to work environment factors, Baldwin and Ford (1988) also identified training design and trainee characteristics as important planks in training transfer. Whilst they have received more attention in the research and are generally better understood than the work environment factors, a brief overview may provide opportunities for organisational involvement that could provide additional support for employee learning and transfer.

1.1.2. TRAINING DESIGN

Appropriate design and delivery of training programs is essential to transferring learning. To have sustainable impact training must meet the needs of both the learner and the organisation (Martin, 2010). It should incorporate clear objectives, relevance to the learner, appropriate timing, training techniques and opportunities to practice the new skills (Blume et al., 2010; Martin, 2010). Effectively designed training programs are reported to build trainees self-confidence and motivation to apply the training (Salas et al., 2012), as well as to improve the learner's cognitive ability and retention of the training content (Hertzog et al., 2009). Organisations may be able to enhance their employees' learning and transfer by paying greater attention to, or becoming further involved in the design stage of training programs.

1.1.3. TRAINEE CHARACTERISTICS

Trainee characteristics include the ability, motivation and personality of the trainee. Of these characteristics, cognitive ability and motivation have been shown to influence transfer (Blume et al., 2010), whereas personality is assumed to be fixed. Motivation to learn was found to be influenced by self-efficacy, valence, anxiety and climate (Colquitt et al., 2000) and motivation to transfer has been shown to be positively influenced by post-training interventions such as goal setting and feedback (Blume et al., 2010).

Early studies on cognitive ability found it was an important predictor for performance and training success (Baldwin and Ford, 1988). Whilst early researchers found little evidence of transfer from one situation to another, such as transferring knowledge learnt in training to the workplace, this is no longer considered correct. Hertzog et al. (2009) reported that providing structured training that develops the higher-order thinking skills, such as those required to coordinate the implementation of a number of complex strategies, can develop control over cognition that does transfer to different situations and environments. It thus appears that finding ways to provide appropriate support for trainees to enhance their cognitive skills and motivation may assist in enhancing their learning and transfer.

The importance of creating work environments that support learning is well-recognised in the literature (Blume et al., 2010; Garvin, 1993; Garvin et al., 2008; McCracken et al., 2012; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002; Salehzadeh et al., 2014). A review of the transfer literature and in particular the work environment factors, training design and training characteristics, has provided some knowledge of the types of activities that are considered supportive, as well as exposing certain areas that could benefit from further investigation. It is also important to review literature from other fields which may provide additional insight into aspects of organisational environments that could help to support learning and transfer.

1.2. SUPPORTIVE ORGANISATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

A review of the literature relating to workplace learning, learning organisations, and organisational culture and leadership in relation to learning, highlights the importance of the organisational context in facilitating learning processes within organisations. Workplace learning has become a more prominent area of interest for researchers and practitioners in the last two decades as researchers recognise that considerable learning occurs outside of formal training programs and institutions (Billett, 2004; Cullen and Turnbull, 2005; Matthews, 1999). Cullen and

Turnbull (2005) described management development and education practitioners as part of a community of discourse, rather than a community of practice. Learning by managers in the course of their everyday work is developed as tacit knowledge in communities of practice that exist within organisations, but remain a blind spot for management development and education practitioners. Organisational support for learning has attracted researchers interest for several decades and there is general agreement on the importance of investigating strategies that support learning, regardless of where or how the learning occurs (Cullen and Turnbull, 2005; Lancaster and Di Milia, 2014).

The learning organisation literature provides some clues for assisting our understanding of learning and transfer. Garavan (1997) considers the interest in the learning organisation as a shift away from the training and development literatures focus on staff development and individual learning to a focus on collective learning. In his critique of the learning organisation literature he ascertained it as 'confused and confusing' (Garavan, 1997, p. 18). Whilst he suggested that organisations can gradually progress towards becoming learning organisations, he also indicated that it is an idealised state that may never be attained.

Garavan (1997) suggested that it is more useful to approach the task of creating a learning organisation in terms of organisational values and processes that adopt a learning-based approach, rather than in terms of specific learning structures or interventions. He determined that the 'building blocks' necessary for learning organisations have not been considered in the literature. He suggested that the fundamental requirements for building a learning organisation include; the ability to develop the psychological maturity of employees to be reflective, the removal of structures and socio-structures that do not facilitate progression towards the learning organisation ideal and the creation of enabling cultures. While these

recommendations appear appropriate they lack sufficient specificity to inform and guide practitioners.

In response to Garavan's (1997) criticism, Garvin et al. (2008) proposed three "building blocks" that they considered necessary to create learning organisations, together with an assessment tool that allows organisations to measure their learning proficiencies in each area. The building blocks proposed by Garvin et al. (2008, p. 1) are a supportive learning environment, concrete learning processes and practices, and leadership behaviour that provides reinforcement. These building blocks were developed from the extant literature at the time, but are yet to be empirically tested. One aim of this thesis is to empirically seek to provide support or otherwise to the first building block - a supportive learning environment (see chapter three).

The literature also acknowledges the importance of organisational culture to organisational learning (Garavan, 1997; Lucas and Kline, 2008; Marsick and Watkins, 2003) and it provides some pointers for supporting learning and transfer. A learning culture typifies an organisation where all of its members acknowledge the importance of learning and endeavour to achieve high performance through the application of their learning to progressive innovative work (Bates and Khasawneh, 2005; Tracey et al., 1995). Organisations with learning cultures exhibit organisation-wide beliefs and views about the benefits of learning and how it should be applied and disseminated. Such philosophies about learning are based on work environment factors such as management that supports employees' learning and its application in the workplace, as well as encouraging innovation and new ideas (Bates and Khasawneh, 2005).

Egan et al. (2004) found that organisational culture had a significant influence on motivation to transfer learning. Determining and understanding the cultural characteristics within an organisation that can facilitate or inhibit change

efforts is important to supporting learning and transfer (Lucas and Kline, 2008).

Egan (2008) also determined that organisations often contain sub-cultural groups such as cohesive work teams or professional groups. Such groups can have values that are unique from the rest of the organisation that may impact their members' motivations for actions related to learning. Merged organisations are renowned for their cultural differences and the development of an overarching culture in such organisations is often problematic (Riad, 2007; Schein, 2010), thus posing additional challenges for achieving an organisational learning culture. The literature is silent on how organisations can provide support for learning in such circumstances.

The leadership literature stresses the importance of organisational leaders in providing strategic leadership for learning. Senior leaders are critical in promoting learning as an organisational value (Rebelo and Gomes, 2011; Schein, 2010). An organisation's leaders have a powerful impact on its culture, as what leaders pay attention to is a persuasive means of communicating what they care about (Schein, 2010). As organisations become more complex, leaders need to rely more on others to generate solutions and they should demonstrate confidence that active problem solving leads to learning. Including organisational members in the learning process is more likely to gain their acceptance of the determined solutions (Schein, 2010). Workplace learning programs not supported by leaders that understand the strategic role of learning will reduce the effect on organisational outcomes; including financial performance (Marsick and Watkins, 2003). Likewise, programs conducted in organisations without the necessary leadership and culture to stimulate their use in the workplace rarely produce a good return on investment (Rebelo and Gomes, 2011).

To summarise, the benefits of supporting learning are typically reported in the literature, but little is known about the aspects of organisational support that

foster effective learning. Organisations can only benefit from learning when it is transferred to the workplace; however transfer remains an enduring problem. The purpose of this series of studies is to better understand how organisations can create environments that support both learning and transfer. The factors required to support learning and transfer are examined through the perceptions of employees. This research builds on the extant literature and provides assistance to organisations and practitioners in understanding how to improve the workplace learning environment.

1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

A review of the background literature in the training, transfer and organisational learning fields suggests a gap in understanding how supportive learning environments are created and how organisations can support the learning and transfer of their members. The following research questions were developed to address those gaps and thus achieve the purpose of these studies (see fig.1.1).

RQ 1: What factors do employees identify as important in creating a supportive learning environment? (see Chapter three)

RQ 2: What do employees identify as forms of organisational support that promote learning? (see Chapter four)

RQ 3: What supervisory behaviours are perceived by employees to assist in training transfer? (see Chapter five)

1.4. CONTEXT FOR THE STUDY

This research was undertaken in an Australian government-owned utility organisation with approximately 5,000 employees. Following deregulation of the industry six regional organisations and one city-based organisation were merged to create a single entity. The regional organisations were utility service providers that had provided the same services as each other in their respective regional locations

for several decades. Their structures and work practices were similar and they all had many field-based employees located across broad geographic areas. They had little in common with the city-based organisation which was specifically created as a retail entity just prior to the industry deregulation. It had distinct business objectives, a different organisational structure and its employees were co-located, with most having different professional backgrounds to the employees in the regional entities.

The management of the merged entity set a number of strategic goals in order to foster the success of the organisation. Since the financial significance of the organisation is dependent upon customer volume, a key goal was for the organisation to become more cost-competitive and to deliver superior customer service. To achieve this goal management elected to dramatically improve leadership capability across all levels of the organisation as a priority.

Focus groups were conducted with management to determine the leadership capabilities required for each level of management to enhance current capabilities and to prepare for future requirements. Respected business schools were engaged to develop and deliver a suite of four integrated leadership development programs for the different levels of management employee, from executive managers down to team leaders. The resulting programs were hierarchical, with the entry level program providing management and introductory leadership skills to team leaders and inexperienced managers. The second program was aimed at experienced supervisors and new managers and it delivered intermediate level leadership skills. Program three was designed to develop senior managers' strategic leadership capability and the fourth program was a follow up for graduates of program three, designed to further their capabilities in strategic thinking, relationship management, stakeholder influencing and innovation. An overview of the four leadership programs can be found in Appendix A.

1.5. OVERVIEW OF METHODOLOGY

This section provides an overview of the research methodology, its purpose and how it was designed and implemented. Based upon the research purpose of better understanding how organisations can create environments that support learning and transfer, a qualitative approach was deemed appropriate.

Social research is a collection of methods used systematically to produce knowledge about the social world (Neuman, 2014). Several of the methods available to researchers include experiments, surveys, histories, analysis of archival information and case studies. Each method has particular advantages and disadvantages depending on the type of research question posed, the amount of control the researcher has over events and whether the focus is on contemporary or historical phenomena (Yin, 2009).

An experiment deliberately divorces phenomena from its context and generally controls the environment. Histories usually deal with non-contemporary events and data obtained from surveys is limited in breadth by the number and range of responses allowed and the number of variables that can be studied. The ability of surveys to deal with context is also extremely limited (Yin, 2009). Surveys and the analysis of archival records are useful strategies if the research goal is to describe the prevalence or incidence of phenomena or to predict certain outcomes (Yin, 2009).

Case studies help researchers to connect the actions of individual people to larger social structures and practices. They are useful for expressing how causal arguments about how broad social influences shape and produce results in specific settings (Neuman, 2014). Case studies are considered advantageous compared to other research strategies when “how” or “why” questions are posed about contemporary events in a real life context over which the researcher has little or no control (Yin, 2009). Whilst some of the research questions employed in this

investigation asked 'what' in terms of identifying the relevant factors of interest, they were designed to elicit "how" and "why" these actions or interventions made a difference to employees' learning. Case studies also have the ability to incorporate a diverse range of evidence, including documents, artefacts, interviews and observations which is outside the scope of many other research methods (Yin, 2009).

Whilst case studies can include quantitative evidence, they are a common approach to conducting qualitative research. With qualitative studies the researcher is interested in the meaning of experiences to the subjects themselves, rather than generalising results to other groups of people (Shenton, 2004). Both quantitative and qualitative researchers use careful, systematic methods to gather high quality data, but their approaches differ significantly.

Quantitative research was originally developed in the natural sciences to study natural phenomena (Myers and Avison, 2002). Quantitative researchers use statistical analysis to test the hypothesis that they derive from the literature and they redefine the phenomenon of interest in the form of distinct variables. Standardised measures are created before the data is collected, procedures are standardised and replication is assumed. Quantitative research methods are independent of context, can include many cases or subjects, are value free and the researcher is detached (Neuman, 2014).

Quantitative researchers are concerned about objectivity, accuracy, validity and reliability and generally document subject attributes expressed in terms of quantity, extent or strength (Sarantakos, 2005). Statistics, charts and tables are used to provide support for the study's hypothesis (Neuman, 2014). Quantitative research methods may be less suitable however, where the context of the study is important (Neuman, 2014) or where the researcher is interested in collecting data in subjective areas such as feelings, emotions, attitudes or perceptions (Sekaran,

2010). A qualitative data collection strategy was considered appropriate in this case given the research is interested in the perceptions of participants and not for example, supervisor perceptions.

The four criteria used in quantitative research to determine the rigour of a study as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) are internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity. Internal validity is the approximate truth about inferences regarding cause-effect or causal relationships and external validity refers to the extent that the results of a study can be generalised to other situations and people. Reliability refers to the consistency of a research study or measuring test (Sekaran, 2010). For a measure to be considered reliable it must provide the same result repeatedly, assuming that what is being measured remains consistent. Objectivity requires that study findings depend on the nature of what was studied rather than on the personality, beliefs and values of the researcher (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). These criteria may prove difficult to apply in studies involving management and behavioural areas, as perceptions and feelings are subjective, unlikely to remain consistent and cannot be assumed to generalise to other situations and contexts.

Qualitative research methods evolved from the social sciences to enable researchers to study social and cultural phenomena. They are designed to assist in understanding people and the social and cultural contexts in which they exist (Myers and Avison, 2002). Context is critical in social research, as the meaning of what is being studied is dependent on the setting in which it occurs (Neuman, 2014). Qualitative methods emphasise the value of individual experiences and perceptions as encountered in real life situations. The associated research procedures are specific and not commonly able to be replicated. Concepts are generally depicted as themes, generalisations or taxonomies (Neuman, 2014). Meaning is discovered after the researcher is immersed in the data, which is in the form of words or images

from documents, observations and transcripts. Fewer cases or subjects are studied than is the case with quantitative methods. Themes or generalisations are extracted during analysis from the evidence and are organised to present a coherent, consistent picture (Neuman, 2014).

Qualitative research is nonetheless a rigorous methodology; it is not simply people providing their own accounts without question. Qualitative researchers employ constructs similar to reliability and validity to assert the veracity of their data. Trustworthiness, often defined as “goodness of fit” determines the degree of confidence that data and findings are credible, transferable and dependable (Andrew and Halcomb, 2009, p. xvii). Trustworthiness is used by qualitative researchers in the same way as validity is used by quantitative researchers. The four criteria that determine the trustworthiness of qualitative research are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Credibility, akin to internal validity, is critical in establishing trustworthiness and is about ascertaining the congruence of the results with reality. One method used to establish credibility is to become familiar with the culture of the site prior to commencing data collection by consulting relevant documents and undertaking preliminary site visits (Shenton, 2004). Triangulation is also useful to establish credibility and involves the use of multiple methods which can include observation, focus groups, interviews, examination of documents, artefacts and different informants (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). Member checks allow stakeholders who provided the original data the opportunity to respond to, and where necessary, correct the researchers’ representation of their reality (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Transferability, similar to external validity or generalisability, requires the researcher to provide sufficient data and context to enable the audience to determine whether the findings can be applied to other situations and contexts.

This can include the use of identical elements, purposeful sampling and a 'thick' description (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The principle of identical elements is that the more elements (content and procedure) of one situation that are identical to the elements of a second situation the greater the transfer in the second situation is likely to be (Tracey and Mandel Morrow, 2012). Many qualitative researchers employ purposeful sampling, rather than random sampling methods to locate individuals, groups or locations where the processes being studied are most likely to exist (Silverman, 2006). A thick description is a rich, detailed description of events, sufficient to capture the sense of what occurred and places the events in a context to enable the reader to infer cultural meaning (Neuman, 2014) and to determine if transfer can be contemplated as a possibility (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Like reliability, dependability requires the researcher to provide sufficient details and documentation of the methods employed so that the study can be scrutinised and a determination made about the quality of the integrated processes of data collection, data analysis, and theory generation (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Providing a description of the research design and its implementation, as well as the operational detail of the data gathering and a reflective appraisal of the project are important to demonstrate dependability (Shenton, 2004). Credibility and dependability are closely linked and Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that demonstrating the former contributes significantly to ensuring the latter.

Confirmability, comparable to objectivity, refers to ensuring that the study's findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants rather than the researcher's (Shenton, 2004). Methods used to provide confirmability include triangulation, practice reflexivity, member checking and maintaining an audit trail of the raw data, memos, notes, data reduction and analysis (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

1.5.1. RESEARCH DESIGN

A qualitative phenomenological constructivist approach within a case study was considered appropriate to achieve the purpose of this research investigation, which is to better understand how organisations can create environments that support learning and transfer. This approach is consistent with social research methods and was selected for the conduct of this study due to the researcher's desire to understand and describe the phenomena of interest through the perceptions of the participants.

Phenomenological techniques are concerned with the experiences of the study participants (Groenewald, 2004) and allow the researcher to explore these experiences through the descriptions they provide (Englander, 2012). Similarly, a constructivist approach requires the researcher to participate in the research process to ensure the information produced is reflective of participants' reality (Lincoln et al., 2013). Face to face interviews concluded with participants checking and confirming the accuracy of their interview transcripts (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This assisted with confirmability; a requirement of qualitative studies that helps to ensure the results of the study are trustworthy and consistent with the participants' experience and the information they provided.

Whilst these studies fit within the constructivist paradigm, the boundaries are recognised as becoming increasingly blurred between paradigms, with some borrowing occurring between the genres (Lincoln et al., 2013). For example, the generic inductive model used in these studies shares many characteristics with grounded theory (Thomas, 2006) but also has some key differences such as the method for selecting the sample population.

First, purposeful sampling with a pre-determined number of participants was utilised, as opposed to theoretical sampling which is a requirement for grounded theory studies (Birks and Mills, 2011). Second, the labels assigned to the emerging

concepts during the first stage of data analysis in the studies were concept driven rather than theory driven (Gibbs, 2002). Third, the literature was read prior to conducting the interviews. Fourth, all of the interviews were coded against the conceptual categories rather than ceasing when theoretical saturation was reached, as is the case with grounded theory (Birks and Mills, 2011; Hood, 2010).

Qualitative methods were utilised to achieve the aim of this study; to give voice (Lincoln et al., 2013) to employee perceptions of the important factors required to create supportive learning environments. Interviewing participants was considered preferable to using quantitative methods such as a survey. Survey tools have a number of limitations. For example, the fixed response options tap pre-defined answer responses only and thus, likely miss the opportunity to gain the breadth and depth of information that can be collected during an interview. Secondly, non-responses are also more likely with surveys than interviews and the use of surveys may also contribute to unclear data due to certain answer options being interpreted differently by respondents. Thirdly, surveys do not allow the researcher to paraphrase a question, or provide further information to aid the participant's understanding compared with an interview. Nor is it possible to probe for insights (Yin, 2009), additional information or clarification when the researcher is not present and able to observe and act on non-verbal clues. Qualitative data collection methods such as interviews allow the researcher to explore the perceptions of the participants.

The use of qualitative methods enables the researcher to provide a thick description of incidents and perceptions which can be embedded in their cultural context (Neuman, 2014). Thick descriptions assist with transferability, allowing the reader to gain an understanding of the cultural meaning of the results and to contemplate the possibility of transfer to other situations and contexts (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The majority of the literature reviewed in the areas of training, transfer

and organisational learning is dominated by quantitative studies. The use of qualitative methods for these studies was considered appropriate to extend the extant literature through a different methodological paradigm.

This research employed a cross-sectional design, with each participant interviewed once only. Whilst longitudinal designs allow researchers to observe or measure behaviour by gathering data at two or more different points in time, most field studies are cross-sectional in nature because of the effort, time and cost of collecting data over several time periods (Sekaran, 2010). The host organisation in this study covers a territory of 1.7 million km² and therefore the logistical, time and cost implications of conducting a longitudinal study that involved participants located over such a vast area was a barrier to conducting a longitudinal study. It was the perceptions of the participants about factors they believed supported or hindered their learning that was the subject of interest, rather than any observations by the supervisor or others made over time.

1.5.2. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The ethical treatment of participants is a necessary consideration for the design and conduct of any research involving human subjects. Thereby an ethics application was submitted to the Human Research Ethics Committee at Central Queensland University and ethical approval (H08/08-043) was granted. Ethical safeguards to protect research participants include ensuring that participation is voluntary; people's comments and behaviour are kept confidential; that people are protected from harm; mutual trust is established between the researcher and participants (Silverman, 2006) and that the content of the data collected is relevant to the research.

The purpose of the research was discussed with the organisational contact whose approval was required to conduct the study, as well as with the individuals who participated. A written invitation to participate in the study (see Appendix B), an

information sheet (see Appendix C) and a consent form (see Appendix D) clearly explained the purpose of the research and that participation was voluntary, with no adverse effects should they choose not to participate or to withdraw at any time. The information sheet reinforced that the information provided would not be presented in a way that allowed individuals to be identified and they were given the opportunity to receive a summary report of the research findings.

A risk assessment was undertaken before any interviews commenced. Whilst the likelihood of participants being exposed to detrimental effect by reflecting on, or discussion any issues or concerns raised during the interviews was deemed a low risk, information about accessing counselling support was included in the information sheet.

Data collected for these studies was stored in accordance with the university's ethics policy; in a safe location and will be held for five years. Participants' identities were safeguarded by assigning unique codes instead of names.

1.5.3. SAMPLE

Purposeful sampling was considered the most appropriate sampling method for this research project. Purposeful sampling methods are used to seek out groups, settings and individuals where the processes being studied are most likely to occur (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). In qualitative studies it is important to identify people who can best help to understand the phenomenon of interest (Creswell, 2014). In these studies it was considered important to have a representative sample from each course, organisational level and both genders. As there was a significantly higher number of males at senior levels (greater than 90%) the organisation had implemented an affirmative action policy and therefore, the study purposefully included additional females from each course. It was considered important to capture the female voice on this issue.

A spreadsheet of all course participants that had completed any of the leadership programs was provided to the researcher by the organisation and it aided in constructing the sampling frame. It was sorted first by program and then by completion date. The date of completion was relevant as the researcher determined to include only participants that had completed training between three and twelve months prior to the commencement of the study. This was to allow sufficient time to attempt transfer, but not enough time for them to forget their experience. The remaining names were then checked and those that had since left the organisation were removed, which left one hundred and sixty-four graduates from which to select participants to be included in the sample.

Choosing a sample size can be a contentious issue for qualitative researchers as there is not a generally accepted principle to recommend an ideal number. Sample sizes used in qualitative research methods are usually considerably smaller than those used in quantitative methods. With qualitative studies, a phenomenon needs only to appear once to be of value and there is no requirement for scale as there is no need for estimates of statistical significance. The size of the sample is less important than the criteria used to select them (Wilmot, 2005). In this case, the sample was homogenous in that the participants had all completed leadership development training between three and twelve months prior to the study, they worked for the same organisation and shared similar experiences.

Morse (1994) recommends using at least six interviews for phenomenological studies and Cresswell (2014) advises that between five and twenty-five interviews is an appropriate number. Guest et al. (2006) established that with qualitative research a sample of six to twelve interviews is sufficient to enable development of meaningful themes and useful interpretations. They also cautioned that purposive samples should be carefully selected and that a larger sample may

be required where the sample is relatively heterogeneous, the data quality poor and the domain of inquiry is diffuse or vague. However, if the aim of the research is to understand common perceptions among a group of relatively homogenous individuals, according to Guest et al. (2006), twelve participants should suffice. Six participants from each of the four programs was determined as an appropriate sample size for this study which, according to Morse (1994); Cresswell (2014); and Guest (2006), should be enough to explore differences by gender and program.

A disproportionate stratified sample was selected from the sample frame to be invited to participate in the study. The sample frame was separated into four sections, one for each program. The process used to select the participants consisted of counting the number of graduates from each program and dividing the total by six. Six participants from each program were needed to achieve the required number of twenty-four. The resulting number determined a proportionate interval between participants. For example, the senior leadership program (SLDP) had thirty-nine graduates. Thirty-nine divided by six equals approximately seven.

A random starting point on the list of graduates was selected as the first participant and every seventh person from that point was also selected to obtain the desired total of six. The same process was used to select the sample from each program.

A further two potential participants were selected from each program by the same method and held in reserve in case some declined to be involved in the study. One person declined to be involved, replying that they “didn’t like that sort of thing” and three did not respond to the invitation, thus the final sample of twenty-four participants included four from the reserve list.

Using purposeful sampling, together with a thick description in qualitative studies assists with establishing transferability and hence trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The final sample included six participants from each of the four leadership programs; fifteen males and nine females. This allowed comparison of

responses to determine if there was any difference in participant experience by the level of the program attended, or by gender.

The organisation in which the studies were undertaken was known to the researcher and thus could be regarded as opportunity sampling (Burns, 2000). Whilst this could be considered as a limitation to the study, in this case it was considered a benefit, as familiarity with the organisation's senior managers enhanced the likelihood of agreement to participate. Having access to organisational documentation, managers and employees willing to be interviewed was essential to gather data for the studies.

1.5.4. DATA COLLECTION

The three principles of data collection identified by Yin (2009) are: using multiple sources of evidence, creating a database and maintaining a chain of evidence. This study employs all three. The sources of evidence commonly used during case studies (Yin, 2009) that were used in this study are documentation, archival records and interviews.

To assist in establishing credibility and trustworthiness in case studies triangulation is often employed which allows researchers to develop converging lines of enquiry across multiple sources of evidence for the purpose of achieving consistency (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004; Yin, 2009). Triangulation in this instance was undertaken through interviews, examination of documents, archival records and by consulting different informants. The informants included senior managers, the supervisors of some participants and the organisation's training and development staff. Whilst the majority of the data was derived from participant interviews, other data collected included company documents and information from the host organisation's archival records.

A database was created using NVivo; a qualitative data analysis (QDA) program designed to assist researchers working with rich text-based and/or multimedia information (Bazeley, 2007). NVivo facilitates users to classify, sort and arrange information; to examine relationships in the data; to build an account of their research and to create models and reports. Information can be created in the system or imported from external sources.

Maintaining a chain of evidence increases reliability (Yin, 2009) and NVivo assisted in this regard by storing the original documents such as the interview transcripts and questions, as well as evidence of the analysis process and outcomes. Some examples of the evidence that NVivo can assist researchers to produce include: illustrative quotes extracted from interview transcripts, graphs displaying the distribution of responses across demographic characteristics, models depicting relationships between various components of the research and diagrams showing how the conceptual framework evolved as the project progressed. Such documentation assists with demonstrating the dependability of the data (Shenton, 2004).

1.5.5. ORGANISATIONAL DOCUMENTATION

Gaining familiarity with the site of a study as well as using multiple sources of information is important to assist in establishing credibility, an important aspect of trustworthiness (Shenton, 2004). A meeting was held with a senior manager in the host organisation to gain approval for the studies and also to gain access to relevant organisational data. The researcher visited various sites where participants were located prior to conducting the interviews to observe the work being undertaken and to converse with managers and employees about their work. Sites visited included the head office which was based in the city and several of the regional centres. These visits assisted the researcher to gain some understanding of the

organisational environment and different types of work undertaken across the organisation.

Documentation provided included information about the company's age, size and structure, geographic areas of operation and copies of the organisation's annual report, strategic plan, people strategy, training policies and an overview of the leadership development program. Copies of recent cultural survey results and employee engagement surveys were also provided. Additional information obtained from the organisation's archival records included each program's learning outcomes and course reviews, as well as demographic details and a list of the participants that had completed each of the leadership programs.

These documents assisted in developing the sampling frame for the study as well as understanding the organisational imperatives for the development program and the context for some of the comments made by participants being interviewed. Understanding the context and having insight into the organisational culture assisted with interpreting some of the data gathered in the interview process. Issues revealed in the employee opinion surveys, such as those relating to training opportunities and the culture around employee/supervisor relations provided input into developing the interview questions, as did statements about leadership in the people strategy.

Understanding organisational factors in the host company is important to contextualise the interview data. Collecting information about the organisation and understanding the shifting business environment helped to consider the impact of those organisational factors on the participants' motivation to participate in the leadership development training and its application in the workplace. Course review information provided included the standard level one (reaction) participant course reviews, as well as reports developed by the training provider that included level three (application) and level four (results) analysis (Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick,

2006), such as surveys of program participants and supervisors describing performance changes at both individual and organisation level. Whilst measuring the amount of learning and transfer that occurred as a result of participation in the leadership programs was not an objective of this study, the information contained in these documents assisted to confirm some of the information provided by participants during their interviews.

1.5.6. INTERVIEW PROCEDURE

Interviews are one of the most important sources of information for case studies (Yin, 2009) and were the primary means of data collection for this investigation.

The interview questions were developed from the literature review and conceptual framework. To gain an understanding of participants' perspectives on the factors required to create a supportive learning environment, the interview questions were posed as open questions. Closed questions provide only a limited number of answers to choose from, whereas using open questions permitted the respondents to answer in their own words, allowed for a wide variety of responses and avoided any bias that may have resulted from suggesting responses to individuals (Reja et al., 2003) as may be the case with surveys.

Invitations to participate in the research were sent by e-mail and a subsequent telephone call was made to confirm participation and the location and time for the interviews. Twenty-one of the twenty-four interviews were conducted face-to-face. The advantages of conducting interviews face-to-face over conducting surveys include the researcher being able to pick up, or use non-verbal clues and to repeat or rephrase questions if necessary. Disadvantages include the high cost of resources required to conduct interviews in remote locations (Neuman, 2014) and the possibility of increased interviewee concerns about their anonymity (Sekaran, 2010).

All interviews followed a quality process to ensure reliability and hence trustworthiness of the ensuing data (Glesne, 1998; Yin, 2009) and standard interview protocols were followed. These included allowing time to develop rapport with participants, using unbiased questions and actively listening to understand their experience, opinions and ideas (Neuman, 2014). Follow-up questions, clarifying and re-phrasing techniques to ensure understanding and recording responses for transcription and analysis (Dick, 1990; Glesne, 1998) were also employed.

Due to the remote locations of some participants and the time and cost constraints of travelling to interview them, two participants were interviewed by telephone. One other person who had agreed to participate in the study requested to receive the interview questions in advance and to reply by e-mail. This request was agreed to. The interview questions were also forwarded in advance to the participants being interviewed by telephone. The telephone participants were able to be probed for further information and to ask for clarification similarly to those being interviewed in person. They were also asked about their experience of being interviewed by telephone and both indicated that they did not experience any difficulty with this medium. Further probing wasn't considered necessary with the e-mail participant whose responses were consistent with those of the other participants. As the participant responding by e-mail completed his response using the same template of interview questions used by the researcher in the face to face interviews, his response was used as the transcript of his interview. The researcher recorded the responses from the telephone participants directly into interview templates, which became their transcripts of interview. The telephone participants were subsequently e-mailed their interview transcripts and asked to check them for accuracy, which they did.

The interviews were semi-structured and lasted between sixty and ninety minutes. This type of interview is the most common form utilised in qualitative

research (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000; Qu and Dumay, 2011). Semi-structured interviewing was preferred as it allowed the interviewer to guide the interview and the interviewees to provide responses in their own terms and in the way they think and use language, which is beneficial to understand the way that interviewees perceive the social world under study (Qu and Dumay, 2011) and enhances confirmability of the data. Each interviewee was asked the same thirteen questions which had been prepared in advance. However, further probing questions were asked where necessary to elicit further details or to clarify any issues. The participants were also encouraged to provide any other information that they thought might be relevant.

Some participants suggested other colleagues that the researcher should contact, as they felt they could confirm their views or provide additional information. Some researchers use this snowballing' technique but the disadvantage with this method is that it may lead to bias; those who know each other may have similar behaviours and attitudes, or may influence each other's views (Wilmot, 2005) and this limits the trustworthiness of the data. Whilst the sampling frame and method in this study did not preclude participants from knowing each other, it was more likely to gain a greater diversity of perspectives.

To enhance dependability the responses to the interview questions were recorded verbatim and member checking (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) was conducted. Following each interview the researcher provided the participant with a copy of the interview transcript and asked them to confirm the accuracy of the content. In all instances the transcript was confirmed as accurate. Participants were also asked at the conclusion of the interview if they would like a copy of the research findings. Four of the twenty-four participants declined to receive further information and the remaining twenty participants were sent copies of the draft findings. No participant

challenged the accuracy of the findings and they were subsequently provided with copies of the final version.

Self-report data was utilised in these studies, but it is not without its critics. Concerns have been raised in relation to common method variance when the input factor and the output factor are gathered from the same source at the same time, which has been found to provide inaccurate results (Blume et al., 2010; Podsakoff et al., 2003). As these studies are qualitative in nature and participants provided descriptive information not requiring statistical measurement, it was not considered problematic in this case. The purpose of this study was to gather participant perceptions of what is important to support their learning. The main strength of self-report methods is that they allow participants to describe their own experiences. Interviewing other employees such as supervisors, peers or subordinates would not assist in achieving that purpose. The questions used in the interviews are shown in Appendix E.

1.5.7. DATA ANALYSIS

According to Yin (2009) case studies should employ an analytic strategy aligned with the theoretical propositions that gave rise to the study. This case proposes that organisations can create supportive learning environments and that organisations and supervisors can better support employees to learn.

The primary means of data collection was by conducting interviews and the focus was on the collective experience and perceptions of the group of participants, rather than on that of the individuals. The unit of analysis in these studies was the same as the case; the group of individuals interviewed and who possessed the knowledge to shed light on the phenomenon of interest (Grunbaum, 2007).

In this project three research studies were undertaken and the same method of analysis was used for each. Thematic analysis is a qualitative analytic method

used widely within and beyond psychology (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Advantages of thematic analysis include that it can: usefully summarise large bodies of data and offer a 'thick description' of the data set; highlight similarities and differences across the data set; highlight patterns and themes; generate unanticipated insights and allow for social as well psychological interpretations of data. Content analysis is also used in descriptive research, however it was considered less appropriate than thematic analysis for this study. Content analysis may be less suitable for qualitative studies, as it uses objective and systematic counting and recording procedures to produce a quantitative description of the symbolic context in a text (Neuman, 2003).

All of the interview transcripts, including those from the telephone interviews and the one e-mailed, were imported into NVivo prior to the commencement of any coding or analysis. Coding was completed using a three stage process; open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Neuman, 2014). The first stage of the analysis, open coding, commenced with a thorough review of the transcript from each interview. During this process as patterns were recognised the raw data was organised into conceptual categories and themes were subsequently developed until each interview had been reviewed and coded.

Prior to commencing coding the complete data each transcript was read carefully to enable the researcher to become familiar with the breadth and depth of the content and to actively search for meanings in the data, as is consistent with thematic analysis methods (Braun and Clarke, 2006). As insights and thoughts about possible patterns were recorded as memos and linked to the transcripts via the NVivo memo feature. The transcripts were then read again and initial conceptual labels were allocated to reduce the data into categories. The categories were not connected at this stage as the focus was still on the data. The labels were data-driven rather than concept-driven to allow themes to emerge from the data, rather than from a preconceived analytic framework (Gibbs, 2002). It is, however,

acknowledged that the themes may also have been influenced by prior reading of the literature. For example, supervisor support was a recurrent theme in the literature review. The research questions were also influenced by the literature and as some questions specifically asked about the participants' supervisor, it would have been highly unlikely for any transcript to not have some passages of text that referred to the participants' supervisor. Supervisor support therefore emerged as a category early in the process.

The data was coded by highlighting segments of the transcripts separately as they related to different constructs. These data extracts were assigned to a relevant node; the name used in the NVivo program for the conceptual labels created by the researcher. Nodes can be added during the coding process as new themes emerge, as was the process used in this study. Braun and Clarke (2006) advise to code for as many potential themes as possible as they may prove interesting later and to code data inclusively by including a little of the relevant surrounding data to avoid losing the context. It is also appropriate to code data as many times as relevant, as the categories can be refined, with extracts recoded or uncoded at a later stage in the analysis process. The researcher in this study coded participant comments that related to a number of categories multiple times. See figure 1.2 for an example of codes applied to a short segment of data.

Data extract	Coded for
About mistakes - I do a lot of work with the fault centre. They're very critical roles. They expect only to talk about what's gone wrong. You need to make mistakes to learn else you never achieve anything. I do give praise now when they do something right and when mistakes are made we look at what we can do better next time [Manager #17].	1.Learn from mistakes 2.Sharing the learning

Fig 1.2 Data extract with codes applied

Demographic details (called attributes in NVivo), were linked to each participant, as were memos containing, thoughts about issues and decisions relating to the project. A note book was kept by the researcher with thoughts and details about coding and the journal feature in NVivo kept a record of progress and any problems experienced during the project. These all contribute to maintaining an audit trail of the project which assists with increasing the confirmability and overall trustworthiness of the findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

The second stage, axial coding, focussed on the themes rather than the data and the initial labels were reviewed. Some closely related concepts were merged and others divided into subcategories where the supporting data was divergent. When the data was similar and linkages emerged between themes, the categories were rearranged to allow differentiation between the main and sub-themes. NVivo uses a tree-like structure which allows subthemes to be linked together under the main themes in a hierarchical structure. For example, supervisor support was determined as a main theme and the unconnected but supporting categories that contained passages of text describing supervisor behaviours, such as “provides feedback” and “open to new ideas and change”, were now linked together as sub-themes under the main theme of supervisor support. It also became apparent

during this stage of the analysis that whilst many of the supervisor behaviours were supportive, others were unsupportive and the category of “hindrances” was created with the unsupportive behaviours recoded into this category.

A final review of the data, selective coding, was then undertaken. During this stage key nodes were queried in order to recognise and examine any patterns in the data by comparing the level of agreement between participants’ responses. Any inconsistencies were reviewed, with interrelated themes merged under a more descriptive overarching theme to finalise the structure. Participant responses were also compared and contrasted to determine if there were any differences in responses based on the attributes of the participants. For example, were the experiences reported by females any different to those of the males, or those of city based participants compared to regionally based participants?

As a key requirement of this research program is the production of three research studies, each resulting in a stand-alone journal article, the analysis has been approached from three levels to provide a separate focus for each study. The identified overarching themes of the learning environment, organisational support and supervisor support were designated as the main themes and are the key focus areas for the studies. The underpinning sub-themes containing the raw data from the interviews were further analysed to understand and describe participants’ perceptions and thus are the source of the results for each study.

1.6. THESIS STRUCTURE

This chapter presented an introduction and context for the research project. It also provided an overview of the methodology and the specific design of the studies. A rationale was provided for the methodological approach, selection of participants and the collection and analysis of the data. Figure 1.1 presents the framework that guides the studies.

The studies are based on a review of the literature across the domains of training transfer, workplace learning, organisational learning, the learning organisation, management development, human resource management and psychology and is provided in chapter two. The journal articles resulting from the three studies are presented as chapters three, four and five.

Chapter three presents the journal article titled “Developing a supportive learning environment in a newly formed organisation”, which was published in the *Journal of Workplace Learning* Vol. 27. Iss 6, 2015 pp 442-456. This study examines the factors that employees perceived were important in creating a supportive learning environment in a newly formed organisation. These factors include the organisation’s leadership and distinguishing characteristics. Providing support for managers to gain confidence and self-awareness was found to be important to their ability to apply their learning. The results also suggest that learning with colleagues from different regional and functional areas helps to reform subcultures and contributes to an overarching learning culture and hence to creating a supportive learning environment. Some hindrances are also discussed.

Chapter four presents the journal article titled “Organisational support for employee learning: An employee perspective”, which has been published in the *European Journal of Training and Development* Vol 38. Iss 7, 2014 pp 642-657. It describes the types of organisational support perceived by employees to support their learning and examines the features that distinguish it from other kinds of support. The results of this study suggest that for organisations to positively impact employees’ learning, they should focus on three key elements; providing high quality relevant development programs, ensuring that course content is aligned with the organisation’s strategic objectives as well as the employees’ work and that senior management commitment is maintained throughout all stages of the employee development process.

Chapter five contains the journal article titled “Supervisor behaviours that facilitate training transfer”. This paper was published in the Journal of Workplace Learning Vol. 25 No1, 2013 pp 6-22. It describes the supervisor behaviours that employees regarded as helping or hindering their learning and transfer. Supervisors’ actions at different stages of the training had different impacts, with meetings following training providing the greatest opportunity to provide support. Hindrances to training transfer included culture, policies and lack of encouragement.

The dissertation concludes by summarising in chapter six the results of the three studies in relation to the overall purpose of the research, together with the contributions to knowledge, theory and practice provided by the research outcomes and highlighting the limitations of these studies and future directions for research.

Figure 1.3 provides the overall structure of this thesis.

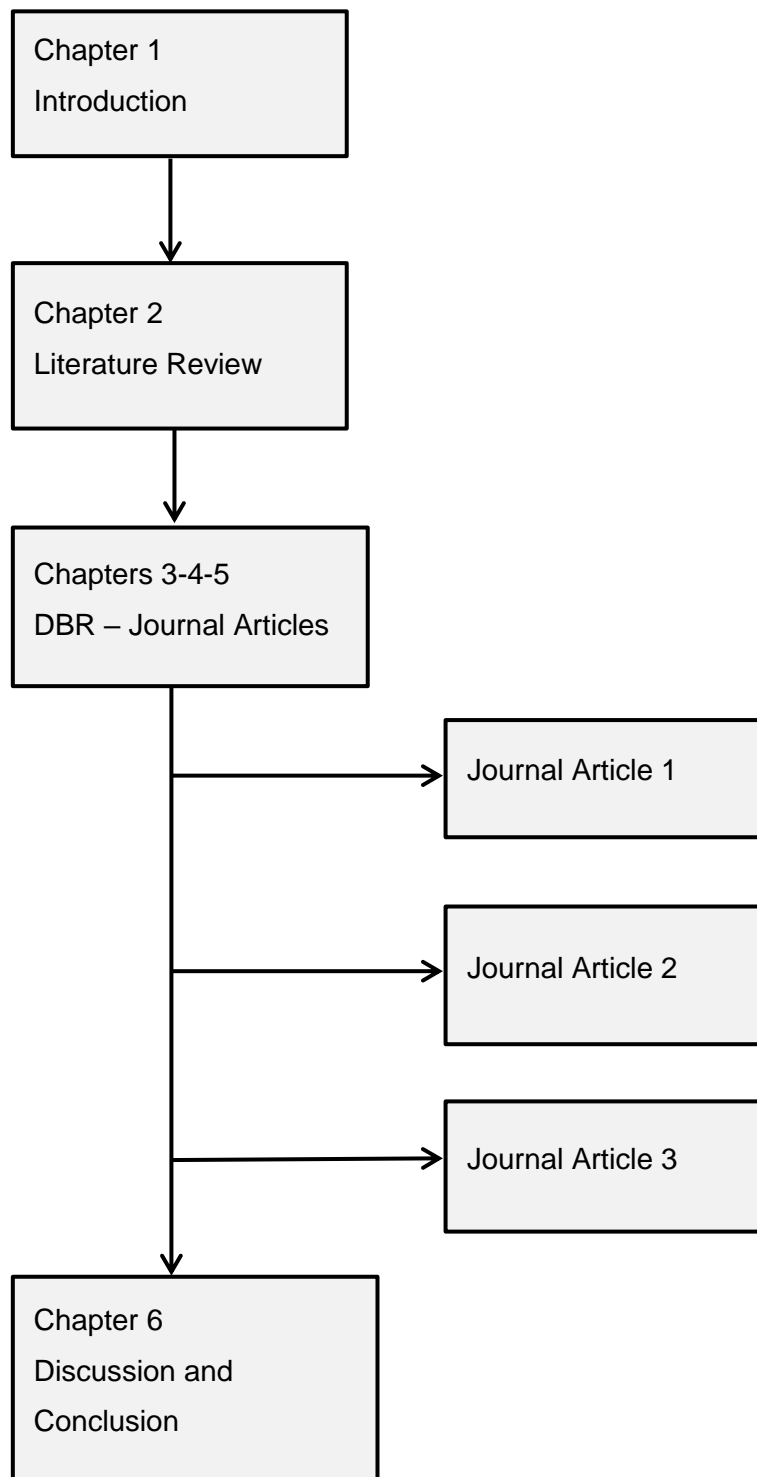


Figure 1.3: Thesis Structure

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides an overview of the background literature relevant to the series of studies that are the focus of this thesis.

A multi-disciplinary approach included reviewing the literature from across the fields of training transfer, workplace learning, organisational learning, the learning organisation, management development, human resource management and psychology.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research suggests the significance of learning to organisations. Although many studies find support for a positive relationship between learning capability and organisational performance (Goh et al., 2012; Hung et al., 2010; Kontogiorghe et al., 2005; Yang et al., 2004), organisations could benefit from paying more attention to the factors that influence their ability to learn. Whilst training is a key factor acknowledged to underpin organisational learning (Camps and Rodriguez, 2011) it is only beneficial if the resultant learning transfers to the workplace. The evidence suggests the transfer rate is between ten and forty percent at best (Baldwin and Ford, 1988; Burke and Baldwin, 1999; Burke and Hutchins, 2007; Cromwell and Kolb, 2004; Fecteau et al., 1995; Georgenson, 1982; Lim and Morris, 2006; Saks, 2002; Tracey et al., 1995). Researchers contend that providing support for learning is beneficial (Blume et al., 2010; Kraimer et al., 2011), however the literature provides insufficient guidance to understand what types of specific support and from whom will have a positive impact.

Much of the training and development literature has a focus on learning through formal training, but there are also existing literatures that provide insight into supporting learning in an organisational context. Studies on management learning emphasise the “internal life” of the organisation and seek to find ways to facilitate the learning processes within the organisation (Cullen and Turnbull, 2005). Similarly, the workplace learning literature has a focus on trying to understand how and to what extent workplaces are and can be made into learning places (Billett and Choy, 2013; Ellstrom and Ellstrom, 2014; Ellstrom, 2001; Scheeres et al., 2010).

The series of studies that comprise chapters three, four and five of this thesis take an interdisciplinary approach in reviewing the extant literatures in order to identify the relevant issues for further investigation to expand our understanding of support for learning and transfer. The majority of the studies reviewed were

quantitative and provided insufficient detail to understand how organisations can better support learning and build their learning capability. The intention of this series of studies is to extend the literature through applying qualitative methods to explore and describe the types of learning support that employees viewed as beneficial and to assist organisations and practitioners to better understand how to create environments that support learning. Organisations that are able to create such environments enhance their learning capability and thus their prospects of improving organisational outcomes.

2.1. ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING CAPABILITY

Academics and practitioners are unanimous in considering organisational learning capability as a basic element for economic growth and improving competitiveness in increasingly global markets (Argyris and Schon, 1996; Martin, 2010; Senge and Sterman, 1990). The literature describes many benefits to organisations that have a learning focus. Aguinis and Kraiger (2009) reported that such organisations benefit from improved organisational performance including profitability, effectiveness, productivity and operating revenue per employee, as well as indirectly through reduced employee turnover, enhanced reputation and social capital. Goh et al. (2012) similarly reported benefits of increased innovation capacity, competitiveness and employee job satisfaction for organisations that are able to develop their learning capability. Learning capability has been defined as the managerial practices, mechanisms and management structures that can be implemented to promote learning in an organisation (Goh et al., 2012, p. 94). Whilst the literature provides insight into the value of learning capability to an organisation and scholars such as Goh et al. (2012) provide general advice such as “*implement managerial practices, mechanisms and management structures,*” there is a lack of practical information to assist with understanding which managerial practices, mechanisms or

structures might prove beneficial, or how they can best be implemented in order to support learning.

Organisations look to exploit any potential advantages that may give them an edge over their competition and a critical component of an organisation's competitiveness is its capacity to learn, adapt and change (Martin, 2010; Senge and Sterman, 1990; Waddell and Pio, 2014). Organisations that have developed their learning capability are able to acquire process, understand and respond to information. They can also adapt their behaviours by generating opportunities to improve organisational outcomes (Easterby-Smith and Araujo, 1999; Killen et al., 2008; Senge, 2006).

Identifying and nurturing organisational resources that underpin or create competitive advantage is an important aspect of organisational strategy (O'Regan and Ghobadian, 2004). Resources that are rare, unique and non-substitutable provide sustainable competitive advantage as they are difficult to duplicate or acquire (Barney, 1991; Gomez et al., 2004). Whilst some resources can be purchased, organisational capabilities are not readily transferable between organisations (Makadok, 2001).

As capabilities are developed through organisational routines and involve the development, collection and exchange of information, organisational learning plays a vital part in developing organisational capabilities (Killen et al., 2008; Moingeon and Edmondson, 1996). Training is considered as one of the most significant human resource practices for the development of organisational learning capability (Camps and Rodriguez, 2011; McGill et al., 1992; Ulrich et al., 1993). Organisations are, however, unable to benefit from their training investment unless the resultant learning is transferred to the workplace.

The training and transfer literature is extensive and provides an important foundation on which to build and extend our knowledge of how organisations can

support their employees' learning and thus improve organisational outcomes. It is appropriate to commence with a review of this literature in order to establish what is already known and what is not well understood about providing support for training (or learning). Other disciplines of academic literature are also reviewed to determine any additional factors that impact on employee learning that should be included in this series of studies to add to the body of knowledge about how organisations can better support employee learning.

2.2. TRAINING AND TRANSFER

Effective training has the potential to increase the knowledge, skills and abilities of employees, enabling them to be leveraged for organisational benefit (Aguinis and Kraiger, 2009; Blume et al., 2010). Training is effective for individuals, teams and organisations (Aguinis and Kraiger, 2009). It can have a significant impact on an organisation's performance and bottom line and has also been shown to reduce life-threatening injuries in high-risk environments. For example, crew resource management training, a specialised version of team training originally utilised by the military and airlines to train cockpit crews to reduce human error and improve safety (Salas and Cannon-Bowers, 2001) has since been extended to emergency procedures in hospitals, air traffic control and driver training (Salas et al., 2012). Progressive organisations have moved from regarding training as an obligatory expense to a strategic weapon in the battle for competitive advantage (Bhatti et al., 2013; Blume et al., 2010). According to Salas et al. (2012, p. 91), *"training should be viewed as an investment in an organisation's human capital, rather than as a cost of doing business"*.

Effective training occurs when employees are provided with well-structured, appropriate opportunities to gain relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes through instruction, demonstration, practice and timely feedback about their performance (Salas and Cannon-Bowers, 2001). Training and learning are related but not the

same, as training does not always produce learning and learning may also result from means other than formal training. Learning is the desired result from training; it is the process of gaining new knowledge and entails relatively permanent changes in cognition, behaviour and affect (Kraiger et al., 1993; Salas et al., 2012; Schacter et al., 2010).

A recent study conducted by the American Society for Training and Development, reported that US organisations spend more than \$164 billion annually on employee training and development (ASTD Research, 2013). Despite the large investment in training, organisations continue to question the return on their investment (Blume et al., 2010). In order to benefit, organisations need their employees to transfer what they learnt during training back to the workplace. Transfer of training refers to how much of the learning that occurs as a result of a training experience is applied in the workplace and the extent to which positive changes in work performance are achieved and maintained over time (Goldstein and Ford, 2002). Transfer studies focus on factors that affect the impact of training on transfer, as well as on interventions designed to increase the rate of transfer (Aguinis and Kraiger, 2009).

Researchers and practitioners are particularly interested in training transfer as research indicates that very little of the training provided actually results in transfer to the workplace (Baldwin and Ford, 1988). Estimates on the extent of training that is transferred to the workplace vary from a low range of ten to fifteen percent (Cromwell and Kolb, 2004; Georgenson, 1982; Lim and Morris, 2006) to a more optimistic range of between fifteen and forty percent (Baldwin and Ford, 1988; Burke and Baldwin, 1999; Burke and Hutchins, 2007; Fecteau et al., 1995; Saks, 2002; Tracey et al., 1995). Wexley and Latham (2002) report that although approximately forty percent of content is transferred immediately following training, the amount transferred falls to twenty-five percent after six months and fifteen

percent after one year. This suggests that with the passing of time trainees are unable to recall and apply the skills and knowledge that they gained during the training. It is possible that differences in the timing and methods of measuring transfer by different researchers could explain the variance between researchers' estimates of the amount of transfer that occurs following training. Notwithstanding the correct transfer rate, transfer remains a problem and organisations would benefit from a better understanding of how they can provide support following the training event that helps trainees to remember what they learnt during training and to apply it in the workplace. This series of studies has a particular focus on understanding what types of support make a difference.

The study of training transfer has been an important area of research for several decades. The work of Baldwin and Ford (1988) in summarising the extant literature continues to be widely cited and has since been updated by Blume et al. (2010). As a result of their original meta-analysis, Baldwin and Ford (1988) developed an organising framework to categorise the factors that affect the transfer of training. The three training-input factors that they determined to impact on transfer are work-environment characteristics, training design and trainee characteristics. This framework has been widely accepted by researchers and continues to be employed in the study of training transfer (Blume et al., 2010; Brown and McCracken, 2009; Cheng and Ho, 2001; Clarke, 2002; Hutchins, 2009; Martin, 2010).

Of the three transfer factors identified by Baldwin and Ford (1988) the work environment has received less attention than either trainee characteristics or training design and researchers call for further investigation into the dynamics of the work environment (Brown and McCracken, 2009; Burke and Hutchins, 2007; Cheng and Ho, 2001). Blume et al. (2010) suggested that work environment factors have the potential to be manipulated. Understanding how managers, supervisors, peers

and organisations are able to influence and control particular work environment factors may provide insight into how they can better support employees' learning and transfer. The work environment thus provides a rich setting in which to conduct this series of studies.

2.2.1. WORK ENVIRONMENT

The work environment characteristics originally identified by Baldwin and Ford (1988) were "*climatic factors such as supervisory or peer support as well as constraints and opportunities to perform learned behaviours on the job.*" Baldwin and Ford (1988) challenged researchers to identify and operationalise key work environment variables such as support. Blume et al. (2010, p. 1079) confirmed a meaningful correlation between work environment and transfer. They found that the transfer climate had the highest relative relationship with transfer (.27) followed closely by general support (.21). However when general support was disaggregated, supervisor support (.31) had a stronger relationship than peer support (.14) or the transfer climate (.27). Constraints were found to have a negligible impact (.05) on transfer although the researchers acknowledged that the very small sample size may have impacted that result (Blume et al., 2010).

The conclusions from Blume et al. (2010) suggest supervisor support appears to be the strongest contributor to facilitating transfer, however our understanding of what support means in practice continues to lag behind reports of its efficacy. A better understanding of supportive supervisor behaviours may assist to enhance employee learning and its application in the workplace.

2.2.1.1. SUPERVISOR SUPPORT

The importance of the role of supervisors in influencing and supporting their employees' learning has been widely endorsed by researchers, with many reporting a positive relationship between transfer and supervisor support (Bhatti et al., 2013;

Blume et al., 2010; Brinkerhoff and Montesino, 1995; Burke and Hutchins, 2007; Clarke, 2002; Cromwell and Kolb, 2004; Dermol and Cater, 2013; Martin, 2010). At the same time, the lack of a consistent definition of supervisor support makes it difficult for practitioners to understand what supervisors need to do in relation to supporting learning. In their meta-analytic study, Baldwin and Ford (1988) identified an issue with the many studies that recognise supervisor support as an important influencing transfer factor, yet make little effort to identify and understand the supervisory behaviours that make a positive difference. More than two decades later researchers are still being urged to better understand the kinds of support that trainees need to assist their learning and subsequent transfer (Bhatti et al., 2013; Blume et al., 2010). Nevertheless, the literature does provide some insights into ways in which supervisors can provide support for learning.

Broad and Newstrom (1992) developed a framework that highlights the importance of supervisors with regard to training effectiveness. Supervisors can begin to provide support for their employees' learning before the training is undertaken (Martin, 2010). For example, discussing course content and setting performance goals is reported to facilitate transfer (Brinkerhoff and Montesino, 1995; Santos and Stuart, 2003). Through framing the training by providing employees with information to increase their familiarity with the training content, supervisors can enhance their self-efficacy and training motivation, which subsequently has a positive effect on participants' learning and transfer (Tai, 2006). When employees perceive that they will get support from their supervisors to apply new knowledge, skills and abilities in their job they are likely to be more motivated to learn and hence demonstrate positive transfer of training. Perceived support thus also plays an important role in training transfer (Salehzadeh et al., 2014).

Having organisational leaders complete the same training as their employees has been found to increase employee utilisation of new leadership skills

(Gilpin-Jackson and Bushe, 2007). It is important for the organisation's leaders to undertake the training and be perceived to be "walking the talk" through demonstrating the skills and behaviours that they expect their employees to learn (Gilpin-Jackson and Bushe, 2007; Lancaster et al., 2013; Tharenou, 2001). Ellstrom and Ellstrom (2014) described supervisors as supportive when they attended and facilitated learning processes at individual and group levels and acted as role models for learning.

The period directly after training is considered as a key window of opportunity to support effective transfer (Axtel et al., 1997; Pidd, 2004). Supervisors play a crucial role after their employees return from training by providing constructive feedback, encouragement and reinforcement for their learning, as well as opportunities to practice newly learned behaviours and skills (Baldwin and Ford, 1988; Kraiger et al., 2004; Martin, 2010; Tannenbaum and Yukl, 1992). For example, opportunities to practice closed skills, such as operating equipment, are often immediately available on returning to the workplace. However, the opportunity to practice newly learned open skills, such as leadership, is less straight forward and may require the supervisor to take an active role in providing such an opportunity or encouragement (Blume et al., 2010).

Meetings held between supervisors and their employees after the training program offer valuable opportunities to discuss and clarify the expectations of both parties. This may include agreeing which aspects of the training could be immediately applied, available opportunities to practice and reinforce new skills and any behavioural changes that may enhance success. Such consultations facilitate a coaching or mentoring relationship between the supervisor and employee (Martin, 2010). Supervisors can also foster an environment of communication and collaboration by influencing participants' openness towards exploring and sharing information (Waddell and Pio, 2014).

Supervisor support is widely regarded as crucial, however there have also been some studies where it was not found to be significantly related to transfer (Axtel et al., 1997; Chiaburu and Marinova, 2005; Fecteau et al., 1995; Velada et al., 2007). It is important that published studies provide a description of the context of their study, including the training content and training objectives, to enable a comparison of results across studies and to allow generalisations to be made (Blume et al., 2010; Kraiger, 2002). Explaining the context of a study is particularly important for understanding mixed results (Aguinis and Kraiger, 2009). One explanation for the mixed findings about the benefits of supervisor support is provided by Chiaburu and Marinova (2005). They explained their “unexpected contrary findings” as likely being due to employees in the organisation where the study was conducted relying less on their supervisors for training outcomes than on organisational policies and procedures, as well as team-level support from their peers.

Whilst many studies report on the importance of supervisors to learning and transfer, few specifically focus on the role of the supervisor. The literature indicates that supervisors can provide support for their employees’ learning before (Broad and Newstrom, 1992; Martin, 2010; Santos and Stuart, 2003) and after (Broad and Newstrom, 1992; Kraiger et al., 2004; Martin, 2010) they attend training. The literature also indicates that supervisor support may not be significantly related to transfer (Chiaburu and Marinova, 2005; Velada et al., 2007). What is not clear is whether employees benefit from support provided both before and after, or even during training; and if the type of support offered should differ depending on when it is offered. We do not know if supervisors who are believed not to support learning and transfer are perceived as not taking positive actions to provide support, or do they behave in particular ways as to inhibit learning and transfer? The extant literature provides some pointers, yet fails to open the “black-box” in relation to our understanding of which supervisor behaviours are beneficial. One of the studies

included in this thesis develops a model of supervisor support that provides an organising framework based on what type of support is offered “prior to, during and after” attending training programs – (see chapter five).

Supervisors have a more direct relationship with their employees than do organisations and they play an important role in supporting their employees’ learning and transfer. However, to implement large-scale training and development programs, policies that support learning and organisational learning systems and culture, a holistic organisational stance to learning across the organisation is essential.

2.2.1.2. ORGANISATIONAL support

Whilst the importance of organisational support is well substantiated (Birdi et al., 1997; Cromwell and Kolb, 2004; Lim and Morris, 2006) there is some confusion in the existing literature between organisational support and supervisor support. Some researchers use the terms supervisor support and organisational support interchangeably. For example, whilst Salehzadeh et al. (2014) pointed out the importance of perceived organisational support on transfer, they were actually discussing the benefit of the employees’ positive perceptions of supervisor support in relation to their motivation to learn and transfer new skills to the workplace. Blume et al. (2010) split the category of support into the two sub categories of supervisor support and peer support when measuring the impact of support on transfer. They did not include organisational support as a separate tangible factor. Whether it was assumed to be included within supervisor support, or simply not considered is not clear.

Organisations and supervisors provide distinct but related sources of support for employee training and development (Maurer and Lippstreu, 2008). Researchers have found that whilst supervisors act on behalf of the organisation they may also convey personal views about the importance of training that can differ from the

message that the organisation wants to communicate to employees (Maurer and Lippstreu, 2008; Maurer et al., 2003; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002).

Organisational and supervisor support are both usually regarded as work environment factors, but few studies have specifically focussed on understanding and differentiating between their key distinguishing characteristics (Lancaster and Di Milia, 2014). Understanding the differences may facilitate organisational practices to better support employee learning and transfer. One of the studies in this thesis focuses on differentiating organisational support from supervisor support. It explores and describes the types of support that organisations can provide to support employee learning – (see chapter four).

The level of support that an organisation provides for training is important in relation to attracting, motivating and retaining employees. When organisations support employees to learn they facilitate their development and career opportunities, as well as convey to employees that they are valued (Kraimer et al., 2011). Organisations can motivate employees to participate in training or learning activities through promoting examples of transfer which highlight both individual and organisational benefits of applying learning (Belling et al., 2004). Organisations demonstrate that they value training by providing financial support, access to appropriate training opportunities, materials, tools and technology, as well as feedback and encouragement through salary or other inducements (Dermol and Cater, 2013). Further incentives include supporting managers' development needs and providing funding and time off to complete relevant undergraduate and post graduate qualifications (O'Connor et al., 2006).

Lancaster and Di Milia (2014) found that providing high-quality relevant programs, senior management commitment and alignment were considered by employees as key forms of organisational support for learning. Whilst researchers generally regard aligning course content with organisational strategies as important

for learning, Lancaster and Di Milia also found that updating organisational processes and procedures to align with course learning outcomes encourages participants' efforts to use their new skills and embed their learning into every day work practices.

Organisations can also invest in technology to support employee and organisational learning. For example, Learning Management Systems (LMS) improve the management of learning resources and processes, and collaborative learning technologies embrace the premise that learning is inherently a social activity (Sridharan et al., 2010). Such technologies assist in lessening the learning barriers of distance, time and cost associated with attending training. Involving employees in the development of procedure manuals or software applications also enhances their learning (Killen et al., 2008).

Peer support is the remaining work environment support factor suggested by Blume et al. (2010). According to Jarvis et al. (2006) learning is socially constructed and therefore occurs in a social context that includes peers, supervisors and the wider organisational culture. Learning thus depends on, influences and is influenced by human relationships and shared understanding. This suggests that peer support may be important to learning and we therefore need to better understand its impact, as well as if and how organisations can positively influence peer support that assists employees to learn and transfer their learning to the workplace.

2.2.1.3. PEER SUPPORT

Having the support of peers is reported to positively impact transfer (Blume et al., 2010; Holton et al., 2003). The role of peers in supporting their colleagues' learning and transfer is regarded as valuable when they demonstrate patience as newly trained employees practice new skills and behaviours in the workplace. They can also help by providing assistance or advice if they feel their colleagues may require it (Holton et al., 2003). Martin (2010) similarly found that trainees often report feeling

relieved when they know they can rely on the advice and support of their peers if they are struggling to implement their learning. Networking with peers and sharing ideas about course content has also helped to promote transfer after training (Hawley and Barnard, 2005).

Efforts at transferring knowledge such as organisational practices are more successful when undertaken at team level as the different interpretive schemes and problem-solving skills of the individuals complement each other's understanding of the knowledge transferred. Research has shown that when employees are encouraged to share knowledge the prospects for successful transfer are increased (Lucas, 2010). Organisations can enhance knowledge sharing amongst peers by investing in technology such as knowledge management systems and processes that encourage members to share their knowledge as well as provide opportunities for mutual support (Chiaburu and Marinova, 2005).

It is often the social and informal networks in an organisation that generate learning (Schmitt et al., 2011). According to social identity theory an individual's self-concept is comprised of their identity as an individual, together with their social identity which is that gained from their membership of social groups, including those in the workplace (Bar-Tal, 1998). The level of identification that an employee feels with their job, together with how their commitment and contribution affects their sense of self-worth, positively influences transfer (Burke and Hutchins, 2007; Noe and Schmitt, 1986). Individuals are likely to conform to group expectations and to emulate the behaviours and views of other group members, subject to the extent that they identify with the group (Pidd, 2004; Terry et al., 1999). Therefore, supervisor, workgroup and organisational support for learning will only influence transfer to the extent that the employee identifies with the supervisor, workgroup or organisation (Colquitt et al., 2000; Kontogiorghe, 2004). When employees

conform to group norms, depending on their direction, they can either facilitate or impede transfer (Elangovan and Karakowsky, 1999; Holton et al., 2003).

Akin to supervisor support, studies reporting on the relationship between peer support and training transfer have yielded mixed results. Whilst some researchers have found peer support to have a positive impact on transfer, others have not. Cromwell and Kolb (2004), for example, whilst initially finding peer support was a positive factor in transfer, then found that it was not significant one year after the training. Similarly, Hawley and Barnard (2005) reported initial findings of the benefits of peer support, but then found that the lack of supervisor support limited the positive benefits from peer support on skill maintenance. Dermol and Cater (2013) were also unable to find sufficient evidence of a link between peer support and transfer, although they cautioned that the design of their questionnaire, which was developed to collect data from managers and not from the trainees, may have impacted on the result.

The findings of Chiaburu and Marinova (2005) in relation to employees relying more on peer than supervisor support appear contrary to those of Hawley and Barnard (2005) who found that the positive benefits from peer support were limited by the lack of supervisor support. The differing results may indicate that peer support is moderated by supervisor support. However, we do not yet understand the nature of the relationship between peer and supervisor support, such as whether peer support could be more important in a work environment where supervisors are considered unsupportive. Regardless of whether supervisor support has a stronger relationship with transfer than peer support (Blume et al., 2010), organisations could improve their support for learning by finding ways for employees to collaborate and build relationships with their peers as well as encouraging greater levels of supervisor support.

In addition to attempting to enhance work environment factors that support learning and transfer, organisations should also be aware of and try to mitigate those factors that inhibit it. The Blume et al. (2010) study includes organisational constraints amongst the work environment factors that hinder learning and transfer, although very few researchers specifically frame their research in terms of constraints. Gaining a better appreciation of such hindrances would likely assist organisations and practitioners to remove or mitigate their potential threats and thus contribute to creating an environment that supports learning and transfer.

2.2.1.4. CONSTRAINTS TO LEARNING AND TRANSFER

Reported hindrances to learning and transfer include inflexible work practices; inconsistencies in organisational systems, strategies, policies and practices (Schilling and Kluge, 2009); insufficient resources (Milne et al., 2004; Santos and Stuart, 2003) and the lack of senior management and supervisor support (Cromwell and Kolb, 2004; Martin, 2010; McCracken, 2005). Senior management can hinder organisational learning by not making necessary changes to policies and practices that are needed to implement new routines. A lack of management skills has been found to inhibit institutionalised learning experiences. For example, a laissez-faire management style that assumes innovations will automatically make their way into organisational practice prevents systematic implementation (Schilling and Kluge, 2009).

Supervisor support is critical to transfer and supervisors who do not regard the training as beneficial or relevant undermine transfer in a number of ways (Martin, 2010). Supervisors who provide little or no feedback and do not endorse changes to work practices are major impediments to transfer (Clarke, 2002). Supervisor resistance is an important obstacle to the implementation of learning initiatives (Rebelo and Gomes, 2011). Supervisors are not simply the executants of top management decisions, but rather they are a critical link between the top and

the bottom and they have the power to facilitate or inhibit the real implementation of many organisational changes and projects. Lancaster et al. (2013) found that supervisors who did not demonstrate interest in their employees' learning, or provide them with feedback and encouragement were perceived as unsupportive and an impediment to transferring learning.

Employees expect senior leaders and supervisors to apply the knowledge and skills they obtained and are often critical of those who don't attend the training, or fail to use and demonstrate the practices that they expect of their employees. Modelling has been shown to have a powerful effect on behaviour change and supervisors who don't behave in accordance with the training objectives adversely impact the transfer of their employees (Birdi et al., 1997). Without visible involvement of supervisors, trainees do not perceive the desired behavioural changes as strategically important to their organisation (Dirani, 2012).

Fear of non-acceptance by peers is also regarded as a significant barrier to utilising new skills (Gilpin-Jackson and Bushe, 2007). Brinkerhoff and Gill (1994) asserted that peer pressure to conform to pre-existing norms is the bane of training transfer - *"the workplace can untrain people far more efficiently than even the best training department can train people"*. Workplace policies and established practices were found to impede employees' ability to implement their ideas for change (Lancaster et al., 2013).

A common reason given for the non-transference of training is the lack of time due to demanding workloads and complex environments that make it difficult to integrate learning into managers' work. Under such conditions they quickly fall back to into old habits and patterns of working (Cromwell and Kolb, 2004; Milne et al., 2004; Santos and Stuart, 2003). Brown and McCracken (2009) similarly found that managers reported feeling overwhelmed by the numerous responsibilities

associated with managing a large workgroup as a barrier to transferring their learning.

Cognitive learning alone does not guarantee transfer. Its benefits are undermined in situations where trainees are unable to practice and use their new knowledge and skills in the workplace (Yamnill and McLean, 2001). Many researchers agree that trainees must be provided with opportunities to perform their newly learned behaviours and that transfer is limited when such opportunities are not afforded (Brinkerhoff and Montesino, 1995; Burke and Hutchins, 2007; Cromwell and Kolb, 2004; Gaudine and Saks, 2004; Lim and Morris, 2006). When practice opportunities are insufficient trainees generally forget what they learnt in training, or view it as irrelevant to their work (Salas et al., 2012).

Many reported hindrances to transferring training appear to be transposed in the factors reported to facilitate it. For example, Lim and Johnson (2002) rated the opportunity to use newly trained skills as the main form of support for transfer and the lack of opportunity to apply the skills and knowledge as the most significant obstacle to transfer. Similarly, supervisor support is reported to assist transfer (Baldwin and Ford, 1988; Birdi et al., 1997; Blume et al., 2010; Burke and Hutchins, 2007) and the lack of supervisor support is reputed to inhibit it (Cromwell and Kolb, 2004; Martin, 2010; McCracken, 2005). Being aware of potential barriers may also assist organisations to remove them or to mitigate their adverse impact. It also may be possible that by purposefully implementing strategies and practices aimed at supporting employees' learning and transfer, organisations could concomitantly overcome many of the recognised constraints.

Whilst the work environment characteristics provide the primary focus area for this series of studies, the remaining transfer characteristics – training design and trainee characteristics warrant a brief review to determine if there is any additional scope for organisations to provide further support for learning.

2.2.2. TRAINING DESIGN

The design and facilitation of training significantly influence learning and subsequent transfer (Martin, 2010; Salas et al., 2012). Good design takes into account the relevance of the training content to the trainees' work, with the amount of transfer largely depending on the extent of alignment between the training content and the opportunity to immediately apply this learning in the work place (Burke and Hutchins, 2007; Hutchins, 2009; Lim and Morris, 2006; Rey de Polanco, 2005).

Trainees determine the utility of the training and their assessment can be influenced by their perceptions of the likelihood that the new skills will enhance their performance, that they can attain them and whether they realise that they need to improve their performance (Hutchins, 2009; Yelon et al., 2004). The level of transfer is greater with well-designed training programs as they assist to increase the trainees' grasp and retention of the subject matter, as well as developing their confidence and motivation (Martin, 2010).

Pre-training interventions are designed to maximise the potential for learning to occur as ill-prepared trainees will be less motivated to learn and therefore less likely to master the training content (Baldwin and Ford, 1988; Cannon-Bowers et al., 1998; Magnus, 2005; Tannenbaum and Yukl, 1992). Such interventions include intentional advice, advance organisers, goal orientation and pre-practice briefs. Intentional advice provides trainees with learning strategies and advance organisers assist to mentally structure the training material by providing diagrams or summaries of training content. Goal orientation fosters goals aimed at either mastery of the training material or performing well on post-training tests (Magnus, 2005).

Trainees instructed in the principles of analysing problems are likely to be better problem solvers in the workplace. With open skills, such as leadership or decision making, there is not just one way to act or respond and the trainee needs

to be able to determine their approach depending on the circumstances (Blume et al., 2010). Facilitators should encourage learners to recognise situations requiring remedies and to think through and try new ideas (Santos and Stuart, 2003; Van den Bossche et al., 2010). The trainees then have to work out how to apply the principles and customise the training to fit the circumstances in which they need to apply them (Baldwin et al., 2009). The capacity to adapt the training content to suit changing work conditions or novel situations is a key indicator of learning (Cromwell and Kolb, 2004).

Research shows that engaging the learners interest through providing practice opportunities during training and proffering feedback on attempts to try fledgling skills allows trainees to adapt their behaviour and to gain insight into any changes required (Blume et al., 2010; Burke et al., 2006; Hutchins, 2009; Martin, 2010). Lancaster and Di Milia (2015) found that role playing leadership skills, such as performance counselling, enhanced participants' confidence in applying their learning in the workplace.

Goal-setting training is an example of a post-training intervention that can be effective in improving the extent to which trainees apply their skills to the job (Richman-Hirsch, 2001). Kontoghiorghes (2001) found that developing learning goals and objectives was meaningfully correlated with transfer ($r=.37$). Setting specific, challenging goals is believed to enhance performance because they focus attention, mobilise effort and encourage trainees to stay on task until they are achieved (Locke et al., 1981). Using goals as part of a self-management training intervention has been found to motivate trainees to transfer (Brown and McCracken, 2009; Richman-Hirsch, 2001). Self-management techniques extend the utility of practice for trainees by providing them with exercises that they can use to apply the new learning and skills in the workplace (Hutchins, 2009). The Blume et al. (2010) meta-analysis found little evidence of support for transfer interventions, although

they did infer that this was possibly due to the brief amount of time generally spent on interventions in training programs, with most lasting two hours or less.

Organisations could likely enhance learning and transfer by playing a greater role in the design of training for their employees. Support for learning should therefore begin well before the actual training event. It is important to undertake a needs analysis early in the design process to ensure that training is an appropriate solution to the performance issue (Burke and Hutchins, 2007; Salas et al., 2012). Organisations that ensure the training content is relevant to the performance issue requiring a solution and aligned with employees' work functions are likely to achieve better outcomes in terms of learning and transfer.

Transfer appears to largely rely on the individual's ability to cognitively acquire the material and to subsequently apply their learning in the workplace. However, this position assumes a number of other factors are present to facilitate this transfer. Well-designed training it is not sufficient to ensure subsequent transfer. Organisations that are involved in the design of the training are more likely to be aware of the benefits of practice and feedback and should therefore also seek ways to utilise such support mechanisms in the workplace. This would provide reinforcement for learning following the training as well as support for employees that are learning through their work.

2.2.3. TRAINEE CHARACTERISTICS

Trainee characteristics describe the attributes of the trainees that impact on their learning and transfer. Two trainee characteristics prominently mentioned in the transfer literature are self-efficacy and instrumentality (Chiabaru and Lindsay, 2008). Self-efficacy entails the learners' belief that they can perform specific tasks and behaviours (McCracken et al., 2012; Salas and Cannon-Bowers, 2001; Wood and Bandura, 1989) and instrumentality represents the individual's belief that if they perform a specific behaviour, it will result in a desired outcome (Vroom, 1964).

A positive relationship has been found between building learners' self-confidence and the likelihood of them transferring their new skills and knowledge to the job (Salas and Cannon-Bowers, 2001). *"Self-efficacy can be enhanced by reminding trainees of past successes in training or on the job and by ensuring early successful learning experiences during training"* (Salas et al., 2012, p. 84).

Chiaburu and Marinova (2008) found that the distinct characteristics of self-efficacy and instrumentality are related, as whilst employees may be motivated to learn, they are unlikely to change their behaviour if they perceive that the organisation will not respond to their improved performance. Organisations may be able to support employees' learning and transfer by seeking additional ways to build employees' confidence in their learning capability and also in their ability to apply their new learning in the workplace following training. Lancaster et al. (2013) found that supervisors who met with their employees prior to their attendance at training instilled confidence in their ability to learn.

Motivation is recognised as important for transfer and is typically conceptualised either as motivation to learn or motivation to transfer (Colquitt et al., 2000; Kontoghiorghes, 2002). *"Motivation to learn can be described as a specific desire on the part of the trainee to learn the content of the training program"* (Noe and Schmitt, 1986, p. 501) and *"motivation to transfer can be described as the trainee's desire to use the knowledge and skills mastered in the training program on the job"* (Noe and Schmitt, 1986, p. 503). The relationship between self-efficacy and motivation is such that trainees that have higher levels of self-efficacy also have higher levels of motivation to learn than trainees with less self-confidence. Trainees with higher motivation to learn also report a greater degree of transfer (Birdi et al., 1997; Martin, 2010). Whilst organisations could likely improve effectiveness by only employing people with high self-efficacy and motivation (Martin, 2010), contemporary human resource practices such as equal employment opportunity

generally prohibit them from doing so. Organisations must therefore look for ways to support all employees in enhancing, retaining and applying learning in order to capitalise on their training investment.

Social cognitive theory affirms that outcome expectancies, goals and self-efficacy are all key variables in explaining human performance (Bandura, 1986; 1997). Early studies on cognitive ability, which is the capacity to think, reason and problem solve (Baldwin and Ford, 1988; Hunter, 1986), found it an important predictor for performance and training success. Some thirty years later, cognitive ability is still regarded as having a significant relationship to transfer (Blume et al., 2010). Whilst early studies suggested that there was little transfer of the knowledge learnt in one situation to another, such as transferring the learning from training programs to the work environment, new studies suggest that this may not be correct. Hertzog et al. (2009, p. 1) reported that *“providing structured experience in situations demanding executive coordination of skills, such as complex video games, task-switching paradigms and divided attention tasks, trains strategic control over cognition that does transfer to different task environments”*. These recent developments within cognitive science provide advances in knowledge of how engagement in authentic practice settings can contribute to individuals’ learning (Barsalou, 2008; Billett and Choy, 2013). Organisations should seek ways to ensure sufficiently challenging and authentic practice settings are provided during training and in the work environment in order to enhance employees’ cognitive ability and learning. For example, participants in Lancaster and Di Milia’s (2014) study reported how case studies based on real organisational issues assisted their learning, as did collaborating with colleagues to resolve current and anticipated workplace challenges.

The transfer factors do not appear to be independent of each other. For example, enhancing motivation and confidence are discussed in the literature

relating to design, yet they are listed as trainee characteristics and are also influenced by supervisor support which is a work environment factor. Similarly, cognitive ability, a trainee characteristic is able to be enhanced by engagement in authentic practice settings, which depend on both training design and the work environment. The training design phase provides an opportunity for organisations to identify potential obstacles to positive transfer (Burke and Hutchins, 2007; Gaudine and Saks, 2004; Sleezer et al., 2008) which are generally caused by and resolved in the work environment. Organisations would benefit from a sound understanding of alignment between and involvement in the management of all of the identified transfer factors.

By taking an interdisciplinary approach to reviewing the extant literatures, other factors that relate to supporting learning in an organisational context emerge. In addition to the training and development literatures, other disciplines such as workplace learning, organisational learning, leadership and culture provide both further knowledge of and the opportunity to better understand how organisations can support their employees' learning.

2.3. WORKPLACE LEARNING

The concept of workplace learning has become more prominent in the literature in recent years (Billett, 2001; Billett, 2004; Billett and Choy, 2013; Boud and Middleton, 2003; Ellstrom et al., 2008; Ellstrom and Ellstrom, 2014; Hauer et al., 2012). It recognises that in addition to participating in formal education and training courses, people also learn as they do their jobs. In this way learning is closely intertwined with how people do their work and it is linked to the idea of learning being context-dependent.

Some researchers refer to the learning that happens in the workplace as informal learning (Hauer et al., 2012; Malcolm et al., 2003). There is a lack of agreement in the literature about what informal, non-formal and formal learning are

(Malcolm et al., 2003) and defining workplace learning as informal is somewhat controversial. Billet (2004) claims it to be negative, imprecise and ill-focused. He argues strongly against defining workplace learning as informal, as it suggests that it is less effective or valuable than formal learning. Billet argues that describing workplace learning as “what it is not” or what it lacks does not give it due credit as an important means of learning. Some advantages attributed to informal learning are that it is easier to learn and foster practical and inter-personal skills, as well as acquiring cultural awareness in the workplace context. Day (1998) suggests that informal learning promotes practical skills, intra- and interpersonal skills and cultural awareness. It is also incremental based upon the individual’s personal needs, spontaneous and immediately applicable, providing outcomes relevant to specific needs.

Workplace learning can also encompass a focus on learning for personal or professional development. Learning legitimately takes place in the workplace as well as, or instead of through formal training courses. Regardless of whether the learning is derived through formal training or at work we need to better understand what forms of support make a difference. In addition to workplace learning, organisational learning and the learning organisation appear prominently in the literature. Gaining an understanding of these concepts may provide further insight into how to support learning in the workplace.

2.4. ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING AND THE LEARNING ORGANISATION

There appears to be a broad acceptance of two related but different bodies of literature; organisational learning and the learning organisation (Easterby-Smith and Araujo, 1999; Fiol and Lyles, 1985; Goh et al., 2012; Tsang, 1997; Yeo, 2005). The terms organisational learning and learning organisation have been used interchangeably in the literature which has resulted in considerable confusion (Kontoghiorghes et al., 2005; Ortenblad, 2001). There have been numerous

attempts made to clarify and distinguish the two approaches (Argyris, 1999; Argyris and Schon, 1996; Easterby-Smith and Araujo, 1999; Marquardt, 1996; Marsick and Watkins, 1994; Ortenblad, 2001; Tsang, 1997; Yang et al., 2004).

One example is provided by Tsang (1997) who regarded organisational learning as a process or a set of activities and the learning organisation as a form of organisation. A second example offers a distinction based on the origination of the literature, with organisational learning literature reported to emerge from academic inquiry and the literature on the learning organisation to originate primarily from practice (Argyris, 1999; Easterby-Smith and Araujo, 1999). Ortenblad (2001) proposed a further distinction based on who learns and the location of the knowledge. He concluded that in organisational learning, knowledge is viewed as residing in individuals, whereas in the learning organisation knowledge is seen as residing in organisational memory. Whilst these studies illustrate some of the differences between the concepts of organisational learning and learning organisations, they do little to assist our understanding of how to support organisations to learn, or to support their evolution into learning organisations.

Organisational learning is described by Senge (1990) as a continuous testing of experience and its transformation into knowledge that is available to the whole organisation and relevant to the achievement of the organisation's objectives. Argyris and Schon (1996) describe organisational learning more broadly, claiming that it occurs when organisations obtain any type of information by any method. Organisational learning is not a cumulative result of individuals' learning. Organisations "learn" when inventions, evaluations and insights of individual members are subsequently acted upon and embedded in the organisation's shared mental models or cognitive systems and memories (Argyris and Schon, 1978; Popper and Lipshitz, 2000; Thomas and Allen, 2006).

Organisations facilitate their members' learning when they embed institutionalised learning mechanisms into a learning culture; a normative system of shared values and beliefs that shape how organisation members feel, think and behave (Popper and Lipshitz, 2000). These learning mechanisms are structures and procedures which are institutionalised to enable organisations to "learn non-vicariously....to collect, analyse, store, disseminate and use systematically information that is relevant to their and their members' performance" (Popper and Lipshitz, 2000, p. 40). The 4I framework developed by Crossan et al. (1999) describes four related sub processes to organisational learning; intuiting, interpreting, integrating and institutionalising that occur over three levels; individual, group and organisation. Intuiting always occurs at an individual level, where an individual recognises a pattern or possibilities. Interpreting may involve just the individual starting to make sense of the insight, but may also include conversations and interactions with others (Crossan et al., 1999). When actions occur with other members of a workgroup, interpreting evolves into the integrating process, where shared understanding and coordination of actions takes place at the workgroup level. Effective actions are then repeated, and the process of institutionalising takes place where rules and procedures become embedded in the organisation. Organisational learning is reported to help organisations to achieve strategic renewal through exploring and learning new ways and also exploiting what they have already learned (Crossan et al., 1999). See figure 2.1

Level	Process	Inputs/Outcomes
Individual	Intuiting	Experiences Images Metaphors
	Interpreting	Language Cognitive map Conversation/dialogue
Group	Integrating	Shared understanding Mutual adjustment Interactive systems
Organisation	Institutionalising	Routines Diagnostic systems Rules and procedures

Figure 2.1: Learning/Renewal in Organizations: Four Processes Through Three Levels (Crossan et al., 1999, p. 525)

This framework assists our understanding of how organisational learning begins with individuals and progresses to the group level through individuals interacting and discussing their insights with other workgroup members. Organisational learning is understood to occur when shared understandings evolve into repeated actions and subsequently into rules and procedures. It does not however, help our understanding of how to support individuals' learning or how to assist workgroups to gain a shared understanding and agreement around changing work practices and procedures. The evolution of individual learning to organisational learning is not an automatic process and with work practices, system inconsistencies and policies sited as barriers to organisational learning (Schilling and Kluge, 2009), there are still gaps in the literature in how to support individual and workgroup learning to enable organisational learning. Organisations would benefit from seeking ways to support both individual and workgroup learning.

Researchers have also shown considerable interest in the concept of the learning organisation, with substantial growth in the quantity of empirical research undertaken in the last two decades (Bapuji and Crossan, 2004; Goh et al., 2012).

Despite the significant amount of research undertaken there is yet, however, little common agreement on the meaning of what and how an organisation learns and the diversity of views on this topic has contributed to the confusion (Goh et al., 2012). Researchers have defined the learning organisation according to their own perspective and area of interest. Senge (1990) defined the learning organisation from a systems perspective as *“organisations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free and where people continually learn together”*. Pedler et al. (1991) employed a learning perspective and defined the learning organisation as *“an organization that facilitates the learning of all of its members and continually transforms itself in order to meet its strategic goals”*. Nonaka (1991) symbolised knowledge-creating companies as places where *“inventing new knowledge is not a specialised activity...it is a way of behaving, indeed a way of being in which everyone is a knowledge worker”*.

Garavan (1997) suggested that the notion of the learning organisation was still in a state of evolution and that its precise form was yet to be defined. The current literature indicates that this remains the case. Garavan also noted that whilst organisational learning tended to concentrate on formalised and prescriptive learning, the learning organisation turns attention to the process of learning; the individuality of learning styles and the creation of the appropriate environment for learners. Garavan raised the question of whether it is even possible to create a learning organisation and suggested it might be an idealised state that may never be attained. He suggested a more useful approach would be to create enabling cultures and structures at organisational and individual levels, together with values and processes that adopt a learning-based approach.

Garvin (1993) suggested that scholars such as Senge and Nonaka are partly to blame for the confusion that surrounds the concept of the learning organisation;

claiming that their recommendations are too abstract, filled with “idyllic and near mystical” terminology and that they fail to provide a framework for action. In order to address these alleged deficiencies, Garvin et al. (2008) developed an assessment tool to assist organisations to determine how well they function as learning organisations. Their model proposed a series of three independent building blocks which they regarded as essential to develop a learning organisation. The first building block titled “a supportive learning environment” consists of four distinguishing characteristics, which are listed as psychological safety, appreciation of differences, openness to new ideas and time for reflection. The second building block is called “concrete learning processes” and the third designated as “leadership that reinforces learning.” Whilst determining how to become a learning organisation is outside the scope of this thesis, the first building block in the Garvin et al. (2008) assessment tool, “a supportive learning environment” is of particular relevance. The listed characteristics of psychological safety, appreciation of differences, openness to new ideas and time for reflection are tested and built upon in one of the studies in the series (see chapter three).

Creating a supportive learning environment requires the organisation’s senior leaders to be involved and visible in leading the organisation’s learning agenda. The commitment of an organisation’s senior leaders is regarded by employees as a significant factor in supporting their learning (Lancaster and Di Milia, 2014).

2.5. SUPPORTIVE LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOUR

An organisation’s leaders have considerable influence in whether or not the organisation promotes a cultural orientation towards learning (Rebelo and Gomes, 2011). What leaders pay attention to is a persuasive means of what they care about (Schein, 2010), hence when leaders encourage learning they are indicating

that they regard learning as an important organisational value (Rebelo and Gomes, 2011; Schein, 2010).

The study of leadership has been of interest to scholars for several decades and there are many definitions of leadership. Rost (cited in Ciulla, 2003) collected 221 such definitions, extending from the 1920s to the 1990s. These definitions were summarised by Ciulla (2003) and reflect the style of leadership at the time. The main differences between the definitions are the implications for leader/follower relationships. How leaders get people to do things and how what is done have normative implications. Ciulla noted an evolutionary shift in the definitions. For example, in the 1920s leaders “impressed their will” on those they led; in the 1940s they “persuaded” followers; in the 1960s they “influenced” them and in the 1990s leaders and followers “influenced each other.” See Figure 2.2.

1930s	Leadership is a process in which the activities of many are organised to move in a specific direction by one.
1940s	Leadership is the result of an ability to persuade or direct men, apart from the prestige or power that comes from office or external circumstance.
1950s	Leadership is what leaders do in groups. The leader's authority is spontaneously accorded him by his fellow group members.
1960s	Leadership is acts by a person which influence other persons in a shared direction
1970s	Leadership is defined in terms of discretionary influence. Discretionary influence refers to those leader behaviours under control of the leader which he may vary from individual to individual.
1980s	Regardless of the complexities involved in the study of leadership, its meaning is relatively simple. Leadership means to inspire others to undertake some form of purposeful action as determined by the leader.
1990s	Leadership is an influence relationship between leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes.

Figure 2.2: Representative sample definitions of leadership by decade (Rost, 1991 as cited in Ciulla 2003 p12)

Leadership style is considered crucial in creating a learning climate (Haakonsson et al., 2008; Vera and Crossan, 2004), with leaders' behaviours and decisions believed to be symbolic of their values and motives (Kaiser et al., 2008). The transactional and transformational leadership styles depicted in Bass's (1985; 1998) framework are useful to examine how an organisation's senior leaders impact learning. Originally transformational leadership was primarily focussed on the micro-level relationship between leaders and their immediate followers. It is only recently that Bass's framework has been used to describe senior leaders and extended to address organisational-level variables such as structure, culture, learning and

innovation (Jansen et al., 2009; Vera and Crossan, 2004). Bass (1985; 1998) determined that transactional and transformational leadership behaviours can be learned. Assisting organisational leaders to learn these skills may benefit organisations as they have been shown to positively impact on organisational learning and thus organisational performance (Vera and Crossan, 2004).

The agenda of transformational leaders encompasses generating a vision for change, as well as the institutionalisation of change (Tichy and Ulrich, 1984). Transformational leaders encourage organisational members to question norms and assumptions, be reflective and innovative, contribute creative ideas and take calculated risks (Bass, 1998). They encourage individuals to communicate, participate and share their learning. Through explicitly asking for input and assistance from all managerial levels across the organisation, transformational leaders help to create a culture where information and ideas are shared openly (Bass and Avolio, 1990). By acknowledging their own shortcomings leaders foster an organisational learning climate where mistakes and issues can be discussed openly (Goleman, 2001; Popper and Lipshitz, 1998). A transformational leadership style is appropriate when organisations are looking to dynamically change the way learning is perceived, achieved and disseminated throughout the organisation, whereas a transactional leadership style is better suited when the goal is to institutionalise, reinforce or amend current learning (Vera and Crossan, 2004).

Transactional leaders endeavour to strengthen an organisation's culture, strategy and structure through utilising existing systems (Vera and Crossan, 2004). They set goals, articulate expectations, establish organisational reward mechanisms and provide constructive feedback to motivate and encourage the organisations' members to keep their focus on the job (Bass and Avolio, 1993b). Transactional leaders motivate employees to use existing learning by keeping focussed on getting the job done and maintaining order. They encourage workgroups to achieve their

objectives by interacting appropriately with other organisational groups to discuss and agree on incremental improvements to the current ways of working and thinking. Transactional leaders focus on what has been proven to work and how to keep the system working (Bass, 1985). Research shows that to facilitate organisational learning, both leadership styles are needed and that they play different roles at different stages (Vera and Crossan, 2004).

The leadership styles depicted in Bass's (1985; 1998) framework describe how senior leaders can impact learning. However, because senior leaders generally do not personally interact with the majority of the organisation's employees, their effect is considered to be primarily indirect. Perceptions of senior leaders occur mainly as a result of their reputation gained through stories related about them and through the organisation's structures, policies and practices for which they are held responsible (Detert and Trevino, 2010; Dutton et al., 2002). Due to the normal chain-of-command structure in organisations, employees' immediate supervisors have many more interactions with them than do senior leaders and therefore have a direct impact (Detert and Trevino, 2010; Waldman and Yammarino, 1999). Detert and Trevino found that the strong influence of supervisors on employees' perceptions arises from both the direct and personal interactions between the supervisor and their employee, as well as how effectively they carry out their role as intermediary between the employee subordinates and senior management. Researchers have also reported that supervisors, whilst acting on behalf of organisations, can impart their own views about the importance of training to their subordinates which may differ from the message that the organisation's senior leaders want to convey to employees (Maurer and Lippstreu, 2008; Maurer et al., 2003; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). This suggests that supervisors have the ability to thwart senior leaders' intentions of creating an organisational learning climate and culture.

Given the influence of supervisors on their employees, it is critical that organisations find ways to ensure that supervisors' behaviours are supportive and aligned with those of the organisation's senior leaders in communicating the importance of learning throughout the organisation. Organisations could benefit from ensuring that all organisational leaders, including supervisors receive appropriate leadership training, such as that depicted in Bass's (1985; 1998) leadership style framework to enable them to provide appropriate leadership that supports learning in times of change or stability.

The learning literature also emphasises the role of leadership in the creation and management of organisational climate and culture (Rebelo and Gomes, 2011). In order to promote learning an organisation's leaders must be committed to creating a culture of learning (Carim and Basson, 2013).

2.6. CLIMATE AND CULTURE FOR LEARNING

Climate is distinguished as "the atmosphere that employees perceive is created in their organisation by practices, procedures and rewards" from culture, "the broader pattern of an organisation's mores, values and beliefs" (Cunningham and Iles, 2002). Climate may be seen as the current behaviour and values in an organisation that may one day form its culture. Employees perceive learning practices, procedures and rewards for learning in particular ways and cluster their experiences, perceived learning, events and proprieties into meanings, which form the basis of the organisation's learning climate (Schneider and Reichers, 1993).

"The transfer climate is a mediating variable in the relationship between the organisational context and an individual's attitude towards the job and their behaviour on the job" (Holton et al., 1997a, p. 96). Kontoghiorghes (2002; 2004) found that the strongest predictor of learning transfer was a positive learning transfer climate. He also reported that a positive learning climate was closely

associated with job motivation and satisfaction as well as organisational commitment.

The level of analysis is important in climate research. If there is agreement among individuals in a group, such as a work group or organisation, then those shared perceptions can be aggregated to characterise the group and thus labelled organisational climate. The perceptions however, remain those of the individuals that comprise the group, regardless of the agreement or disagreement amongst individual perceptions and thus the unit of analysis is the individual (Chan, 1998; James, 1982).

The importance of climate and culture to learning is generally agreed by researchers, with culture considered more enduring and difficult to change than climate. Schein (1993) described cultures developed in organisations as stabilisers that function in order to resist change. According to Kotter (1995) most transformation efforts fail and will continue to do so unless the new behaviours are rooted into the organisation's culture.

Initially the literatures on climate and culture were developed independently, but more recently they are considered to be inter-related (James et al., 2008). Whilst closely related they are not the same, although in recent years some researchers use the terms interchangeably (Carim and Basson, 2013; James et al., 2008) and others regard them as overlapping constructs (Kaiser et al., 2008). Climate is the psychological sense of well-being that the work environment provides for its members (James et al., 2008). Employees' perceptions and interpretation of the climate affects their attitudes and behaviours in the workplace.

Culture is described as the shared values and behavioural expectations of an organisation (Cook and Szumal, 1993). The culture provides the underlying beliefs and justifications for the organisation's activities and behaviours. Such organisational mores are often seen as a result of group dynamics; the interactions

that occur in social groups, including organisations, that help to develop shared perceptions to make sense out of the functions of the group or organisation (James et al., 2008; Katz and Kahn, 1978; Rousseau, 1988). Individuals in the group or organisation must have shared perceptual expectations around values and behaviours to justify the aggregation of those views to represent group or organisation level culture (Chan, 1998). If such consensus is not present then the individual responses cannot be aggregated and labelled as group or organisational culture, as the lack of shared understanding implies that there is not an overarching culture (Chan, 1998; James et al., 2008). Culture reflects a system-level orientation and is a property of the system, whereas climate reflects an individual orientation and is a property of the individual (James et al., 2008).

Studies examining workplace culture generally assume a mono-culture (Egan, 2008). However some organisations do not have an overarching culture due to a lack of common history or shared important experiences (Schein, 2010). Localised sub-cultures may be present in organisations because of association in various groups or functions unique to, but separate from the larger organisation. The influence of sub-cultures can affect employee perceptions of what is valued and prioritised, as well as the motivation for actions related to learning and development (Egan, 2008). As per Chan's rationale for the concept of aggregated consensus, developing an organisational learning culture in an organisation where sub-cultures are present may prove problematic. Organisations should therefore seek to understand the potential influence of any such sub-cultural groups on developing an organisational culture for learning and pursue ways to mitigate any negative impacts.

The concept of organisational learning culture implies a set of norms and values about the functioning of an organisation that supports a systematic and comprehensive approach aimed at achieving higher-level organisational learning

(Skerlavaj et al., 2007). Organisational learning culture has been found to influence the beliefs of employees about change, their self-efficacy and performance-outcome expectancies. An organisational learning culture symbolises an organisation with shared values that demonstrate the importance of learning, how it will be undertaken, shared and applied across the organisation (Bates and Khasawneh, 2005). Organisations with strong learning cultures are good at creating, acquiring and transferring knowledge, as well as modifying their behaviour to reflect new knowledge and insights (Garvin, 1993; Skerlavaj et al., 2007).

Within the literatures on organisational learning and learning organisations, organisational culture is generally seen as a facilitating factor, or an essential condition for organisational learning to occur (Marquardt, 1996; Marsick and Watkins, 2003; Pedler et al., 1997; Rebelo and Gomes, 2011). Whilst organisational learning culture does not seem to generate value directly (Hung et al., 2010; Marsick and Watkins, 2003), it does exert an indirect influence on organisational success factors. The mediating effect of culture on learning has been shown to improve organisational performance (Hung et al., 2010) and innovation capability (Bates and Khasawneh, 2005).

To maximise the benefits from learning, organisations require a culture that embraces learning and creativity, together with a psychological climate that encourages individuals to share and apply their learning in the workplace (Bates and Khasawneh, 2005). The literature clarifies the difference between climate and culture, as well as between individual, group and organisational manifestations of them. It also suggests that a positive organisational transfer climate is dependent on an organisational learning culture and thus, for organisations to create environments that support learning and transfer, they need to focus on finding ways to enhance their learning culture at the organisational level.

2.7. CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has presented an overview of the extant literature from the learning and related organisational fields of study to ascertain what is known in relation to learning and transfer. It has also identified some limitations in the extant literature that require further examination in order to better understand how organisations can create supportive learning environments.

The literature presents a strong case for organisations wanting to remain relevant or to improve their performance to engage in building their learning capability. Training is a major intervention used by organisations to enhance capability, as demonstrated by the millions of dollars spent annually on providing training (ASTD Research, 2013). There is a universal issue in that only a relatively small amount of what is learnt in training is being transferred to the job. Whilst many studies discuss this enduring problem (Blume et al., 2010; Burke and Hutchins, 2007; Cromwell and Kolb, 2004) the literature fails to sufficiently address closing the gap and thereby assisting organisations to help their employees to learn and transfer their learning to the workplace. This series of studies investigates how organisations can support employees' learning and transfer from prior to commencing the training to completion and following the trainees' return to the workplace.

Whilst the literature reports the importance of good training design, it provides scant direction to assist organisations in understanding how they can add value to this process in order to improve their training outcomes. In addition to the course content, organisations can also plan and endorse pre and post-training interventions that are relevant to the organisation and its employees. Ways in which organisations can be more involved in program design to ensure the training content and any additional interventions are well planned and relevant for their employees are further examined.

Supervisor support is widely acknowledged to assist employees to transfer newly learned skills to the workplace (Bhatti et al., 2013; Blume et al., 2010; Martin, 2010). The literature suggests that supervisors can enhance employees' self-efficacy and motivation to learn before the training commences (Santos and Stuart, 2003; Tai, 2006). It also suggests that the period following the training is critical in terms of transfer (Axtel et al., 1997; Pidd, 2004). The main barriers to learning and transfer are reported as the lack of supervisor support (Cromwell and Kolb, 2004; Martin, 2010; McCracken, 2005) and opportunities to practice and use new skills in the workplace (Burke and Hutchins, 2007; Gaudine and Saks, 2004; Lim and Johnson, 2002). As having the opportunity to practice and implement new skills at work largely come under the province of the supervisor, enhancing supervisors' ability to support learning and transfer should largely mitigate the problems caused by the lack of supervisor support. However, the literature provides little practical guidance for supervisors in how to provide appropriate support. Supervisor behaviours that support learning and transfer and how they should differ during the various stages of the learning process are investigated.

Organisational and supervisor support are different but related work environment factors that have significant influence on learning and transfer. Some researchers use the terms interchangeably (Salehzadeh et al., 2014), however they are distinct sources of support (Maurer and Lippstreu, 2008). The literature fails to sufficiently differentiate between organisational support and supervisor support. Further study is required to understand and differentiate between their distinguishing characteristics in order to assist organisations to better support employee learning and transfer.

Learning environments are of considerable interest to researchers as they encompass the conditions and practices in organisations that are likely to facilitate or hinder learning (Ellstrom et al., 2008). The literature provides little practical

assistance on how to create supportive learning environments, which is a key focus of this thesis. Some clues are provided in the first stage of the Garvin et al. (2008) three stage model, which was developed for organisations to assess their progress towards becoming learning organisations. The first stage, or building block, in the model is labelled as “a supportive learning environment”. Four characteristics of supportive learning environments were proposed by Garvin et al. (2008, p. 4); psychological safety, appreciation of differences, openness to new ideas and change and time for reflection.

Leadership is also reported in the literature as having a significant impact on the learning environment. When they promote learning, organisational leaders signify that learning is an important organisational value (Rebelo and Gomes, 2011; Schein, 2010). Leadership also has a strong influence on an organisation's culture (Rebelo and Gomes, 2011) and organisational culture is important to the learning environment (Lucas and Kline, 2008; Schein, 2010). However, not all organisations have unified cultures and this may have a detrimental impact on the achievement of an organisation's learning agenda (Egan, 2008). The characteristics of a supportive learning environment (Garvin et al., 2008), together with leadership and culture are empirically tested in this research to better understand their impact on learning and transfer. See chapter 3.

2.8. FOCUS OF RESEARCH

The purpose of this research is to better understand how organisations can create environments that support learning and transfer. To achieve this objective three separate but related studies were conducted to address the main weaknesses identified in the research literature. In particular, the studies are based on a qualitative case study method that allowed the experiences of the participants to be explored through the descriptions they provided of their experiences and their perceptions of how their supervisors' actions, or the organisation, made a difference

to their learning and transfer. Each of the studies has been published as a stand-alone journal article. Figure 2.3 illustrates the focus of the research and shows the relationship between the three studies.

Chapter three relates to the outermost circle of the model – Supportive learning environment and it addresses RQ 1:

What factors do employees identify as important in creating a supportive learning environment?

This study emphasises the work environment at the organisational level. Interviews were conducted with recent graduates of leadership development programs to determine and explore the factors that employees perceived were important in creating a supportive learning environment. These included leadership, environmental and personal characteristics, as well as cultural influences.

Chapter four represents the second of the concentric circles in the model, which is labelled Organisational support and it addresses RQ 2:

What do employees identify as forms of organisational support that promote learning?

Whilst this study also relates to the organisational level, its focus is on the types of support that employees perceived as being within the province of the organisation that assisted their learning. It describes how organisational support differs from other kinds of learning support.

Chapter five relates to the innermost area of the model, which is labelled Supervisor support and addresses RQ 3:

What supervisory behaviours are perceived by employees to assist in training transfer?

Supervisors have a unique and influential role in the learning and transfer process as they hold an intermediary position between the organisation and the employee and have a much closer relationship with their employees than do the senior leaders

in an organisation. This study focuses on examining supervisor behaviours that employees reported as helpful or unhelpful in assisting their training transfer.

See figure 2.3 for the framework that guides the three studies.

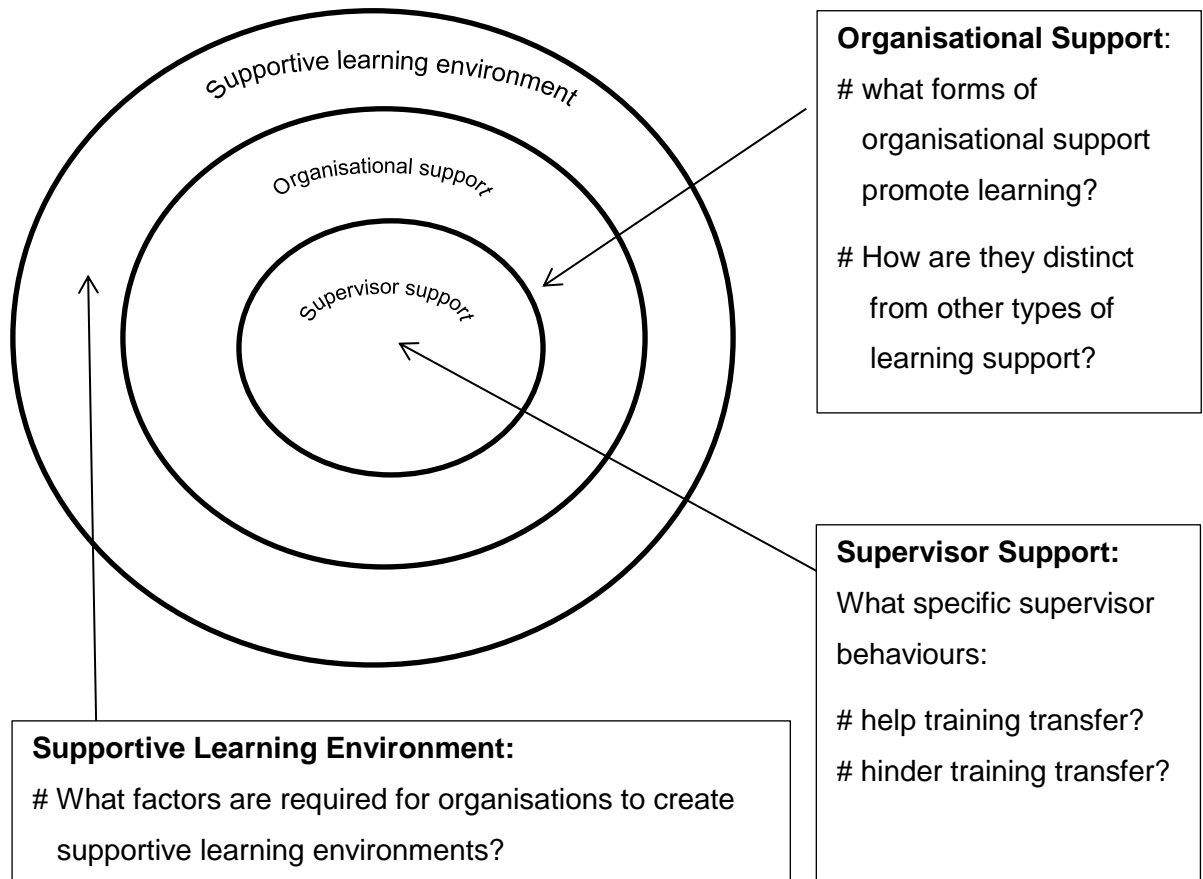


Figure 2.3: Research Framework

CHAPTER 3: JOURNAL ARTICLE ONE

The journal article presented in this chapter addresses RQ 1:

What factors do employees identify as important in creating a supportive learning environment?

This study was published as:

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Nature of Candidate's Contribution

Susan Lancaster conceived the study, wrote the article, collected and analysed the data.

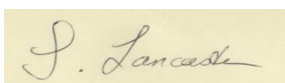
Nature of Co-Authors' Contributions

Lee Di Milia as Ms Lancaster's principal supervisor assisted to conceive the study, reviewed draft manuscripts and assisted in the revision of the study.

Candidate's Declaration

I declare that the publication above meets the requirements to be included in the thesis as outlined in the Publication of Research Higher Degree Work for Inclusion in the Thesis Procedures

Signature



Date 15/11/2016

Developing a supportive learning environment in a newly formed organisation

3.1. ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study examined the factors that employees perceived were important in creating a supportive learning environment in a newly formed organisation. The study provides rich qualitative data from the employees' perspective.

Design/methodology/approach – This case study used a qualitative phenomenological constructivist approach. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed with the aid of NVivo. The study was conducted in a large government-owned organisation in Australia and the sample consisted of twenty-four recent graduates of leadership development programs.

Findings – The results suggested that together with the organisation's leadership, there are several distinguishing characteristics of a learning environment. These include learning with colleagues, openness to new ideas and change, building relationships, open communication, sharing the learning, coaching and reflection. Providing support for managers to gain confidence and self-awareness was important to their ability to apply their learning. The results also suggest that learning with colleagues from different regional and functional areas helps to reform subcultures and contributes to an overarching learning culture and hence to creating a supportive learning environment. Some hindrances were also discovered.

Originality/value – This study gives voice to employee perceptions of the important factors required to create a supportive learning environment. The authors used a qualitative methodology in a field dominated by quantitative studies to provide rich data that extends the extant literature.

Keywords – Australia, Leadership development, Subculture, Merger, Learning environment, Learning culture

Paper Type – Case Study

3.2. INTRODUCTION

To maintain competitive success in the increasingly turbulent global economy organisations must develop capabilities for continuous learning and improve their business core processes (Hung et al., 2010). Organisations that develop their learning capability reportedly benefit from increased job performance, employee self-efficacy, customer satisfaction, profitability (Aguinis and Kraiger, 2009), employee job satisfaction, organisational effectiveness (Aguinis and Kraiger, 2009; Goh et al., 2012), innovation capacity and competitiveness (Goh et al., 2012).

The past four decades have seen considerable interest in understanding how to build learning organisations in the belief that they lead to improved performance and effectiveness (Goh et al., 2012). A learning organisation is defined as “[...] one that facilitates the learning of all of its members and continuously transforms itself in order to meet its strategic goals” (Pedler et al., 1991). Senge (1990) stimulated interest in the relevance of learning organisations underpinned by the notions of systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, team learning and shared vision, which were heralded as the panacea to problems for organisations facing increased competition and environmental change. Nonaka (1991) characterised knowledge-creating companies as places where ‘everyone is a knowledge worker’ and espoused that companies use metaphors and organisational redundancy to make tacit, instinctively understood ideas explicit.

Some researchers contend that the learning organisation is an ideal, with implementation remaining elusive (Garavan, 1997; Garvin, 1993). Criticising the earlier recommendations of Nonaka (1991) and Senge (1990) as too abstract, Garvin et al. (2008) developed a three-staged process for building a learning organisation which included building a supportive learning environment, concrete learning processes and leadership that reinforces learning. The focus of this study is how to create a supportive learning environment and the distinguishing

characteristics proposed by Garvin et al. (2008) for the first stage of their model provide a tangible starting point for the study. These are psychological safety, appreciation of differences, openness to new ideas and time for reflection.

The learning environment potentially includes the entire range of components and activities within which learning occurs, such as structures, social support, technology, rewards and policies. Clarke (2005) used the terms learning environment and learning climate interchangeably and restricted his definition to learning that occurs solely in the workplace. Billet's (2001) definition of a learning environment, "[...] one that affords opportunities for individuals to engage in and be supported in learning at work", likewise confines learning to the workplace. The definition used by Ellstrom et al. (2008), "[...] the conditions and practices in an organization that are likely to facilitate or hinder learning in and through work at a particular workplace" is broader and more consistent with the aims of this study other than also limiting learning to the workplace. For the purposes of this study the definition of the learning environment is: "The organisational conditions and practices that are likely to facilitate or hinder learning."

The importance of organisational culture to learning environments is acknowledged in the literature (Lucas and Kline, 2008; Schein, 2010) and defined as:

[...] the deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organisation, that operate unconsciously, and that define in a basic taken-for-granted fashion an organisation's view of itself and its environment' (Schein, 1985).

This definition has a clear overlap with Bates and Kasawneh's (2005) definition of a learning culture, which [...] "*embodies a shared pattern of values and beliefs about the importance of learning, its dissemination and application*". These definitions

highlight the importance of organisational values and beliefs in defining what is core to an organisation.

The purpose of this study is to better understand how organisations create supportive learning environments. We explore the relevance of Garvin et al's (2008) distinguishing characteristics, as well as the influence of culture and leadership. Our aim is to seek insight into any additional factors found to assist or hinder the creation of a supportive learning environment.

To learn, employees must feel safe to ask naïve questions, express ideas and doubts, admit to mistakes and disagree with others' ideas without fear of ridicule or censure (Garvin et al., 2008). Mistakes perform a role in the evolution of learning. Small failures provide motivation to learn by encouraging individuals to pay greater attention to the process without the defensiveness associated with major failures (Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000).

When people are pressured by deadlines their ability to think analytically, diagnose problems and be creative is compromised. Supportive learning environments allow time for pause and thoughtful review of the organisations processes (Garvin et al., 2008). Encouraging reflection assists the likelihood that managers will transfer their learning and helps to demonstrate that their contributions are valuable (Clarke, 2005).

Learning occurs with exposure to others' ideas and alternate points of view (Garvin et al., 2008). For example, lateral cross-functional transfers force employees to learn, develop new skills and share existing skills and perspectives with new colleagues (Slater and Narver, 1995). New ideas are essential for learning to take place. This requires questioning the status quo and current practices. Regardless of whether ideas originate through insight or creativity, collaboration with or exposure to internal or external sources, they generate organisational improvement (Garvin, 1993).

Leaders have a powerful impact on organisational culture and what leaders pay attention to is a persuasive means of communicating what they care about (Schein, 2010). When an organisation's leaders promote learning they signal that learning is an important value for the organisation. With the rapid pace of environmental change and complexity, leaders are becoming increasingly dependent on others to generate solutions. These new ideas are, however, more likely to be adopted if the organisation's members are involved in the learning process (Schein, 2010). The learning organisation literature emphasises the role of organisational culture and indicates consensus amongst organisation members about the value and use of learning in the pursuit of organisational goals and objectives (Bates and Khasawneh, 2005).

To determine an organisation's culture sufficient stability and common history must exist for a culture to form. Some organisations have no overarching culture because of the lack of a common history and others have strong cultures due to a lengthy shared history or shared important experiences (Schein, 2010). Organisations may also have localised sub-cultures as a consequence of association in various groups or functions specific to and unique from the larger organisation. The influence of subcultures can affect employee perceptions of what is valued and prioritised, as well as the motivations for actions related to learning and development (Egan, 2008).

The majority of studies that examine learning organisations, learning environments or learning culture assume a mono culture (Egan, 2008) and do not consider the implications for merged or newly created organisations that are less likely to have an overarching culture. Only one of the studies reviewed linked subcultures with learning. Egan (2008) found a relationship between subcultures and motivation to transfer learning. We use a case study with a phenomenological constructivist approach to interview recent graduates of leadership development

programs and explore their perceptions of the factors required to create a supportive learning environment. Whilst the literature indicates that the Garvin et al.'s (2008) distinguishing characteristics may be present in participants' responses, as may cultural influences, the interview process used a semi-structured approach with open questions to encourage respondents to answer in their own words, provide a variety of responses and thereby avoid any bias inadvertently created by the interviewer (Reja et al., 2003). The following overarching research question was posited to achieve this objective:

RQ: What factors do employees identify as important in creating a supportive learning environment?

3.3. CONTEXT FOR THE STUDY

This study was conducted in an Australian government-owned utility organisation that operates over a large regional area and employs approximately 5,000 employees. The organisation was created through the merger of one city-based and six regional organisations as a result of industry deregulation. The regional entities shared a common purpose and performed the same functions, but with distinct geographical locations, structures and work practices formed over several decades. The city-based organisation had a much shorter history and different business objectives.

The organisation realised that it needed to become more customer responsive and innovative to succeed in the new environment. To achieve this aim a suite of four leadership development programs was designed and implemented for employees with managerial responsibilities. Focus groups and subject matter experts assisted in determining the capabilities required for each level of management to meet current deficiencies and future requirements.

The resulting programs were hierarchical, with the entry-level program providing managerial and introductory leadership skills to work group leaders and new supervisors. The second program targeted experienced supervisors and new managers, delivering intermediate level leadership skills such as managing performance and change, conflict, team dynamics and emotional intelligence skills. The third program was designed to develop strategic leadership capability in senior managers. The organisation wanted them to see themselves as organisational leaders; to understand and take accountability for their decisions and actions. The fourth program was a follow-up to the third program, designed to hone their capabilities in strategic thinking, relationship management, stakeholder influencing and innovation.

3.4. STUDY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

A qualitative phenomenological constructivist approach within a case study was considered appropriate to achieve the purpose of this study, which was to explore the factors that participants perceived important in creating a supportive learning environment. Phenomenological constructivist approaches are consistent with social research methods. Utilising a descriptive phenomenological approach allowed the researcher to explore the experiences of participants through the descriptions that they provided (Englander, 2012). Similarly, a constructivist approach requires the researcher to participate in the research process with the subjects to ensure the information produced is reflective of their reality (Lincoln et al., 2013).

The generic inductive qualitative model used in this study shares many characteristics with grounded theory. The essential differences between the models are that grounded theory studies employ theoretic sampling, constant comparison of data to theoretical categories and focus on theory development via theoretical

saturation of categories (Birks and Mills, 2011). The following methods of sampling and analysis were selected for this study.

3.4.1. SAMPLE

Purposeful sampling was employed to ensure representation from each course and gender. A key issue in purposeful sampling is identifying people who can best help in understanding the phenomena of interest (Creswell, 2014). Due to a disproportionately high number of males in senior management (over 90%) the host organisation ensured that some females were included in each program, thus the researcher considered it appropriate that females were included in the sample. The sample comprised six graduates from each program and included fifteen males and nine females. They had all completed the program between three and twelve months previously, allowing sufficient time to experience any support provided. All participants were selected prior to commencing the data collection and analysis.

3.4.2. PROCEDURE

Following clearance to conduct the study from the University Human Research Ethics Committee, invitations were e-mailed to selected participants and a subsequent telephone call confirmed participation and interview arrangements. Twenty-one semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face, two by telephone with remotely located participants and one via e-mail at the participant's request. The questions were forwarded in advance to those participating via telephone or e-mail and their responses were consistent with other participants.

The interview guide consisted of thirteen open-ended questions. All respondents were asked identical questions in the same sequence, with further probing questions only asked if necessary to gather more details or for clarification. The interview questions covered the following domains of inquiry:

- new skills learnt to increase effectiveness, including application, changes to their management style and interactions with others,
- how the organisation demonstrates interest in developing leaders,
- the nature of discussions with supervisors, including any encouragement to participate, use new skills, develop new ideas and initiate changes to practices and processes,
- perceptions of supervisor understanding of concepts learnt in the development programs,
- anything that may hinder application of new learning.

To establish the trustworthiness of the data and the subsequent interpretation, a range of sources was used, including the participants, senior managers and company documents, although interviews were the primary source. The interviews were recorded verbatim, followed by member checking where participants reviewed their interview transcript for accuracy (Lincoln et al., 2013).

3.4.3. DATA ANALYSIS

The interviews were transcribed and uploaded into NVivo prior to the commencement of any coding or analysis. The unit of analysis in this study was the same as the case; the group of purposefully selected participants who possessed knowledge to shed light on the phenomenon of interest (Grunbaum, 2007).

To commence the coding process each interview transcript was reviewed sequentially and as a meaningful segment of text suggested a category a descriptive label was created by the researcher. Additional segments of text were added to the category where relevant and new labels created when a different category emerged from the data. The labels were data-driven rather than concept-driven as the researcher wanted to keep an open mind and not use a preconceived analytic framework (Gibbs, 2002). Some phrases or segments of text were coded

into more than one category as is common practice with qualitative coding (Thomas, 2006). For example the following segment of text was coded at both “confidence” and “practice opportunities”.

I think I've been given the opportunity to grow by being given this project role so it recognises my capabilities and I have had some feedback from my manager that he has noticed a change in how I deal with some issues. I am a little stronger and more driving [manager #03]

Demographic data was linked to each participant, as were memos containing thoughts about participants, the interviews or emerging categories and themes. A journal was maintained to record the processes followed during the study and the reasons for any changes made.

Following the initial stage of coding the interview transcripts were re-examined “horizontally” by question and the initial labels reviewed. Closely related concepts were merged and others divided into subcategories where the supporting data was divergent. During this stage of analysis it became apparent that the participants’ reality included both positive and negative descriptions of the same phenomena. For example, the initial label of “follow-up discussion” was divided into “follow-up discussion” and “no follow-up discussion”. To provide clarity, the category of “hindrances” was created with negative examples from all categories recoded. Any coding discrepancies were revised and recoded where necessary to ensure consistent application of codes. Table 3.1 provides a summary of the revised learning environment codes and sub codes.

First Tier Code	Second Tier	No. of sources	No. of references
Learning Environment		Nil	Nil
	Supervisor support	24	73
	Build relationships	22	58
	Sharing the learning	21	31
	Provide training	21	31
	Open communications	21	52
	Self-awareness	19	48
	Hindrances	18	50
	Confidence	17	41
	Coaching	13	24
	Reflection	12	37
	Reinforcement for learning	11	19
	Practice opportunities	11	22
	Trust	11	15
	Senior management sponsorship	10	11
	Involvement	10	17
	Learning with colleagues	8	13
	Learn from mistakes	5	5

Table 3.1: Summary of learning environment codes and sub codes

Coding the data provided a rich amount of information. The number of individuals independently expressing the same idea is considered more important than the absolute number of times a theme is expressed or coded. Talkative individuals could express the same idea in several responses, thereby increasing the frequency of a code application (Guest et al., 2006). Whilst in this study the category of supervisor support was deemed significant, it is also important to note that as several of the interview questions specifically related to interactions with and perceptions of the participants' supervisor it was likely that all participants would

mention something related to supervisor support. The researcher must therefore determine the key themes, rather than relying on counts created by software programs.

Based on the analysis of the case, four key themes were derived from the codes or labels assigned to the data shown in table 3.1. The results report on the main themes together with the relevant categories, or sub codes that support them. The main themes include the required leadership, environmental and personal characteristics, as well as the hindrances that participants perceived important in the creation of a supportive learning environment.

NVivo facilitates comparing and contrasting responses based on the demographic attributes assigned to each participant. Groups were created based on gender, organisational level, program attended and geographic location. In the final stage of analysis these groups were interrogated to determine if the experiences reported by the participants were different for any particular group to those of the other participants. Any additional notable findings are also reported.

3.5. RESULTS

3.5.1. LEADERSHIP

Executive level sponsorship was considered critical. Providing development programs was judged a key support factor, as was the significant financial investment. Senior leaders' presence to open the programs, as guest speakers, or to attend as participants was a tangible symbol of commitment. As expressed by one manager:

Having an executive management team member attend showed that they also are expected to be across aspects and that it's important enough to be there [manager #16]

Reinforcement for learning was provided through follow-up initiatives, such as leadership forums where program graduates presented their new initiatives and

business issues were openly discussed with participants working together to develop solutions.

Supervisor support was also regarded as vital and demonstrated by encouraging employees to use their new skills and providing feedback on their efforts. Practice opportunities such as short-term changes to roles, acting in their supervisor's position or working on projects were reported as supporting their learning. Supervisors were expected to role model the desired skills and leadership behaviours and discuss the concepts with them. Access to business information and involvement in discussions and planning processes were considered important for learning. Participants identified themselves as part of the decision making process, regarding their involvement as recognition that their learning and contribution were valued. They also reported that they now involved their own employees in decisions that affected them and their workgroup.

The results derived for the key theme of Leadership were consistent across the demographic groups with the exception of the nature of support preferred. Participants who undertook the introductory leadership program valued hands-on assistance with assignments and with relating new concepts to their work. Those who completed the three higher-level programs appreciated autonomy to develop and implement their new initiatives.

3.5.2. ENVIRONMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS

Learning with colleagues was considered particularly beneficial and participants described the value of learning about other parts of the business from people they didn't normally work with. This included listening to others' views and exploring concepts from a wider organisational perspective rather than solely from their own experience. As one team leader expressed:

[...] having input from people from different business units; their needs were different to mine [...] they may have been doing what I do, but doing it in a

different way [...] how they handled difficult employees, then we discussed it with the group. It let me think outside of the box to look at other angles to a problem [team leader #18]

Relationships developed during the programs continued afterwards with participants working on projects with cohort members from other regional areas or workgroups. Participants also believed their efforts to build relationships with their peers and employees following the program contributed to the learning environment.

Newly trained managers related sharing their learning from the programs with their employees. They described using specific tools or models such as conflict management and team building to work through team and business issues. For example:

I have shared the team building concepts with some of my team leaders and senior trainers. I have taught them how to better communicate with their teams and build rapport. It has made them take ownership of their leadership role [team leader #18]

Some participants described sharing their learning from the psychological assessment instruments with their teams to understand their preferences for learning and working styles.

Coaching was considered beneficial to extend and embed the learning. Participant accounts of coaching included coaching skills training as well as external coaching provided to them during the programs and ongoing coaching by their supervisors. They also reported that they were now coaching their own employees.

Participants described changes to their communication style as more open with their employees in regard to what was happening in the business, such as informing them of impending changes and issues. Communicating their expectations about desired outcomes and making themselves available to talk through any issues were believed to enhance the learning environment for their employees.

Reflection was regarded as helpful for learning and participants reported that taking the time to reflect allowed them to stop and think about the issues and to plan and prioritise how they would resolve them. One manager said:

I tend to get in, do something and move on. I find taking time to reflect has had a big impact on me [...]. I've changed the way I operate since the program [manager #11]

The concept of learning from mistakes was insignificant in terms of the number of participants identifying it as a support factor. What was interesting is that during the analysis by demographic grouping a comparatively large percentage of engineers reported it as helpful for learning.

3.5.3. PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

The most valuable benefits from attending the development programs were reported as gaining confidence (17 of the 24 participants) and self-awareness (19 of the 24). Gaining confidence was credited with enabling participants to speak up at meetings, offer their opinions and ideas, get involved and try new things, access and use company information and to better manage their employees. Their newfound confidence was reportedly acquired through coaching, taking part in guided group discussions and practice opportunities. One participant said:

[...] the program gave me additional insight and exposure to senior leaders and their strengths and weaknesses. It helped me to realise that they aren't perfect and I don't need to be perfect either and that's an ok place to be [manager #14]

Participants described gaining self-awareness through feedback and the psychological testing instruments used during the programs. They related how gaining insight into how others perceived them allowed them to change their behaviour if they wanted to have a different impact.

Interrogating the categories for personal characteristics by demographic group found a significant difference in relation to gaining confidence by gender. The

17 participants who mentioned increased confidence included 8 of the 9 females in the study (89 percent) and nine of the fifteen males (60 percent).

3.5.4. HINDRANCES

Participants reporting hindrances to their learning mainly described the lack of supervisor support, interest and encouragement to use new skills following their participation in the development programs. They were cynical about supervisors who did not role model the behaviours and concepts taught in the programs and believed that made them unable or unwilling to support their learning.

Cultural differences between the predecessor organisations were said to block efforts to learn and achieve workplace change. Participants referred to “the not invented here syndrome”, indicating that people were unwilling to adopt practices and ideas proposed by others from different predecessor organisations. Other reported hindrances included being too busy back at work to practice new skills or reflection and the remoteness of their locations made it difficult to collaborate with cohort members. The results derived for the key theme of Hindrances were consistent across the demographic groups.

3.6. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to understand how organisations create supportive learning environments. We explored the leadership, characteristics, and cultural factors that impacted on the creation of a supportive learning environment. During the study it became apparent that there are also negative aspects that may impede the development of such an environment.

Participants believed access to high quality development programs was essential and described the financial commitment and dedicated resources as tangible evidence that the organisations’ leaders were committed to supporting their learning. The leaders’ symbolic support through participation in the programs and

the ensuing reinforcement provided were also recognised. This finding is consistent with Schein (2010) regarding the significance of leaders paying attention to what they believe in or care about. Our results suggest that sponsorship by the organisation's leaders is essential to creating a supportive learning environment.

Supervisors have a significant influence on the learning environment. They demonstrated their openness to new ideas when they provided encouragement to participants to develop and implement new initiatives. Such encouragement is essential to enable employees to use their new learning at work. Being open to new ideas was one of Garvin et al.'s (2008) supportive learning environment characteristics and our results support this concept. Participants also believed that open communication, access to company information and being involved in making decisions that affected them were important for learning. They regarded it as essential that employees were kept informed about the organisation's plans so that they all understood their part in the bigger picture.

When participants were asked what new skills they had been able to apply in the workplace, most replied that they were now coaching their own employees and sharing their learning from the development programs with them. By using the skills and concepts in team meetings and coaching their employees, newly trained managers were furthering the organisation's learning culture and enhancing the learning environment in the workplace. This is somewhat consistent with Goldman et al. (2014) who reported on 'second-hand' learning where graduates of leadership programs passed on their learning to peers and supervisors in an academic hospital setting. Learning from mistakes was a key factor in the Garvin et al. (2008) concept of psychological safety. This was not a significant finding in our study and is only noteworthy because it was comparatively more significant to the professional engineers in the study when their responses were compared to other groups. The engineers reported that they had previously been taught only to look for faults and

to expect a perfect job every time. They reported that they now used mistakes as a learning opportunity with their employees. Gaining confidence was identified as one of the most valuable outcomes from the development programs. It was this newfound confidence that enabled participants to apply their new skills at work and therefore, presumably, to transfer their learning. A significant finding from this study is that gaining confidence in a supportive learning environment prior to returning to the workplace appears to be of particular importance to women. Eighty-nine percent of the female participants as compared to sixty percent of the males independently reported gaining confidence through the development program.

Acquiring self-awareness was also deemed important to support learning. The insights gained from psychological profile testing, together with individual feedback and group discussions were considered beneficial. All participants who described this process reported being surprised by their feedback; some pleased and some shocked. They all reported taking action to build on the positive aspects, or where they felt they needed to change their behaviour to create a different impression, such as becoming a better listener or being more responsive to the needs and feelings of their employees or peers.

Reflection was a characteristic of a supportive learning environment reported by Garvin et al. (2008), for which our results provide support. Participants reported the benefits of taking the time to stop and think during the program. However, most found it difficult to make time for reflection back at work due to the pressure and workload inherent in the workplace. Learning with colleagues from different regional areas and business units was considered particularly beneficial, for example hearing alternative viewpoints about work issues and functional perspectives. Whilst the label that emerged during the coding for this aspect was “learning with colleagues”, the meaning of the category is the same as and hence supports the concept that Garvin et al. (2008) termed “appreciation of differences”.

Participants benefitted through the learning cohorts being selected from people with similar levels of responsibility, but from different regional and functional areas. This provided greater diversity and a broader perspective to the learning environment.

The results of this study also identified some hindrances to creating a supportive learning environment. The main hindrances were lack of supervisor support and encouragement. Supervisors were perceived as unsupportive if they did not initiate follow-up discussions about participants' experience of their learning and how they could apply it at work. Supervisors not role modelling the concepts and behaviours that the organisation sought to promote were also perceived as detrimental to the learning environment.

Remoteness due to the organisation's large geographical spread made collaboration more difficult and this was not assisted by the lack of learning collaboration mechanisms and technology. Participants also reported being too busy back at work as a hindrance. The learning environment may have benefitted further if senior leaders and supervisors had provided more encouragement and opportunity for pause and review in the workplace. Whilst participants perceived that cultural differences between the predecessor organisations inhibited learning, in reality their comments related to experiences and perceptions from before they jointly participated in the development programs and experienced the benefits of learning together and building relationships. One indication of improvement is their reports of collaborating on projects and initiatives with those from other regions and workgroups following the programs.

The results of this study build on the findings of Egan (2008) and Riad (2007) and add to the body of knowledge about the impact of organisational subcultures on the learning environment. Our results suggest that learning with people from different subcultural groups positively influences the creation of a supportive learning environment.

3.7. STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

The results of this study should be considered in terms of its strengths and limitations. An important strength is that we used a phenomenological constructivist approach to better understand what participants considered important in creating a supportive learning environment. This methodology allowed detailed examination of the relevant factors which resulted in new insights that may assist organisations and practitioners in their endeavours to develop such environments. A second strength is that we interviewed participants from different levels of the organisation and found general agreement on perceptions of what was important in creating a supportive learning environment.

A potential limitation is the use of a single case study. Whilst single case studies are not as strong a base for generalising to a population of cases as other research designs (Yin, 2009), people can learn much that is general from a single case (Stake, 1995). A second limitation is that because we used a purposefully selected sample it may not be representative of all course graduates. A third limitation is that the interview questions posed may have obliged the participants to focus on the social issues impacting their learning rather than technical or physical factors.

3.8. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

This study has raised some questions about gaining a deeper understanding of potential gender differences in acquiring the confidence to undertake a leadership role. We found a significantly larger percentage of female participants who reported that the development program enhanced their confidence to use new skills in the work place. As gender differences were not a specific focus of this study, further research is warranted to understand what makes a difference and if this is an isolated or more general finding.

The cross-sectional design of the present study prohibits suggestions of causal relationships, therefore we cannot generalise the results to other organisations and populations. Conducting a longitudinal study in a different organisation with a similar context would be beneficial to test our results.

3.9. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study have practical implications for creating supportive learning environments. Our results suggest that to create such an environment it is essential that senior leadership assumes sponsorship of the organisation's learning agenda. With the potential for subcultural groups to undermine learning efforts it is important to create new shared experiences to form the foundation on which to establish an overarching culture of learning. Our results suggest beneficial outcomes from selecting cohorts for development programs and projects from different sub-cultural groups. We also propose that leadership development programs would benefit from including coaching skills as a learning outcome. Newly trained leaders who coach their employees share their learning, thus furthering the workplace learning environment.

3.10. CONCLUSION

To the best of our knowledge this is the first study to test the influence of subcultures on the creation of a learning environment. Subcultural influences in merged organisations are generally considered problematic (Schein, 2010). Our results however suggest that selecting cohorts for development programs from across subcultural groups actually has a positive influence on the learning environment.

This study investigated the four distinguishing characteristics of supportive learning environments espoused by Garvin et al. (2008). Our results provide support for three of these:

- (1) appreciation of differences;
- (2) openness to new ideas; and
- (3) time for reflection.

We found only partial support for psychological safety. Additionally, building relationships, open communications, sharing the learning, coaching, confidence and self-awareness were found to be at least equally important as the characteristics proposed by Garvin et al. (2008).

Whilst the presence of learning environment characteristics is important, they are insufficient by themselves to create a supportive learning environment. The most influential factor in creating such an environment is the organisation's leadership. Senior leader sponsorship of the organisation's learning agenda, together with the support provided by supervisors is indispensable to creating a supportive learning environment. The organisations leaders are also best-placed to eradicate any identified hindrances to the creation of such an environment.

Chapter four addresses RQ 2:

What do employees identify as forms of organisational support that promote learning?

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DECLARATION OF CO-AUTHORSHIP AND CONTRIBUTION

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Status	Published

Nature of Candidate's Contribution

Susan Lancaster conceived the study, wrote the article, collected and analysed the data.

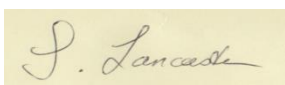
Nature of Co-Authors' Contributions

Lee Di Milia as Ms Lancaster's principal supervisor assisted to conceive the study, reviewed draft manuscripts and assisted in the revision of the study

Candidate's Declaration

I declare that the publication above meets the requirements to be included in the thesis as outlined in the Publication of Research Higher Degree Work for Inclusion in the Thesis Procedures

Signature



Date 15/11/16

Organisational support for employee learning: An employee perspective

4.1. ABSTRACT

Purpose – This paper describes the forms of organisational support that employees perceived as helpful to support their learning. This study aims to explore how organisational support is distinct from other kinds of learning support.

Design/methodology/approach - This is a qualitative, exploratory study utilising a cross-sectional design. Interviews were conducted in a large multi-site Australian organisation with twenty-four graduates from four leadership development programmes.

Findings – The results from this study extend the literature relating to work environment as an important factor in supporting employee learning. We differentiate between the types of support that employees perceived the organisation provided from other types of learning support. The results suggest that for organisations to positively impact employees' learning, they should pay attention to three key factors: provide high-quality relevant development programs; ensure that course content is aligned with the organisations strategy and the employees work; and ensure senior management commitment throughout all aspects of the employee development process.

Originality/value – This study gives voice to employees' perceptions of how organisations can support their learning. It also provides rich data that extends the literature through a qualitative study in a field dominated by quantitative studies.

Keywords - Australia, Work environment, Learning, Leadership development, Qualitative research, Alignment, Organisational support

Article Classification – Research paper

4.2. INTRODUCTION

Organisational learning capability (OLC) is considered as a key component that underpins economic growth and improves competitiveness (Argyris and Schon, 1996; Camps and Rodriguez, 2011; Senge, 2006). A significant source of competitive advantage is the organisational knowledge retained either by employees (Schmitt et al., 2011), or made accessible via knowledge management systems. Organisational learning occurs when the inventions and evaluations of individual members' are subsequently acted upon and embedded in the organisation's shared mental models (Argyris and Schon, 1978; Popper and Lipshitz, 2000). The foundation for organisational learning is individual employees, as it is the thoughts and actions of individuals that produce learning (Argyris, 1995) but at the same time, learning also takes place in a social setting. Evidence suggests that supporting employees to learn makes a difference (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Kraimer et al., 2011) but it is less clear which forms of support are beneficial.

Training is considered to be one of the most significant strategies for developing OLC as it facilitates the acquisition and generation of new knowledge and skills (Camps and Rodriguez, 2011). US organisations spent in excess of \$156 billion (Miller, 2012) on the assumption that training is beneficial. The benefits of training to individuals and organisations have been well documented (Aguinis and Kraiger, 2009; Di Milia and Birdi, 2010). A recent meta-analytic review of the literature confirms that properly designed training works and of particular importance is the way by which the course is designed, delivered and implemented. For a review of what matters before, during and after training see Salas et al. (Salas et al., 2012). Other research suggests that attending training does not ensure learning and application of new knowledge and skills (Cromwell and Kolb, 2004; Martin, 2010). A trend in the literature from a focus on "management development" to "management learning" recognises that considerable learning occurs outside of

formal training programs and that organisational context is important (Cullen and Turnbull, 2005). There is also widespread agreement on the importance of exploring methods to support learning, regardless of where or how the learning occurs (Cullen and Turnbull, 2005; Lancaster et al., 2013).

The overall level of learning support provided by an organisation is believed to be critical to attract, motivate and retain employees. Supporting learning assists employee growth and career opportunities as well as signalling to employees that they are valued and respected by the organisation (Kraimer et al., 2011).

Developing organisational practices for learning such as encouraging external interaction, experimentation and tolerance of errors creates a culture of performance improvement and fosters behaviours that help to achieve organisational goals (Camps and Rodriguez, 2011). Employees who perceive that they have been well supported by their organisation reciprocate by performing better than those reporting lower levels of support. Increased performance includes stronger affiliation and loyalty, conscientiousness in carrying out job responsibilities and innovation on behalf of the organisation (Eisenberger et al., 1990). While increased competence can be seen as an opportunity to improve their position in another company, employees tend to remain committed to employers that have trusted and invested in them (Camps and Rodriguez, 2011; Maurer and Lippstreu, 2008).

While supporting employees is typically reported in the literature, little is known about the factors that influence employee perceptions of organisational support to foster effective learning. In comparison, supervisor support for learning is better recognised. Supervisors help employees to learn by encouraging, reinforcing and providing opportunities to practice new skills (Burke and Hutchins, 2007). When they meet with employees prior to training, supervisors help prepare them for learning by discussing the course content, setting performance goals and instilling

confidence in their ability to learn (Lancaster et al., 2013; Santos and Stuart, 2003). When meeting with employees following training, supervisors provide support by demonstrating interest in their learning, encouraging new ideas, sponsoring their projects and assisting to resolve problems (Lancaster et al., 2013).

In endeavouring to understand organisational support factors for learning, the difference between supervisor support and organisational support is less clear. Organisations and supervisors represent distinct but related sources of support for development (Maurer and Lippstreu, 2008). Supervisors act as agents of the organisation, yet may demonstrate their own emphasis, or lack of, in supporting employee learning (Maurer and Lippstreu, 2008; Maurer et al., 2003; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). A positive relationship exists between perceived supervisor support and perceived organisational support as supervisors performing their roles represent the organisation and, therefore, contribute to perceived organisational support (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Wayne et al., 1997).

Organisational support for learning has attracted researchers' interest for several decades; however, the literature yields a diverse range of perspectives on what organisational support comprises. The lack of consistency is not surprising given the varied aims of these studies. Early research was primarily interested in technical skills, such as helping engineers update their skills to avoid obsolescence and maintain performance. Kaufman (1974) found that assigning challenging work early in an engineer's career benefitted their performance and attitude in succeeding years. He recommended that organisations should support employees' learning by redesigning their jobs to provide challenging work and career development. Subsequently, Kozlowski and Hults (1987) evaluated the notion of an organisational "climate for technical updating". Their research was limited to an assessment of organisational policies and practices related to development. They found that information exchange, challenging job assignments and minimal work

pressure supported learning by helping to promote technical performance. This early research had a narrow technical focus and provided only a partial understanding of organisational support for learning. Later, researchers were interested in how organisations could motivate employees to participate in development activities and their studies were focussed on the social aspects of learning in the work environment. Noe and Wilk (1993) found that organisations could motivate employees to learn by providing them with appropriate working conditions, realistic choices and information regarding development activities. Maurer and Tarulli (1994) discovered that organisations could support learning by enhancing employees' self-efficacy. For example, employees were motivated to participate in development activities when they were encouraged to believe that they would be successful if they actually did participate in learning and development activities. These findings help our understanding of how organisations can enhance employees' motivation to participate in training; however participation does not guarantee that learning occurs and, hence, our understanding of how to provide support for learning remains incomplete.

Researchers have more recently studied the effect that development support, such as equipping employees with new knowledge and skills has on employee work attitudes and behaviour. Investing in employee development allows employees to see the extent that the organisation values them and, by way of reciprocation, they offer higher levels of commitment and job satisfaction (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). A supportive learning environment generates employees who think proactively, are open to new ideas and seek to develop innovative solutions for future problems (Camps and Rodriguez, 2011). Investing effort, time and money aimed at developing a learning-oriented culture can bring about improved performance; both in regards to improved internal and external relationships as well as in financial terms (Skerlavaj et al., 2007). Creating a culture

of learning embodies a shared pattern of values and beliefs about the importance, dissemination and application of learning and fosters employees' ability to share and apply their learning (Bates and Khasawneh, 2005).

Organisational support is considered important to realising the benefits from learning (Birdi et al., 1997; Cromwell and Kolb, 2004; Lim and Morris, 2006), but the existing research literature has some limitations. One limitation is the inconsistency in differentiating between organisational support and supervisor support. Few studies have directly set out to understand the role of the organisation in supporting learning and this has resulted in a literature that lacks discrimination. A further limitation is that the research on organisational support is predominantly quantitative and does not provide sufficient detail to understand the ways in which employees perceive the organisation provides support for their learning. Some six studies (Aguinis and Kraiger, 2009; Kotter, 2001; Lancaster et al., 2013; Martin, 2010; Popper and Lipshitz, 2000; Schmitt et al., 2011) of the forty reviewed were qualitative. The purpose of this study is to extend the literature by exploring and describing the organisational support that employees perceived as helpful to support their learning. We conducted an exploratory study and interviewed twenty-four recent graduates of leadership development courses to achieve this aim and to address the research question posited for this inquiry:

RQ: What do employees identify as forms of organisational support that promote learning?

4.3. CONTEXT FOR THE STUDY

This study was conducted in a large multi-site Australian government owned energy provider. The energy industry was deregulated in 2007 and the organisation initiated a large scale change program that included cultural change as well as changes to systems, structure and processes in an effort to become competitive and

sustainable. Improving leadership capability across the organisation was considered essential to achieve strategic priorities.

A skills assessment was conducted to determine the specific competencies required to enhance current capability and future requirements (Brown, 2002). Initially the executive leadership of the organisation conveyed what they wanted the managers to be able to do. Further consultation with subject matter experts and representative groups of employees, line and senior managers identified specific competency requirements for managers and leaders across various levels in the organisation. Subsequently, four integrated leadership courses were developed to accommodate aspiring and experienced managers. The courses were hierarchical, although the only pre-requisite was participants of the Senior Leadership Development Program (SLDP) had first to complete Leadership Foundations (LF). LF was initially the only senior level leadership program intended. While the executive team signified satisfaction with the LF programme, they identified additional capabilities that they wanted to address and to provide reinforcement for and extension to LF; hence, SLDP was developed approximately eighteen months after the other courses. See table 4.1 for a summary of the learning outcomes for each course.

Programme title	Programme description
Programme 1: Management Foundations (MF)	Entry level management programme for team leaders and some new supervisors Conducted over several months in blocks of 2 days Nationally accredited programme with exit outcome of certificate iv or diploma in business Learning outcomes included prioritising work, professional development, workplace relationships, operational planning, health and safety management, teamwork, information systems, customer service, innovation and change, continuous improvement and people management
Programme 2: (LDP)	For experienced supervisors and managers Tertiary standard, non-accredited programme Conducted in a residential setting over 5 days Learning outcomes included self-awareness and personal effectiveness, emotional intelligence, influence and conflict, change management, performance management, team dynamics, coaching, leadership and strategy
Programme 3: (LF)	For senior managers Tertiary standard non-accredited programme Conducted in a residential format over 2 blocks of 4 days Learning outcomes included self-awareness and development, effective teamwork and coaching, culture and teams, managing change, futures thinking, strategic leadership and innovation, networking and communication
Programme 4: (SLDP)	For senior managers who had previously completed program 3 Tertiary standard non-accredited program Conducted in a residential format over 2 blocks of 4 days Learning outcomes included strategic thinking, building and maintaining relationships, innovation and creativity and stakeholder influencing

Table 4.1: Structured leadership programmes

4.4 . STUDY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study uses a cross-sectional design. An exploratory study drawing on a qualitative interpretivist approach was considered appropriate to probe and describe how the participants perceived that the organisation provided them with support during the learning process.

4.4.1. SAMPLE

Six participants from each of the four leadership programs were interviewed; nine females and fifteen males. The sample was selected purposefully to ensure representation from each course. To allow sufficient time for participants to utilise their learning, but not enough for them to forget, all participants interviewed had completed training between three and twelve months previously. Table 4.2 provides a summary of the participant demographics.

Development Programme	(MF)	(LDP)	(LF)	(SLDP)
Target group for each programme (determined by organisational role and experience)	Team leaders and new supervisors	Experienced supervisors and managers	Senior managers	Senior managers (pre-requisite LF programme)
Study participants by gender and programme	female - 2 male - 4	female - 2 male - 4	female - 2 male - 4	female - 3 male - 3

Table 4.2: Participant demographics

4.4.2. PROCEDURE

Clearance was obtained from the University Human Research Ethics Committee to conduct the study. Invitations to participate were sent by e-mail and meetings were scheduled by telephone. Participation in the study was voluntary and confidentiality was assured. The semi-structured interviews, which lasted between sixty and ninety minutes, consisted of open-ended questions with further probing to clarify or qualify responses. Participants' responses were recorded and confirmed with them prior to completing the interviews. Twenty-one interviews were conducted in person, two by telephone due to the remote location and one participant preferred to respond by e-mail. Whilst it was not possible to further probe the e-mail response, it was consistent with other participants. The telephone respondents indicated they did not experience any difficulty understanding the questions.

4.4.3. DATA ANALYSIS

Following transcription, the interviews were imported into NVivo to assist with storage, retrieval and analysis of the data. See Bazeley (2007) for further information on NVivo features and usage. Coding was completed using a three-stage process; open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Neuman, 2003). The first stage of the analysis (open coding) commenced with a thorough review of the transcript from each interview. During this process, as patterns were recognised, the raw data was organised into conceptual categories and emerging themes were subsequently developed until each interview had been reviewed and coded. Demographic data was also assigned to each participant at this stage, as well as memos containing additional ideas or thoughts about the interview.

The next stage in the coding process (axial coding) saw the initial themes consolidated and arranged with similar themes grouped together. Two overarching categories were designated as the main themes and other related topics became subthemes. NVivo uses a tree-like structure which allows subthemes to be linked together under the main themes in a hierarchical structure. A final review of the data (selective coding) completed the coding process with any inconsistencies or overlapping themes identified and refined through comparing and contrasting the extent of agreement between participants' responses to finalise the structure.

4.5. RESULTS

The results identified two main and 10 sub themes. The first main theme was labelled "Organisational Support", which encompasses six subthemes:

- (1) provide the programs;
- (2) alignment;
- (3) time and priority;
- (4) senior management involvement;
- (5) financial commitment; and
- (6) programme status.

The second main theme was labelled “Other Support Processes” and includes the subthemes - networking, reinforcement, reflection, and coaching, which were specific artefacts of the development programs that participants identified as “helpful in being able to apply learning outcomes from leadership development programs back on the job”.

Table 4.3 presents the main and subthemes, along with summary descriptions and illustrative quotes.

Main Themes	Sub Themes	Summary Description	Examples of Organisational Support: illustrative Quotes
Organisational Support	Provide the programmes	Seventy-five percent of participants replied “providing the programs” when asked how the organisation demonstrated genuine interest in helping its managers to become better leaders	By providing these sorts of programmes...it’s about leadership, not management and it’s about yourself [manager #16] By putting on these sorts of training courses to develop better understanding of leadership and to develop the competencies we need to become better leaders. It’s a different and wide range of competencies [manager #10]
	Alignment	Alignment between development programmes and other organisational processes and initiatives was regarded by most participants as an important organisational support factor	Leadership forums, high performing teams; management operating & reporting systems all have a focus on the things identified in the various programs; the things they want the leadership team to do. The values and how we build that into the course; it adds emphasis, although it’s not explicit; more in the background. But there is alignment between the various programmes; leadership, the culture and values etc. They are all about being a better leader [senior manager #13]
	Senior Management involvement	Having senior managers participating in, or speaking at the programmes was believed to demonstrate their commitment	Having an Executive Management Team member attend showed that they also are expected to be across aspects & that it’s important enough to be there [manager #16]
	Financial commitment	Participants regarded the substantial financial investment in the leadership development programmes as tangible evidence of support	Just from the financial side; it’s not a cheap course. I regard it as a business expenditure, which is a pretty solid demonstration of interest, and the numbers put through it [manager #11]
	Programme status	Engaging external providers with reputations for delivering quality programmes encouraged interest in participating and expectations of learning new skills	There is adequate rigour around who goes to what training, i.e. people can’t just nominate themselves and go along to the leadership and executive training programmes [manager #04]

	Time & priority	Participants valued both the priority given by the organisation to leadership programmes and being afforded the time off work to attend	Managers saying “I want you to attend that and not do something else”; i.e. invest your time in it [senior manager #19] I think the sheer number of hours dedicated to training & development is a great indicator.....the time & priority given to it [manager #04]
Other support processes	Networking	In the design phase, cohorts were purposely planned to comprise members from different locations, genders and business units to increase networking opportunities and diversity	What helps is the networks; when I run into people from the programme it is easy to start a dialogue about what they have done or applied. You know that some people were very good at some of the stuff; quantifying or using other tools etc. I know if I needed help I could talk to them about it [senior manager #13]
	Reinforcement	Whilst some participants cited examples of self-reinforcement, the majority believed the organisation should take responsibility to provide reinforcement for their learning	There is a commitment to having the training, but a gap in keeping it going. What happens outside of the course other than training covered i.e. opportunity to grow in different roles; have access to things to support - those who are looking for mentors or role models? [manager #03]
	Reflection	Reflection was one of the skills taught in the programme that participants reported as helpful in supporting their learning	It's been a great opportunity to reflect, learn some new things, & revisit some I already knew, penny dropping, understanding of why some things are as they are. The experience of having to challenge things; then reflect on why I believed like that was very useful to learn about myself [manager #03]
	Coaching	Half of the participants reported that providing coaching was one way that the organisation demonstrated interest in helping them to become better leaders and to use their new skills in the workplace	It's very easy to walk out after the course, put your book away and forget about it. Unless you consolidate the course you won't apply it. The coaching helped to keep some of the skills alive [manager #14]

Table 4.3: Themes and illustrative quotes

Nineteen of the twenty-four participants indicated that providing high quality, relevant training programmes demonstrated the organisation's support for learning. According to these participants, the quality of the facilitators and course content designed to help them become better leaders were significant factors in supporting their learning. Participants reported that the examples and practice activities, such as simulations and role plays based on problems they faced managing staff and real company issues helped them to learn. They reported feeling confident in using the concepts and models learnt in training to make changes at work. Participants also reported that the psychological assessments included in the programs helped them to gain self-insight which they found valuable in interacting with others at work and in their personal lives.

A strong alignment between course content, business initiatives and their work were reported as important organisational support by 13 of the participants. Some examples given to illustrate alignment are regular senior management forums to share business progress now incorporate the "language" used in the development programmes; case studies used for teaching are based on real organisational issues. When asked how the organisation encouraged the use of the new skills, one senior manager replied:

When doing our leadership forums, or High Performing Teams™; management operating and reporting systems etc., they all have a focus on the things identified in the various programmes; the things they want the leadership team to do. The values and how we build that into the course; it adds emphasis, although it's not explicit, more in the background. But there is alignment between the various programmes; leadership, the culture and values etc. They are all about being a better leader [senior manager #13]

Attendance by executives at the leadership development programmes (LDPs) as both participants and speakers signified that the learning was valuable, of

high quality and that they supported the programmes. Participants believed that the priority over other time commitments given by the Chairman of the Board or the Chief Executive officer (CEO) to open the programmes and to stay and talk with them demonstrated the importance of the programs to the company's transformation.

The organisation's financial investment in the programmes was provided as a further example of supporting employee development. Participants acknowledged the significant expense of having reputable external organisations develop and facilitate the programmes, as well as the costs of travel, accommodation and external coaching. The large number of hours dedicated to training and development were also considered evidence of the organisation's support for learning. Participants appreciated the time afforded them by the organisation to attend the training programmes.

The reputation of the course providers added to the status of the programmes. This created a desire to participate, particularly for the higher level courses where participant allocation depended on their level of seniority in the business. Employees were also motivated to attend and anticipated gaining value from the programmes through the information provided by the organisation about the programmes and by positive reports from those attending previous programmes.

Participants reported that meeting and learning with people from different professional backgrounds and areas of the business was particularly beneficial. They believed that the different perspectives added to the discussions, broadened their thinking and knowledge of other areas in the business and facilitated relationships that assisted them following the programme. Nineteen of the participants made reference to how helpful building relationships and working with like-minded people was to their learning.

When questioned about organisational support for learning after completing development programmes the responses were mixed. Some participants felt it was their responsibility to reinforce their own learning. For example, some reported using the language and concepts from the program to plan projects and initiatives for their teams or joint projects and others talked about how they used learning journals and made time for reflection to reinforce their own learning. The majority of participants, however, thought that the organisation should take responsibility for reinforcing their learning following completion of the training course. Role modelling, mentoring and providing a better learning culture were suggested as examples of how the organisation could better support their learning.

External professional coaching was a specific follow-up intervention the organisation provided in conjunction with the training provider following the higher level programmes to assist in reinforcing and embedding the learning. Twelve of the 18 participants that received coaching reported it as being extremely valuable. Some used coaching to consolidate the course and embed their learning; others to discuss and improve how they were applying their new skills; and some to better learn the skills of coaching to assist them in coaching their own employees. Some participants used coaching to address personal and work- related matters and, subsequently, changed their operating style. All participants who mentioned coaching did so in the context of how the organisation supported their learning.

4.6. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the forms of organisational support that employees found helpful and to differentiate organisational support from other kinds of learning support. The results of this study confirm that participants consider organisational support as a significant factor affecting their ability and opportunity to learn new leadership skills. We give voice to employees' perceptions of how organisations can support their learning. Furthermore, in a field

dominated by quantitative research, we used a qualitative approach to go beyond previous work and differentiate between the forms of support provided by organisations and supervisors.

The research question posited was: What do employees identify as forms of organisational support that promote learning? To answer this question we identified three overarching factors that encompass all of the identified themes described in the results. These three key factors are:

- (1) alignment;
- (2) senior management commitment; and
- (3) providing high quality relevant programmes.

4.6.1. ALIGNMENT

The most noteworthy finding from this study is the notion of alignment. In the training literature alignment is, generally, referred to in the context of aligning training with corporate strategy. Consistent with views espoused by others (Montesino, 2002; O'Connor et al., 2006), participants identified the importance of aligning the training content with corporate strategy as central to their learning. Participants related how having the organisation's strategic and operational plans and values incorporated into the programme content helped with understanding their own roles in the "bigger picture" of the organisation's goals; these activities assisted to place their learning into context. Analysis of the data from this study showed how alignment between the training content and the organisation's objectives can be achieved. It also revealed that alignment encompasses more than just that between training content and organisational strategy.

When the learning outcomes from the employee development programmes were integrated into business processes, the participants were able to align their learning with their work, which reinforced how learning could be used in the

workplace. Aligning business processes helps create an organisational learning culture (Hung et al., 2010). Participants, in this study, described how the organisation supported their learning by updating the recruitment and selection practices, position profiles, performance management process and management reporting systems to align with the terminology and competencies from the development courses. They found the consistency between what they had learnt in training and workplace processes assisted their efforts to use new skills and embed their learning into every day work practices.

Kotter (2001) described organisations as being interdependent, with employees tied to each other by their work, technology, management systems and hierarchy. Aligning people to move together in the same direction is essential for organisations to achieve their strategic priorities. The host organisation in this study implemented the LDPs in an effort to improve leadership capability across the organisation. Their efforts to align their people were underpinned by both the commitment of senior management and the quality and relevance of the development programmes.

4.6.2. SENIOR MANAGEMENT COMMITMENT

Senior managers that attended the same courses as employees demonstrated their commitment to employee development and thereby added credibility to the programme. Participants in this study reported feeling supported by senior managers who shared the same course understanding, were willing to spend time and collaborate on real organisational issues, and informally talk with participants over dinner.

Involving senior managers as guest speakers helped to make the courses relevant and meaningful for the participants. Hearing about current organisational challenges directly from their leaders' increased the participants' sense of being valued and included as part of the organisations future. This supports Rhoades and

Eisenberger (2002) who reported that the extent to which organisations value employees' contributions and care about their well-being helps to meet their socio-emotional needs and positively influences their perceptions of organisational support.

Other researchers (McCracken, 2005; O'Connor et al., 2006) have also found that senior management buy-in is crucial to create a positive organisational culture that supports learning. Creating an organisational learning culture includes cultivating an environment that enhances employees' ability to share and apply their learning (Bates and Khasawneh, 2005; Skerlavaj et al., 2007). Participants reported benefits from building networking relationships with peers and senior managers. These relationships allowed participants to discuss successes and failures in applying new skills following training. Including the outcomes from the courses into subsequent leadership forums and management meetings enabled the learning to be more widely shared and underlined that implementing new ideas and constructive workplace changes were valued.

Participants recognised and appreciated the substantial investment in leadership development as a key learning support factor. Financial investment included the cost of course development to meet the organisation's specific requirements, as well as recurrent facilitation, travel and accommodation, training resources, administration, course review and update costs and those of subsequent follow-up activities. The time that the organisation allowed for learning and the priority it was given were also recognised as investment and support for learning.

Senior management provided reinforcement for learning following the development training for programme graduates. Follow-up initiatives included:

- providing professional coaching support, encouraging completion of projects commenced during training;

- promoting success stories about completed projects or innovations at corporate or external forums; and
- participation as guest speakers at other training courses or meetings and being included in decision-making forums.

Credibility is a major challenge in aligning people to share understanding and commitment (Kotter, 2001). In this study, senior management demonstrated their credibility and that of the development programmes by their commitment and participation. The participants subsequently gained confidence and belief in their ability to implement their new skills and thus help the organisation to achieve its objectives.

4.6.3. PROVIDE HIGH QUALITY RELEVANT PROGRAMS

When asked how the organisation demonstrated its interest in helping its managers to become better leaders, almost 80 percent of participants responded that it did so by providing high-quality relevant training programmes. While researchers generally agree that providing training supports learning (Kraimer et al., 2011; Lee and Bruvold, 2003; Salas et al., 2012), some report that not all employees value development opportunities (Lambert et al., 2003; Maurer and Lippstreu, 2008). For example, employees who are performance-orientated, rather than learning-oriented can find that participating in development activities comes at a high personal cost (Maurer and Lippstreu, 2008), and three participants in this study reported their initial reluctance to participate. It is, therefore, unlikely that simply making training available would evoke such positive perceptions of organisational support. It is more likely that participants' comments about the courses being "high quality and relevant" were salient factors influencing their views.

The leadership skills taught in training programmes are largely generic and training providers offer similar off-the-shelf products. What enhanced the quality and relevance of these particular training courses was the organisation's willingness to invest in dedicated staff to plan and manage the programmes; to engage reputable

providers; and to work with them to customise the content and ensure that it aligned with the organisation's objectives and participants' work. Customising the programmes enabled the organisations values and desired leadership capabilities to be examined. Learning activities and discussions focused on new ways of thinking and behavioural changes required for the organisations leaders to gain a shared understanding of how they needed to work to help the organisation achieve its objectives.

Participants in this study reported that the coaching provided between and after course modules assisted them to embed their learning. Coaching is an example of a follow-up activity that is well regarded as a learning intervention (Baron and Morin, 2010). Participants found that their coaches assisted them to reflect on and understand a number of personality measures the participants completed as vehicles towards personal development as leaders. They also acted as sounding boards and provided feedback on participants' attempts to use their new skills at work.

Additionally, each programme was conducted at a unique location, which included accommodation suitable for live-in programmes, an on-site restaurant, appropriate training facilities and an environment conducive to learning. This, as well as the reputation of the external providers, contributed to the perception of status associated with the courses and, hence, the employees' motivation to participate.

4.7. STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

A major strength of the study is that we used a qualitative approach in a field dominated by quantitative studies to give voice to participants' perceptions of what forms of organisational support promoted learning. This methodology allowed in-depth examination of the relevant factors which resulted in new information that extends the body of knowledge about organisational support for learning. We

provide detailed information that may assist practitioners with developing and managing leadership programmes to support employee learning. A second strength is that the rich data provides a level of clarity and differentiation between the types of support provided by organisations and supervisors that has not previously been reported.

The results, however, need also to be considered in the context of the study limitations. The study was conducted in a single organisation and thus limits our ability to generalise results to other organisations or industries. A second limitation is that as the focus of the study was the perceptions of participants, we therefore are unable to validate claims of any actual learning, or whether the leaders' intentions in relation to the outcomes of the development programme were met. A third limitation is that by limiting our sample to participants in leadership programmes, who by default are also managers, we cannot assess the impact of organisational support on all types of training programmes, nor all levels of employee. Whilst the results are relevant for the host organisation, future studies should try to replicate these findings in other types of organisations with a more diverse sample.

4.8. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study suggest several ways that organisations can provide support to enhance employee learning. Based on the results of this study we provide the following recommendations to assist practitioners.

One recommendation is to invest in development programmes that are adequately funded and resourced to enable customisation of the content to align the organisation's strategy with the employees' work. Participants who perceive development training as both high quality and relevant are more likely to be motivated to participate, learn and apply the subject matter.

A second recommendation is that organisations investing in coaching to reinforce learning are likely to achieve greater impact if it is integrated into the development programme; with the coaches well-versed in the course content and objectives. Coaches accredited in any assessment tools used in courses can provide further support to participants in reflecting on psychological assessment results and affecting any behavioural changes they may choose to make.

A third recommendation is for organisations to align learning outcomes into business processes and systems and thus reinforce how learning can be used in the workplace. To enhance OLC, employees should experience learning as a routine aspect of the way work is carried out, rather than as a discretionary practice added on top of their work.

A fourth recommendation is that senior management must be engaged in every LDP. Determining the critical competencies, participating in the courses and sponsoring follow-up initiatives are tangible evidence of the importance they place on the training. Their involvement adds credibility to the development interventions and is crucial to create an organisational culture that encourages and supports employees to gain new skills and the confidence to apply them in the workplace.

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Chapter five addresses RQ 3:

What supervisory behaviours are perceived by employees to assist in training transfer?

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DECLARATION OF CO-AUTHORSHIP AND CONTRIBUTION

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Nature of Candidate's Contribution

Susan Lancaster conceived the study, wrote the article, collected and analysed the data.

Nature of Co-Authors' Contributions

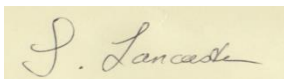
Lee Di Milia as Ms Lancaster's principal supervisor assisted to conceive the study, reviewed draft manuscripts and assisted in the revision of the study.

Roslyn Cameron assisted in data analysis using NVivo.

Candidate's Declaration

I declare that the publication above meets the requirements to be included in the thesis as outlined in the Publication of Research Higher Degree Work for Inclusion in the Thesis Procedures

Signature



Date

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Supervisor behaviours that facilitate training transfer

5.1. ABSTRACT

Purpose -This paper describes the supervisor behaviours that employees found to be helpful and unhelpful in facilitating training transfer. The study aims to provide rich qualitative data from the employee's perspective.

Design/methodology/approach – This study utilises a cross-sectional design. A case study and a qualitative interpretivist approach were used to interpret the employee's responses. In total 24 semi-structured interviews were conducted and responses were analysed with the aid of NVivo.

Findings – The results suggested what supervisors did prior to, during and after course attendance was critical to training transfer. Supportive behaviours prior to the course included motivating, encouraging and setting expectations. Practical support provided during the course signalled the value the supervisor placed on the course. Meetings held after the course provided the best opportunity to support transfer. Transfer was maximised when participants experienced a positive role model and when supervisors showed interest in their experience of the course, encouraged and sponsored new initiatives, and involved them in decision-making. The main perceived hindrances to training transfer were culture, policies and a lack of encouragement.

Originality/value - This is a qualitative study in a field of inquiry dominated by quantitative approaches. The results highlight the employee's perspective concerning what they found to assist in training transfer. This methodology is rarely evidenced in the extant literature.

Keywords - Training transfer, Supervisor support, Leadership development, Work environment, Qualitative research, Australia, Training methods, Information transfer

Paper type - Case study

5.2 INTRODUCTION

Organisations invest significant amounts of time and money into training with the goal of increasing employee performance. Estimates suggest that American organisations spend between US \$50 billion (Doh and Stumpf, 2007; Martin, 2010) and US \$171.5 billion (Green and McGill, 2011) annually. Some studies suggest that approximately 10 to 15 percent of the training content results in behavioural change in the workplace (Cromwell and Kolb, 2004; Lim and Morris, 2006). These estimates indicate a questionable return on investment. Therefore, finding strategies to assist training transfer has the potential to assist organisational productivity.

There is a long standing interest in training transfer and this literature was first summarised by Baldwin and Ford (1988). Their recommendations for future research included examining the direct effects of training design factors on training outcomes, developing a framework on the effects of trainee characteristics and the identification and operationalisation of key variables in the work environment. A more recent review of the training transfer literature suggests little has changed (Blume et al., 2010). Both studies challenged researchers to better understand the factors that assist training transfer.

Training transfer has been defined as the extent to which knowledge and skill acquired in a learning setting can be applied in the workplace, and maintained over time (Blume et al., 2010). The study of training transfer focuses on variables affecting the impact on transfer as well as the interventions intended to enhance transfer (Aguinis and Kraiger, 2009). Researchers generally agree on categorising the study of training transfer into three broad areas; trainee characteristics, training design and work environment (Blume et al., 2010; Brown and McCracken, 2009; Burke and Hutchins, 2007; Clarke, 2002; Martin, 2010; Yamnill and McLean, 2001). Of these transfer factors the work environment has received the least attention (Brown and McCracken, 2009; Burke and Hutchins, 2007; Cheng and Ho, 2001).

Baldwin et al. (1988) reported supervisor support as an important but under-recognised work environment factor affecting transfer and in particular, noted little attempt to understand the supervisory behaviours that assist transfer. Blume and Ford (2010) recommended finding ways to foster higher levels of supervisor support in the work environment. The aim of this study is to describe the supervisor behaviours that trainees found helpful or unhelpful in training transfer. A qualitative interpretivist approach utilising a case study was chosen to achieve this aim and to address the research question posited for this inquiry:

RQ: What supervisory behaviours were perceived to assist in the training transfer by employees?

5.3. AN OVERVIEW OF THE TRAINING TRANSFER LITERATURE

The training transfer literature generally focuses on the trainee's characteristics, training design and work environment. We briefly outline two of these factors and focus in particular on the work environment.

Trainee characteristics such as cognitive ability, motivation and personality are considered important factors in training transfer (Blume et al., 2010). Managers with high achievement needs are likely to apply new knowledge gained in training (Chiaburu and Marinova, 2005; Gaudine and Saks, 2004; Hutchins and Burke, 2006), as are those with an internal locus of control and greater self-awareness (Baldwin et al., 2009; Brown and McCracken, 2009; Martin, 2010). Trainees with higher levels of self-efficacy are more motivated to learn than trainees with lower self-confidence, and as a result of higher motivation report higher levels of transfer (Birdi et al., 1997; Martin, 2010).

The second factor, training design includes the objectives, methods and the varied training techniques and opportunities to practice. The transfer of complex tasks, such as decision making, is enhanced by practice during training (Blume et

al., 2010; Martin, 2010). Good design ensures the relevance of the training content to the trainees and the extent of transfer depends on the alignment between the training content and job function (Lim and Morris, 2006; Rey de Polanco, 2005). Well-designed training programs are more successful in transferring to the workplace because they help to improve the trainees' understanding and retention of the content, as well as building their self-confidence and motivation (Martin, 2010).

Arguably, the most complex but least understood factors in facilitating training transfer are those in the work environment. These include transfer climate, supervisor support and opportunities (Cromwell and Kolb, 2004). Workplace climate refers to the extent to which organisations create a supportive environment conducive to transferring training from the classroom to the workplace (Salas and Cannon-Bowers, 2001) and is considered extremely important in facilitating transfer (Blume et al., 2010; Hauer et al., 2012; Martin, 2010).

Supervisor support may contribute to the development of a supportive work environment by encouraging, reinforcing and providing opportunities to practice new behaviours (Birdi et al., 1997; Burke and Hutchins, 2007). Supervisors encourage employees to transfer new skills to the workplace by helping to remove any obstacles to their application. Supervisors "signal" whether they consider training to be important and supervisors who do not view training as useful have been found to undermine the transfer process (Martin, 2010) by failing to provide feedback concerning the use and importance of the training content. This discourages trainees from attempting transfer (Holton et al., 1997b).

The importance of the relationship between supervisor support and training transfer can be found by examining the differences in the correlation between these variables. While Cromwell and Kolb (2004) reported a strong correlation between

supervisor support and training transfer (0.61), Blume and Ford's (2010) meta-analysis of the literature reported a more moderate correlation (0.31).

The role of supervisors in supporting transfer has been widely supported (Birdi et al., 1997; Burke and Hutchins, 2007; Martin, 2010) but this literature has some limitations. One limitation is that few studies have directly set out to understand the role of the supervisor and this has resulted in a literature that lacks an organising framework to understand the behaviours that are supportive. We suggest that a model based on what the supervisor does “prior” to course attendance, “during” course attendance and “after” course attendance (PDA) may assist to identify these behaviours. A second limitation is that the training transfer research is predominantly quantitative and does not provide sufficient detail regarding the behaviours that trainee's consider important to assist them to transfer. The purpose of this study then, is to describe the supervisor behaviours that their employees found to be helpful and unhelpful with training transfer. A conceptual model for this study is shown in Figure 5.1.

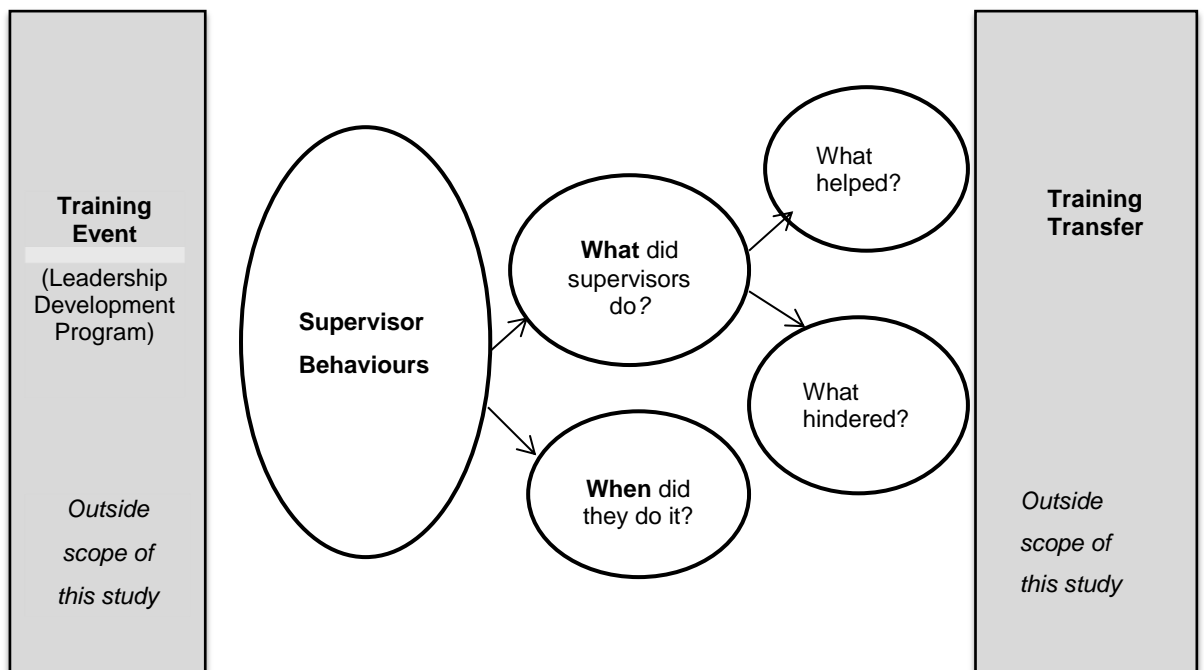


Figure 5.1 Focus of the study

5.4. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

This study was conducted in an Australian government owned Energy Corporation operating over a large area and employing approximately 5,000 employees.

Following deregulation of the industry this organisation needed to become more competitive. The organisation considered its leadership capability to be a key factor for future success and implemented a large scale leadership development program that comprised four integrated courses aimed at senior managers, managers, supervisors and team leaders. The course content and the target groups for each course can be found in Table 5.1.

PROGRAM	Management Foundations (MF)	Leadership Development Program (LDP)	Leadership Foundations (LF)	Senior Leadership Development Program (SLDP)
TARGET GROUP	Workgroup and team leaders, supervisors	Middle managers (direct report to a senior manager)	Senior manager (direct report to a general manager)	Senior managers (prerequisite leadership foundations program)
PROGRAM DURATION	Conducted over several months – 2 day blocks	Residential - one x five days	Residential two x four days	Residential two x four days
PROGRAM CONTENT	Work priorities and professional development	Leadership – setting the scene	Leadership and self - personal awareness and development	Strategic Thinking
	Effective workplace relationships	Self-awareness and personal effectiveness	Leadership and team-effective teamwork and coaching	Building and maintaining relationships
	Operational plans	Emotional intelligence	Leadership and the organisation-culture and teams	Innovation and creativity
	Workplace safety	Influence & conflict	Leadership and the future-managing change	Stakeholder influencing
	Team effectiveness	Leadership and team dynamics	Futures thinking	
	Workplace information systems	Leadership and Coaching	Strategic leadership and innovation	
	Customer service	Change management	Leadership, networking and communication	
	Innovation and Change	Managing performance through change		
	Continuous Improvement	Leadership and strategy		
	Managing people			
	Learning organisations			
EXIT OUTCOME	Certificate iv or Diploma in Business	Tertiary standard non accredited	Tertiary standard non accredited	Tertiary standard non accredited

Table 5.1: Structured leadership programs

The program was designed following an organizational assessment to identify current performance deficiencies and future requirements. First, focus groups comprising representatives from across the organisation informed a skills analysis to determine the desired capabilities for the four employee groups. Second, subject matter experts (SMEs) were used during the needs assessment phase in conducting a gap analysis to decide the specific competencies for each program (Aguinis and Kraiger, 2009). Careful consideration was given to aligning learning outcomes with business objectives.

There were two pathways to access the program. The first pathway follows an Employee Development Planning (EDP) meeting where supervisors take into account the employees future job goals, educational qualifications, experience and level in the organisation. The second pathway involves self-nomination with supervisor approval.

5.5. STUDY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study uses a cross-sectional design. A qualitative interpretivist approach based within a case study was considered appropriate to describe how supervisors provide support and its impact on participants. Case studies are the preferred research strategy when “how” or “why” questions are posed and when the researcher has little control over events (Yin, 2003). The collective experience of the group was the focus of this study, rather than the individual.

5.5.1. SAMPLE

A total of 24 participants were interviewed; 15 males and nine females. Six participants from each of the four leadership courses were selected to participate in the study. The sample was homogenous in that participants had completed training between three and 12 months prior to the study. This time frame allowed

participants to attempt transfer. Each participant reported to a supervisor, thus having the opportunity and time to experience any support provided.

The sample was selected purposefully to ensure representation from each course and gender. Due to disproportionately high numbers of males at senior levels, the organisation employed affirmative action by purposefully selecting some females for inclusion in each course and therefore it was considered appropriate to ensure the sample included females. Table 5.2 provides a summary of the participant demographics.

Participants	Gender	Level	Location
Management Foundations (MF)			
MF1	F	6	Far North (major regional centre)
MF2	M	5	South West 1(major regional centre)
MF3	F	6	South West 2 (minor regional centre)
MF4	M	5	South West 1(major regional centre)
MF5	M	5	South West 1 (major regional centre)
MF6	M	5	South West 3 (minor regional centre)
Leadership Development Program (LDP)			
LDP 1	F	5	Central (major regional centre)
LDP 2	F	5	Southern (head office)
LDP 3	M	4	Southern (head office)
LDP 4	M	4	Southern (head office)
LDP 5	M	3	Central (major regional centre)
LDP 6	M	4	Central (major regional centre)
Leadership Foundations (LF)			
LF 1	F	4	Southern (head office)
LF 2	M	4	Southern (head office)
LF 3	M	3	Central (major regional centre)
LF 4	M	3	South West 4 (minor regional centre)
LF 5	M	3	Central (major regional centre)
LF 6	F	3	Northern (major regional centre)
Senior Leadership Development Program (SLDP)			
SLDP 1	F	4	Central (major regional centre)
SLDP 2	M	3	Central (major regional centre)
SLDP 3	F	2	Northern (major regional centre)
SLDP 4	F	4	Northern (major regional centre)
SLDP 5	M	2	South West 1 (major regional centre)
SLDP 6	M	2	Southern (head office)
note: participants from the South West region were located across 4 different areas			

Table 5.2 Participant demographics

5.5.2. PROCEDURE

Following clearance from the University Human Research Ethics Committee, invitations to participate in the study were sent by e-mail. Participation was voluntary, confidential and anonymous. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to better understand the behaviours that facilitate transfer. Participants were asked thirteen open-ended questions with further probing questions to clarify or qualify responses.

A total of 21 interviews were conducted face-to-face. Three participants were located in remote regions and it was planned to conduct these interviews via the telephone. However, one participant preferred to reply by e-mail and it was not possible to further probe these answers but the responses were consistent with other participants. The telephone respondents indicated they did not experience any difficulty using this medium. Replies to the interview were recorded verbatim and checked for accuracy and meaning with participants before ending the interview. Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes.

5.5.3. DATA ANALYSIS

The interviews were transcribed and analysed with the aid of the NVivo data analysis program. Coding was completed using a three stage process; open coding, axial coding and selective coding.

The data analysis commenced by reviewing and coding each interview (open coding) individually and then across all participants to ensure that all relevant information was captured. Initial labels were assigned to condense the data into categories. At this stage categories were not linked as the main focus was on the data. NVivo facilitated participant demographic information to be added, as were memos noting additional ideas or thoughts about the interview, participants, or categories as they emerged.

The initial coding process was followed by axial coding to refine the categories and develop themes. Related themes were merged and themes that were initially too broad were divided into sub-themes. As connections between themes were identified, categories were rearranged into a hierarchical structure to group and distinguish between the main themes and the sub-themes.

Once key themes were identified a final review of the data completed the coding process (selective coding). Key nodes were queried to help identify and test patterns by comparing and contrasting the extent of agreement between participants' responses.

5.6. RESULTS

Coding the interview data provided a rich amount of information. To provide clarity we report on the three main themes and 14 sub themes. The main themes were supervisor encouragement, supervisor as role model and hindrances to transfer. The analysis also suggested that when supervisors provided support was important. Supervisor behaviours are grouped in terms of what they did before, during and after the training course. The themes, supervisor behaviours and an indicative quote from the participant to illustrate each theme are shown in Table 5.3.

When support was provided	Main themes	Sub-themes	Examples of supervisor support : illustrative quotes
Prior to course	Supervisor Encouragement	Prior to course discussion	The first discussion was when I was told that I had been nominated for the course because she thought I was ready for it. Then I was told that I had been successful [...] "I think you'll enjoy it and get a lot out of it". My manager had information about the content of the course and directed me to the information [...] and we went through the various topics [manager: #07]
Prior to and after course		Expectations	I think there is an expectation that if you're going on a course and they spend a lot of money, they expect people to put their best foot forward and apply things to improve outcomes [manager #10]
Prior during and after course		Demonstrates interest	When he does his six monthly reviews and at our monthly meetings we talk about what I'm doing and he asks me if I'm going to try anything new [manager #11]
After course		Opportunity to use new skills	I was lucky to be seconded into a field assessment coordinator role for several months. I started to apply the things that I learnt. The changes that I implemented into the business that I had control of impressed management. My direct manager then encouraged me to continue [coordinator: #24]
After course		Open to new ideas and change	My manager allows me to develop ideas and put them into place. She encourages and supports me to come up with ideas. She listens and we talk it through to see how it would work [coordinator: #08]
After course		After course discussion	We talked about the different sessions [...] how useful the learnings are and where you can use the various concepts [manager: #07]
After course		Feedback	We don't often get feedback in the organisation at the level we are at - it's not personal enough. It depends on who the boss is and how good they are at giving feedback. I want more personal as well as business results feedback [senior manager #13]
After course		Mentoring	My two senior managers [...] ask for my input; we share ideas. They always support me; they get excited and encourage me. My immediate manager gives me challenges to think about and I go away and think of solutions [manager #14]
Prior to during and after course	Supervisor as role model	Supervisor understands concepts learnt	For this sort of program (leadership) it is extremely important for them to understand. It's critical so they can coach me on it [team leader: #18]
Prior to during and after course		Supervisor completed course	It is helpful as we can speak the same language and use the same approach. We can get consistency with the team; use the same base line for values, behaviours, results and standards. He needs to do it too to reinforce the behaviour [manager #09]

Prior to during and after course		Supervisor demonstrates skills learnt	My manager has done this course and he has made positive changes in his own leadership style and people skills over recent years. It has been helpful that he's done the course; he challenges me if I slip back into my old ways [manager #11]
After course	Hindrances to application	Culture	The expectations around "this is the way we do it around here" can be very difficult. We can change the words on paper, but learnt behaviours and people are harder to change. If we have a new or better way to do something, someone who has been in the role a long time, or sick of change are resistant to new ideas and ways of doing things [team leader: #06]
After course		Policies	If you are a learning organisation you are constantly on the move, whereas policies are static; policies can get in the way if they don't reflect what's trying to be achieved [supervisor: #05]
After course		No encouragement	My manager wasn't interested and didn't ask about it. He didn't come to my graduation and final presentation; he did not care [manager #14]

Table 5.3 Results

5.6.1. SUPPORT PRIOR TO THE COURSE

A total of 14 participants reported meeting with their supervisor before course attendance and ten participants did not have a meeting. The majority of participants who did meet with their supervisors reported a superficial meeting. Five participants reported a meeting focussed on the course content. The topics included what supervisors expected the trainees to gain from the program, skill improvements for current roles, the value they could add to the business and future promotional and employment opportunities. These participants reported feeling motivated by the trust and belief placed in them.

5.6.2. SUPPORT DURING THE COURSE

Participants in the MF course reported that their supervisors assisted them with their assignments by helping them to find information, to relate concepts to their work and by providing opportunities for exposure to activities outside their own roles. Participants in the higher level courses appreciated their supervisors discussing their ideas and issues with them, and sponsoring their workplace projects or initiatives.

The attendance of senior managers and supervisors as guest speakers at each of the courses and their attendance at course graduation ceremonies were considered an important symbol. Participants felt these actions demonstrated commitment to the program.

5.6.3. SUPPORT AFTER THE COURSE

Most of the supervisor behaviours that supported transfer took place following course attendance. Participants reported that meeting with their supervisors helped them to consolidate their learning. They commented positively about supervisors who took the time to discuss what the participant found valuable and discussions centred on how

and what they could apply in the workplace. Having the opportunity to use new skills was regarded as critical to reinforce their learning. Supportive supervisors facilitated practice opportunities by including participants in planning and decision-making, chairing meetings, broadening their roles and encouraging them to develop and try new ideas. Standing in the role when their supervisors took leave, and undertaking secondments or project roles were also reported as valuable opportunities for training transfer.

Regular meetings with supervisors afforded the opportunity for mentoring and encouragement. Participants valued timely feedback “along the way”, because it developed self-awareness, confidence, and the opportunity to correct undesired behaviours. Other examples of support included; listening and talking through ideas and potential problems; sponsoring project initiatives and occasionally, asking participants “how things were going.” The supervisors that assisted transfer provided a supportive work environment that motivated participants, provided help and a feedback mechanism on the participants’ performance.

The second theme based on the results was the supervisor as “role model.” Modelling the desired behaviour provided a strong symbol (evidence) for the relevance of the training and the new organisational culture that the organisation was aiming to achieve. Thus, all participants believed it was essential that supervisors first completed the training course so that supervisors could act as a coach and reinforce new behaviours. Positive role models were described as good leaders.

The third theme was hindrance to transfer. Many reported feeling frustrated on returning to work to find that established ways of working blocked attempts to transfer. They described the organisational culture as punitive, focussed on tasks rather than people, bureaucratic and slow to change. The majority of the participants reported

policies as an issue, describing them as too restrictive, not reflective of the pace of change in the organisation and too numerous to remember.

Participants reported being “demotivated” and disappointed by supervisors that showed no interest in their attempts to implement new work practices. While all participants reported gaining self-confidence by attending the courses, this confidence waned quickly in the workplace. Supervisors that did not demonstrate support were believed to be uninterested, uncaring and undermined participants’ confidence in training transfer. One participant said:

“People don’t leave organisations, they leave their managers” [manager: #14]

5.7. DISCUSSION

The success of training transfer depends on several factors; trainee characteristics, training design and the work environment. The research question posited was: What supervisory behaviours were perceived to assist in the training transfer by employees? To answer this question we focussed on the role of the supervisor within the work environment and while the literature considers this support to be critical, when the support is offered and what type of support is beneficial is not well understood. We proposed the PDA model (see Figure 5.2) that considers when supervisors provide assistance and the results from this study appear to support this model. Furthermore, in a literature dominated by quantitative investigations we used a qualitative approach in order to give voice to what participants found to assist or hinder in the transfer process.

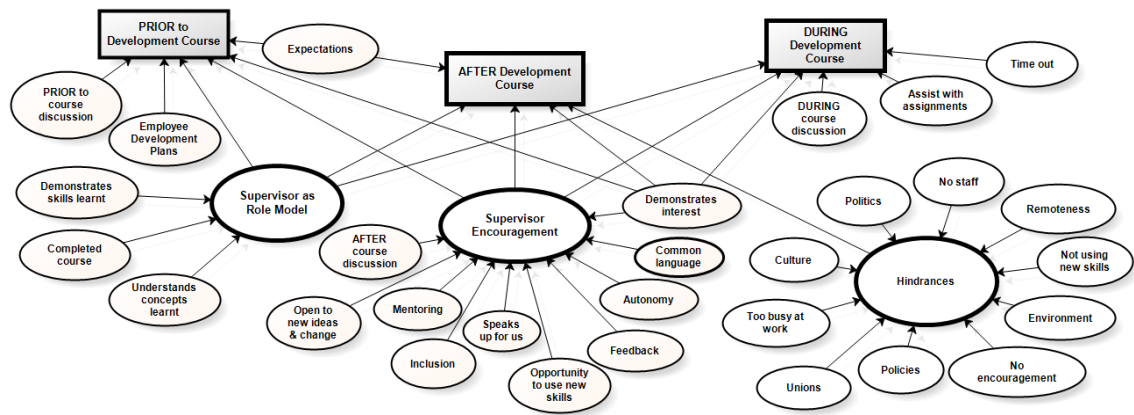


Figure 5.2: PDA model of supervisor support

It is important to highlight that all participants felt motivated as a result of being nominated to attend the training courses. This signalled to the participants that the organisation considered them to play a key role in its goal to become more competitive. A number of learning models suggest the importance of creating motivation in order to encourage behaviour change. Thus, in our model, pre-course meetings have the potential to create a climate that may support transfer. Meetings held with participants prior to training allowed supervisors to clarify expectations and demonstrate that they valued the outcomes of the training course. Supervisors that initiated meetings prior to training instilled confidence in the participants' ability to learn. Participants that experienced these meetings reported feeling motivated and inspired when supervisors encouraged them to develop their own ideas for project initiatives rather than imposing pre-determined performance goals. Other studies have also reported that discussing course content and setting performance goals were found to facilitate transfer (Santos and Stuart, 2003).

Meetings held prior to training were not common in this sample. This should not be interpreted however, to suggest these meetings are not important, but rather that these were lost opportunities to build upon the participant's motivation to learn and apply the course objectives in the workplace.

The second component of the PDA model suggests that supervisor support during the training course is beneficial. Supportive supervisors were those that made themselves available to provide information, to discuss topics or listen and talk through ideas that required clarification. There was some evidence that the type of support differed according to which program the participants attended. The participants that attended the MF course were less experienced and required much more specific guidance. In contrast, employees occupying higher levels in the organisation wanted more autonomy and freedom in decision making. They appreciated the latitude afforded them and reported that they felt trusted to make decisions.

Meetings held after the course afforded the best opportunities for supervisors to maximise their employees training transfer. Participants were highly motivated to transfer when their supervisors showed interest in their learning experiences. Supervisors demonstrated their support by scheduling regular meetings and working with participants to encourage their ideas and to resolve any problems they were experiencing. They sponsored their initiatives but also challenged and held them accountable for using their new skills. Supportive supervisors also acknowledged participants' achievements. Having the opportunity to use new skills at work was found to be important in the transfer literature (Burke and Hutchins, 2007; Santos and Stuart, 2003). This study supports those findings and contributes further to the body of transfer knowledge by describing how supervisors can encourage and provide practice opportunities to support training transfer.

In addition to the PDA model the results highlighted the importance of the “supervisor as role model”. Supervisors behaving in congruence with the training objectives had a major impact on transfer Birdi et al. (1997). In this study participants perceived that supervisors who met with them prior to, during and after the course demonstrated the behavioural content of the course. Motivating, coaching, building relationships and influencing people were key course outcomes from the leadership development program. Participants whose supervisors did not attend the courses, or model the required behaviours were cynical of their supervisors’ leadership skills.

The results also provided some clear examples concerning the hindrances to training transfer. The hindrances can be grouped in terms of the supervisor’s lack of interest and their culture, “blaming” a work environment that is not congruent with the new organisational directions.

The participants reported gaining confidence at the course and felt enthusiastic about the prospect of using (transferring) their new skills at work. They wanted the opportunity to discuss their learning and ideas with their supervisors. Their expectation was that their supervisor would initiate a meeting and help them in their attempt to transfer. Supervisors that did not instigate specific meetings with participants, or actively support their learning were perceived as uninterested and unsupportive. Participants also expressed disappointment with supervisors that showed only superficial interest in their learning; for example making a fleeting comment in passing, such as: “How was it, was it good”? [Team Leader: #06]. Lack of encouragement made it difficult to transfer.

Participants who reported culture as a hindrance found that on returning from a supportive and “safe” training environment, the work environment was not conducive to making workplace changes. While the course content included managing workplace

change, the reality was that the culture for change was not present across the organisation. Some supervisors were resistant to trying new ideas. Participants reported that supervisors did not respond positively to being challenged. They had preconceived ideas and it was difficult to get them to change their minds, or even to listen, especially when the participants' ideas conflicted with a known process.

Some participants reported that policies impeded their ability to make changes. These participants described the organisation as focussed on outputs and fundamentally focussed on getting the job done right. New ideas ran the risk of clashing with established policies and participants reported that it was futile to challenge supervisors who would not contemplate an idea that conflicted with an existing policy.

The results suggest that the role of the supervisor is important in at least two main ways. The support provided by supervisors prior to, during and after training serves to build constructive relationships with their employees. This relationship guides and develops the desired workplace behaviours. These actions create a supportive culture that develops and encourages the implementation of new ideas. Supervisors that modelled the desired behaviours were a strong symbol of the behaviours that were rewarded by the organisation. From the employee's perspective, the supervisor is pivotal to the transfer climate.

5.8. STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

The results of this study need to be considered in terms of its strengths and limitations. The major strength of the study is that we used a qualitative approach to better understand the behaviours that participants considered important to facilitating transfer. A second strength is that we interviewed participants from different levels of the organisation and while the type of support required showed some differences, the basic

tenets of the model; supervisor support prior to, during and after the course were supported.

The study was conducted in a single organisation and thus, a limitation is that we do not know whether these results would generalise across other organisations. Future studies are encouraged to examine training transfer in terms of the PDA model. Nonetheless, the findings are of direct relevance to the host organisation. A second limitation is that despite efforts to maximise trustworthiness of the data, researcher bias in terms of selection and interpretation of interview data may have influenced the findings. A third limitation is that our sample was not randomly selected and our participants may not be representative of all course graduates.

5.9. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study suggest that there are specific supervisor behaviours that assist in the training transfer process. Based on these findings we can make a number of recommendations to assist practitioners.

One recommendation is to train supervisors in the PDA model. The results showed that participants appreciated assistance prior to, during and after training. While a few supervisors provided this level of assistance perhaps implicitly, many provided assistance solely following the course. Supervisors who are trained to understand why it is important to support participants' transfer efforts and how to provide relevant support at the appropriate time may assist to enhance the organisation's training transfer rate.

A second recommendation is for supervisors to be better role models of the behaviours that are trying to develop in the workplace. Supervisors acting in accord with the course objectives provide a tangible example of how to transfer. Supervisors

may also “role model” unsupportive behaviours that deter participants from attending the training course. Role modelling of positive behaviours is critical to influence and create the expectation for participants to transfer and act in accordance with the objectives of the course.

A third recommendation is for supervisors to proactively demonstrate their interest in participants’ experience of the course and subsequent learning. No participant who experienced a meeting that was focussed on the course content reported that their supervisor was uninterested. A cost-effective way to treat this hindrance would be for supervisors to schedule meetings with participants who are about to attend and those who have recently completed training. They should also offer to make themselves available to meet during the course if the participant requires guidance.

A fourth recommendation is for supervisors to create a supportive work culture that provides participants with the confidence to try new work behaviours. Participants were trained in the organisation’s “espoused” values of professionalism, respect, innovation, trust and teamwork during the courses. Supervisors that made it difficult for their employees to challenge them or the established ways of working were displaying the “values in use”. Professionals often become defensive when they feel their authority or ideas are being challenged. They attribute blame, often unconsciously, to others or make excuses to ensure they remain in control and to halt further discussion or questioning. Supervisors that use positive reasoning behaviours when their employees make suggestions for improvement or propose new ideas without becoming defensive will create a supportive workplace culture.

A fifth recommendation is that all supervisors be made aware that policies are subject to change when there is a valid case for these changes to be made.

Supervisors whose participants are expressing difficulty in implementing change because of “restrictive policies” may be able to assist by discussing and determining the issues with them and proposing appropriate policy amendments.

In conclusion, this study asked participants to report the behaviours that they found to be helpful or unhelpful in training transfer. The results suggested the importance of three factors in facilitating transfer. One factor is the support provided by supervisors prior to, during and after the training. The second factor that assisted transfer was working with a positive role model. The third and final factor was the hindrances to transfer. The first hindrance was when supervisors that did not show any interest in their employees’ learning or ideas and participants felt discouraged from further efforts to attempt transfer. Another hindrance to transfer was where participants felt they were unable to progress change initiatives due to restrictive policies. An unsupportive culture was the final hindrance to transfer. Participants valued those supervisors that created a positive work culture as it gave them some confidence that implementing a well-considered work practice was possible and would not be punished.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to investigate and understand how organisations can support employee learning and transfer. Whilst the extant literature conveys the importance of providing “support” as an important vehicle to maximise learning and transfer, it does not provide sufficient clarity around the actions, structures or mechanisms that contribute as support in an organisational learning context. A series of three separate but related studies was undertaken to address gaps in the literature and provide guidance for model development and actions for practitioners in supporting learning and transfer.

The data collected during the research was analysed at three different levels. The first study (chapter three) was undertaken at the macro level and it focussed on the factors that employees identified as important in creating a supportive learning environment. This study recognised leadership, culture and distinguishing characteristics as key areas of focus for organisations wanting to create supportive learning environments. The second study (chapter four) analysed the data at the meso level and concentrated on what employees identified as forms of organisational support that promote learning. This study identified and clarified the significant factors that differentiate organisational support from other forms of support. These factors were determined as alignment, senior management commitment and the provision of high quality programs. The third study (chapter five) captured a micro level perspective by analysing the supervisory behaviours that employees perceived to assist in training transfer. This study identified the types of support that supervisors should provide to their employees prior to, during and after attending training. Figure 6.1 shows the three levels of analysis as the three main themes for the studies together with the sub-themes that indicate how the main themes are structured.

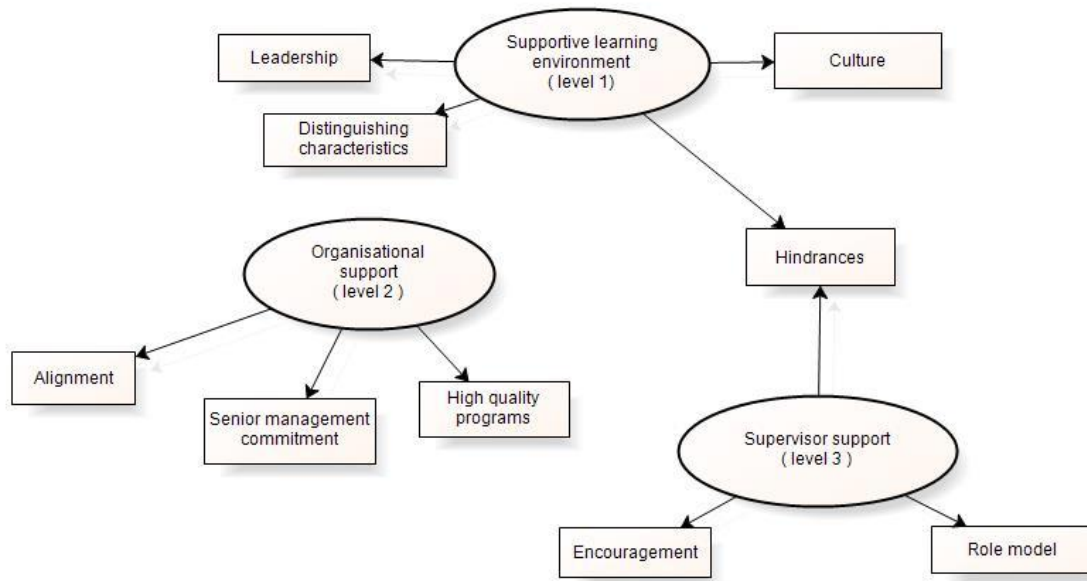


Figure 6.1 Three levels of analysis

Whilst analysing the data at three different levels provided the opportunity to present and publish the results as three separate journal articles, the discussion takes an integrated approach to reflect how learning and learning support are best understood, planned and managed in an organisational setting. The results of the studies are discussed, followed by their contribution to theory and practice. The dissertation concludes with a discussion of the strengths and limitations of the studies, together with some directions for future research.

6.1. CREATING A SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

A key factor in creating a supportive organisational learning environment is the level of involvement of the organisation's most senior leaders. Participants in this study identified several factors that they perceived as evidence that the organisation's leaders cared about developing leadership capability and promoting learning throughout the organisation. The significant financial investment in providing the development

programs, together with the presence of the CEO or Board Chair to open each program or attend as a guest speaker were powerful symbols demonstrating the importance of learning as a vehicle to enhance organisational performance. Participants felt valued and appreciated when they were given the opportunity to better understand the organisation's strategic objectives and priorities directly from such senior organisational leaders. When the organisation's leaders were willing to answer participant's questions and ask employees for their ideas and support, they made them feel they were central to the organisation's future success. These results reinforce Schein (2010), as discussed in chapter three in relation to the impact leaders have on organisational members by demonstrating what they care about. Such tangible evidence of leadership support motivated participants to immerse themselves in the development program and to transfer their learning to the workplace.

Culture is also an important consideration for organisations wanting to create supportive learning environments. Schein (2010) stated that organisations must have experienced stability and a common history or shared important experiences to have cohesive cultures. Cultural differences are often cited as a key issue in organisational mergers, as appeared to be the case in the host organisation. Participants in this study commented about people from other regions inhibiting learning, which suggested the absence of an overarching culture in the "new" organisation and that this was problematic for learning across the organisation. Organisations may also have sub-cultures, which form through association with various groups or functions specific to, but separate from the larger organisation. These sub-cultural groups often form their own perceptions of what is important and such behaviour can have a negative impact on learning (Egan, 2008).

Egan's findings in relation to the potential for sub-cultural influences to impede

learning are relevant to the host organisation in this study. The interview data revealed that whilst the merger had occurred a few years previously, mistrust and even animosity existed between the previously separate organisations, which implied that the seven geographic locations, the previous separate entities, were behaving as sub-cultural groups within the larger organisation. Nonetheless, following joint participation in development programs, participants from all locations related the benefits of learning together and appreciating the different perspectives and contributions of people they didn't normally work with. They reported how they had and were continuing to collaborate across regional and functional areas on projects and initiatives to improve organisational outcomes following the training. The results of this study build on Egan's (2008) findings of adverse impact on learning to reveal a different perspective that shows how learning can become a vehicle that helps to overcome sub-cultural differences. Selecting learning cohorts from cross-disciplinary and different geographical groups assists to break down sub-cultural barriers and in creating a unified organisational culture.

In addition to an organisation's leadership and culture, particular distinguishing organisational characteristics are identified as being associated with supportive learning environments. The study in chapter three essentially sets out to test the Garvin et al. (2008) model for creating supportive learning environments. In general, the results suggested broad support for the model with the exception of 'psychological safety' – providing learners with the opportunity to learn in an environment where they feel secure enough to voice their ideas, concerns and questions and admit to, or make mistakes while learning. The significance of psychological safety in this study is that its investigation has uncovered some unexplained issues.

The significance of making mistakes while learning was disproportionately raised by (the mostly) engineers in the sample. The notion of making mistakes appeared an anathema to them, as they expected that their own work, and that of others, should always be one hundred percent accurate. They used their learning from the development program of this concept to better support their own employees' learning in the workplace and also found that it improved relationships with their employees and other groups that they interacted with. It appears that engineers are taught that mistakes are unacceptable in their profession. However, when engineers, and likely other technical experts, move from a purely technical role to one of leadership, they benefit from understanding that making mistakes under certain circumstances can be a valuable learning tool.

A second explanation regarding the absence of broad support for psychological safety is that having the opportunity to gain confidence in a supportive learning environment prior to returning to the workplace appears to be more significant to women. Eight of the nine female participants, compared to nine of the sixteen males in the study reported gaining confidence during the development programs. Females related how learning and practicing leadership skills with a group of people that they had become comfortable with created a safe trusting environment to extend their skill set. This finding provides limited support for Garvin et al. (2008) regarding the importance of psychological safety, but also raises issues relating to possible gender differences in learning styles.

In addition to the Garvin et al. factors for creating supportive learning environments, several other distinguishing characteristics were identified in chapter three. Whilst each characteristic is unique, relationships between them help to build their significance in creating supportive learning environments. Four of the identified

characteristics; learning with colleagues, building new relationships, appreciation of differences and openness to new ideas and change, help to enrich the learning environment. When program participants from different regions and business groups learn together, they gain a broader understanding of the business and its challenges, as well as hearing about practices and ideas from a wider group of people with different priorities, experiences and perspectives to their own. In addition to learning about theories and strategies from a facilitator, they can also discuss issues and practice new skills and different approaches with their colleagues that they can then apply in their jobs. Learning with colleagues fits with, and builds upon the Garvin et al. (2008) “appreciation of differences” characteristic. Relationships developed with colleagues whilst learning together contribute to the organisational learning environment by assisting participants to continue with their personal development and reinforce their learning. These relationships provide a basis for participants with similar interests or complementary skills and experiences to discuss issues and support each other, as well as to collaborate on organisational improvement initiatives or projects following the program.

Gaining confidence and self-awareness were regarded by interviewees as the most important benefits gained from participating in the development programs. These two characteristics were key elements that enabled the recently trained managers to apply their new skills in the workplace. Confidence parallels Bandura’s (1997) self-efficacy theory in that it provides an individual with the belief that they can accomplish specific tasks and succeed in specific situations. In this case confidence was built through personal coaching, immersion in guided group discussions and the opportunity to practice what they were learning during training and afterwards in the workplace. Participants reported that gaining confidence empowered them to offer their opinions

and ideas at meetings including management, to feel able to apply new activity, and to better manage and coach their own employees.

Self-awareness was acquired through feedback from the program facilitators, coaches and cohort members, as well as through the use of psychological testing instruments. Achieving self-awareness assists in avoiding the pitfalls of overconfidence such as overestimating knowledge or ability. In this case it helped participants to understand the impact they had on others and enabled them to modify their approach if they wanted to create a different impression or to influence a desired outcome. Program participants received one-to-one coaching as part of their development, as well as theory relevant to coaching and its application in a variety of contexts. Participants reported how their experience of coaching enabled their confidence in coaching their own employees following the development program. As many skills taught in development programs are generic, it is likely that training design plays a greater role in imparting confidence and self-awareness than the specific skills taught. Whilst organisations may select different competencies as the focus areas for their development programs, ensuring appropriate methods are used to help participants gain self-awareness and confidence is critically important in creating an environment that facilitates learning and transfer.

Participants also reported becoming sufficiently confident to share with their employees some of the learnings, tools and models from the development program, such as enhanced communication skills, team building and conflict resolution skills. These skills in turn had the potential to be cascaded further throughout the organisation. 'Sharing the learning' was the label that the researcher applied to the excerpts of the interview transcripts where participants related how they had taught these new skills to their employees following their own training experience. The notion

of sharing the learning is akin to Goldman et al's (2014) second-hand learning. These authors suggested second-hand learning can occur via observation and copying of other graduates behaviour, learning by working with graduates on projects and receiving specific guidance from graduates. These forms of learning are consistent with the results from this study. In addition to that which they intentionally shared, it was quite likely that the newly trained managers also passed on learning through informal means such as role-modelling and other interactions with their employees and colleagues. Whilst participants in this research related the importance of the organisation's leaders role-modelling the behaviours and values they wanted to see in the organisation, it also appears that role modelling skills and strategies learnt during training is a means of vicariously transferring learning to others.

6.2. ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT FOR LEARNING

Whilst the literature recognises the importance of organisational support for learning it is not sufficiently differentiated from supervisor or other forms of support to provide clarity. A second level of analysis applied to the data to gain a better understanding of how organisations can promote learning identified three unique areas of organisational support for learning. They are senior management commitment, providing high quality relevant programs and alignment. Senior managers were perceived to demonstrate their commitment to learning in several ways. Ongoing financial investment in building the new organisation and in providing the development programs was acknowledged as significant, but providing funding alone is insufficient to generate a new culture of learning. What helped to demonstrate commitment was senior management's continuing involvement in and sponsorship of the development programs. When senior managers participate in the same development programs as other employees, or act as guest speakers and talk about current and future issues facing the organisation and

how the participants are important to the organisation's success, they add credibility that the organisation is committed to building a new and common learning culture. These findings build on the premise by Kotter (2001), that credibility is a major challenge in sharing understanding and commitment, by providing some practical examples of how senior managers can establish their credibility through demonstrating their ongoing commitment to providing support for learning. Senior management commitment is also recognised to extend beyond the development programs through the provision of organisational level reinforcement initiatives following program completion. Such initiatives included professional coaching between course modules and post program; implementing leadership forums where graduates showcased their projects or initiatives; program graduates acting as guest speakers at other programs or workgroup meetings; delivering presentations at organisational and external forums and leading or participating in organisational projects. Purposely developing and providing such opportunities for newly trained graduates reinforces and acknowledges their learning and supports transfer. It also demonstrates senior managements' commitment to learning and sends signals to the entire organisation that learning is valued.

The perceived high quality and relevance of the development programs were significant factors in participants' belief that the organisation was focussed on developing employee capability by supporting their development to become better leaders and supervisors. One factor that influenced the perception participants were engaging with a high quality program is that the organisation employed providers with a well-regarded reputation for bringing academic rigour and practitioner relevance to their programs. This created an element of prestige among the participants to be invited into the program and an expectation that participation would be worthwhile.

Participants in this study related how having the organisation's strategic agenda as well as its values incorporated into the program content helped them to understand their role in the bigger picture and to place their learning into context. Researchers agree that aligning training initiatives with corporate strategy is important and that trainees are better able to transfer learning under these conditions (Montesino, 2002; O'Connor et al., 2006). In this case the providers were given copies of organisational documentation such as strategic plans, operational plans, the organisational structure, and key project initiatives. Visiting the organisations' regional areas and meeting with regional managers and future program participants likely assisted in aligning the program content and delivery strategy with the organisational context and strategic direction. Having organisational leaders that are willing to share information about current and future challenges assists providers to create relevant learning resources to align the training content with the corporate strategy and participant's work.

Recognising the need to ensure alignment across the business, the host organisation made some changes to its human resource practices. Participants discussed how recruitment and selection procedures, position descriptions, performance management processes, the management reporting system and the strategic plan were updated to include some of the language and concepts from the development programs. Such actions are consistent with the 4I framework of organisational learning (Crossan et al., 1999) which shows how organisations institutionalise learning by embedding it in their systems, practices and information systems. Regardless of whether the host organisation was aware of the 4I framework or not, its actions served to reinforce the alignment between strategy, training and participants' work, as well as demonstrating how learning can be applied and valued in the workplace.

Whilst the results of this research do not give explicit credence to the value of workplace learning, this does not imply that workplace learning would not also benefit from a supportive learning environment. In this case the host organisation chose 'formal' learning as a vehicle to assist the organisation to become more customer responsive and innovative to succeed in a changing business environment. As the study participants were recent graduates of development programs and the interview questions largely related to the development programs, it is logical that workplace learning was not significantly featured in the data. However, the reinforcement initiatives following the training and the coaching provided to employees by newly trained supervisors, role modelling and other activities such as participating in workplace projects are all examples of workplace learning. Formal learning and workplace learning play important complementary roles in supporting employees to learn and transfer their learning to the work environment.

6.3. SUPERVISOR SUPPORT FOR LEARNING AND TRANSFER

The literature widely recognises that supervisor support has a significant impact on training transfer. Whilst many researchers report that supervisor support positively impacts training transfer, the specific supervisory behaviours that facilitate transfer are not clearly understood. This study applied a micro level perspective in analysing the data to better understand which supervisor behaviours can positively impact the work environment and stimulate greater levels of employee learning and transfer.

One outcome from this study is the PDA model of supervisor support (Lancaster et al., 2013, p. 17). The PDA model suggests what the supervisor does "*prior*" to, "*during*" and "*after*" the course is central to developing motivation to learn and transfer learning. The model addresses the gap in the literature by providing a comprehensive account of the forms of support that enhance or inhibit transfer. See figure 5. 2. This

model may assist supervisors to understand both the importance of their role in supporting employee learning and transfer, and how/when to provide appropriate support.

Supervisors who met with their employees “*prior*” to training were able to clarify their expectations, to discuss the training content and how it might be applied in the workplace. It was also an opportunity for supervisors to convey their confidence in participants’ ability to master the program’s outcomes. Participants felt motivated to take part in the development programs when their supervisors expressed confidence in their ability to learn the new concepts and encouraged them to think of ideas and initiatives that would ensure they could use their new learning in the workplace.

Support “*during*” the program was less common but appeared to be more practical than that provided prior to or after training. Supervisors that made themselves available between course modules of the programs to provide assistance to find information, to discuss and clarify participants’ project ideas, or to provide exposure to areas that the participant had not previously experienced were considered supportive. Support during the program was accessed by employees participating in the entry level leadership program with less management experience and demonstrates the importance of mentoring. It is not clear why more senior participants were less likely to seek support during the program. One possibility is that senior managers are time poor and are unable to fill the mentor role during this stage. Another possibility is that these participants are less likely to seek help. Future studies should seek to replicate this finding and better understand the reasons why senior staff were less likely to seek a mentor.

Meetings “*after*” the programs provided the greatest opportunity for supervisors to positively impact transfer. Specific supervisor behaviours such as providing

opportunities to practice new skills, assistance to resolve issues, assigning challenging goals, allowing participants the autonomy to develop their own solutions, providing feedback on progress and acknowledging participants' achievements were considered as tangible evidence of their supervisor's faith in them as valued employees and a genuine desire to help them become better leaders.

Participants reported being particularly motivated to transfer when their supervisors expressed interest in what they had learnt. Supervisors were regarded as especially supportive when they scheduled specific meetings to discuss what value their employees believed they had gained from attending the training and to provide support or encouragement to develop new ideas or initiatives that they wanted to implement. Being open to new ideas was one of the Garvin et al. (2008) supportive learning environment characteristics and this research found it is also positively associated with supervisor support. The majority of interaction between employees and the organisation is via the supervisor and therefore supervisors are a fundamental factor in creating a supportive learning environment.

Role modelling by supervisors of the behaviours and skills desired in the workplace is viewed as a strong symbol of the importance that they place on the training. Supervisors that are unable to align their behaviour in accordance with the organisation's goals only serve to undermine the creation of a supportive organisational learning environment. Participants expressing cynicism about supervisors that failed to role model the organisation's agenda considered them to be unsupportive of the organisation's learning agenda. In general, participants felt motivated to transfer their learning into the workplace but not with supervisors that showed little to no interest *prior, during or after* the program. This study found that the main barriers to transfer

were the lack of supervisor interest and encouragement. Scheduling meetings with employees following training may mitigate the majority of perceived barriers to transfer.

6.4. CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE RESEARCH

6.4.1. CONTRIBUTION TO THEORY

The literature review outlined existing models that are considered to support learning and transfer. At the same time a review of the literature also revealed some gaps in the knowledge about the forms of support that assist learning and transfer. In order to investigate the factors that employees considered important in creating a supportive learning environment, the utility of the 'four distinguishing characteristics of a supportive learning environment' outlined in Garvin et al.'s (2008) conceptual article were examined. The results of the first study (chapter three) found empirical support for three of the Garvin et al. characteristics - appreciation of differences, openness to new ideas and time for reflection, with partial support found for the fourth characteristic - psychological safety. The results also add to the literature by identifying the presence of several other factors important in creating a supportive environment. Building relationships, open communications, sharing the learning, coaching, confidence and self-awareness were also important to creating a supportive learning environment.

While organisational culture is recognised as important to learning (Egan et al., 2004; Lucas and Kline, 2008; Schein, 2010), few studies examine the impact of subcultures on learning (Egan, 2008). This study contributes to the theory by increasing the knowledge about the relationship between subcultural groups and learning. Whilst Egan (2008) found that organisational subcultures had a detrimental impact on learning, the results of this study suggested that selecting learning cohorts from cross-disciplinary and geographically diverse groups, helped to break down the influence of subcultures and seemed to contribute to creating a supportive learning environment.

Many of the studies reviewed, including Baldwin and Ford (1988), Birdi et al. (1997), Cromwell and Kolb (2004) and Lim and Morris (2006) identified that both organisational and supervisor support have a significant impact on learning and transfer. The literature however, does not sufficiently discriminate between organisational and supervisor support. The results of the second study add to the theory by clarifying how organisational support is distinct from supervisor support. The three identified key factors that distinguish organisational support from supervisor support are alignment, senior management commitment and the provision of high quality relevant programs.

Study two further contributes to theory by broadening the notion of alignment from the training environment to the work environment. Alignment is generally considered as aligning training with corporate strategy (O'Connor et al., 2006). The results of this study suggest that updating business processes to align with the terminology and competencies from the development program also served to support employees' efforts to use their new skills and embed their learning into every day work practices.

Supervisor support is widely acknowledged in the literature as a critical work environment factor that supports learning and transfer (Bhatti et al., 2013; Blume et al., 2010; Cromwell and Kolb, 2004; Martin, 2010). However the supervisory behaviours, types of support that are beneficial and when and how to provide such support is not widely understood. The final contribution to theory made by the results of study three in the series is the PDA model of supervisor support (Lancaster et al., 2013) that identifies the supervisor behaviours and types of support that should be provided prior to, during and after training.

6.4.2. CONTRIBUTION TO PRACTICE

The implications for practice arising from this research mainly relate to organisational learning strategies. As the implications from the studies concern the organisational learning environment, culture, leadership, organisational and supervisor practices, it is important that people responsible for developing and implementing organisational learning strategies should be experienced in dealing with the more complex issues that extend beyond delivering training. This is something often overlooked in organisations, where training is scheduled without strategies in place to create appropriate support mechanisms that assist learners to transfer their learning to the workplace. The results of this research provide some useful insights into what participants perceived as important in supporting their learning, which may assist organisations and practitioners to better support their employees' learning and transfer.

A key element in supporting learning is ensuring executive level commitment for any organisation-wide development program. These studies contribute to practice by providing practical examples of how an organisation's senior leaders can add credibility to development initiatives by demonstrating the value they place on the training. Such actions include endorsement of the learning strategy, financial commitment and personal involvement in the program's design, participation in the training courses and providing follow-up initiatives to reinforce learning and support transfer.

One way that organisations can motivate employees to learn and transfer their learning to the workplace is to ensure the training is relevant to the learner (Salas et al., 2012). The results from these studies may help practitioners' understanding of practices that assist in making training relevant. Customising the development programs to align the learning outcomes with the organisation's strategies and values

as well as the participants' work influenced perceptions of the training being high quality and relevant. Engaging reputable providers to develop and deliver the training, as well as having the CEO or Board Chairman open programs and discuss current challenges and initiatives with the participants contributed to the reputation of the programs and hence to the employees' motivation to participate and apply their learning.

Purposefully selecting cohorts for the development programs from across different regional and functional areas of the organisation helped to create a supportive learning environment. Apart from acting as a catalyst to break down subcultures which had previously been seen as problematic to learning by participants, they found that learning together with people from diverse areas of the same organisation expanded their ideas and perspectives. This helped them to discuss current problems and potential solutions with others that may have some experience of the issue and to form ongoing working relationships.

Contributions to practice from these studies include an understanding of how organisations can provide managers with the skills and confidence to share their learning with their employees. Coaching skills were included in the program design as a specific learning outcome. Participants also experienced the benefits of being coached by external professional coaches during and following the training program, which helped to embed the learning and build their confidence. They reported how they were coaching and sharing many of the tools and concepts with their own employees and thus cascading the learning throughout the organisation.

The majority of employees' dealings with the organisation are through their supervisors and therefore the support that supervisors provide to help employees to learn and transfer their learning to the workplace is extremely important. As the level of support provided by supervisors varies across organisations and even within the same

organisation (Ellstrom and Ellstrom, 2014) as evidenced in study three, it is possible that the significance of their influence may be a blind spot to supervisors. The PDA model of supervisor support (Lancaster et al., 2013) developed from the results of this study contributes to practice by assisting organisations and practitioners to better understand the nature and the importance of the role that supervisors play in supporting employee learning. This model may assist organisations to develop supervisors to recognise the importance of supporting their employees learning before, during and after a major learning intervention.

The results from study two found that alignment between training initiatives, organisational strategy, processes and practices is important for learning. Collectively the three studies demonstrate the importance of aligning objectives across all levels of the organisation to facilitate the creation of a supportive learning environment. To successfully implement an organisation's learning strategy it is important to assess the organisation's culture to ensure that it enables, rather than hinders learning. It is also essential for the organisations leadership to be aligned in understanding the importance of learning as a tool in building employee capability to meet organisational goals.

6.5. STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The collective results from the present studies need to be considered in light of the strengths and weaknesses associated with the design of the studies.

The learning and transfer literature is dominated by positivist quantitative studies that are less able to represent employee voice (Lincoln et al., 2013; Neuman, 2014). Therefore, the use of a phenomenological constructivist approach to data collection allowed a detailed examination of the relevant factors that assisted

individuals to maximise and transfer their learning. This approach provided a rich data that produced a level of clarity and differentiation between the types of support provided by organisations, senior management and supervisors that has not previously been reported. Establishing the trustworthiness of the data is important and in this case is assisted by the chain of evidence maintained in the NVivo database which includes the interview transcripts and questions, an audit trail of the analysis process and the study's outcomes (Shenton, 2004; Yin, 2009). Documentation provided by the organisation, such as copies of policies, program overviews and reviews, cultural and employee engagement surveys, enabled the researcher to cross check the data against the company's records to verify the trustworthiness of the data set.

A second strength is the diversity of the participants in the studies. Participants were drawn from across organisational levels and were selected based on their roles as team leaders or managers; the sample comprised key people charged with carrying out the organisation's goals of becoming customer focussed. The sample also purposefully included participants from each of the four development programs and both genders. See table 5.2. Purposeful sampling, together with a rich detailed description of the participants' experiences and perceptions, is used to establish transferability, which allows readers to determine whether the findings can be applied to other situations and contexts (Lincoln et al., 2013; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Neuman, 2014).

Despite the strengths, there are also some limitations to the studies. The first limitation is that the three studies were based on self-report data and it is recognised that this method of data collection in the absence of other data may contain some bias generated by participants providing socially desirable responses or seeking to meet the interviewer's expectations (Gittelman et al., 2015; Krumpal, 2013). With qualitative

research credibility is critical to establish trustworthiness in relation to the congruence of the findings with reality (Shenton, 2004); in this case triangulation was used to establish the credibility of the data collection process (Shenton, 2004). This included gaining familiarity with the culture of the host organisation during site visits and reviewing relevant organisational documents and using different informants in addition to the study participants, such as senior managers, supervisors and human resource staff to gather relevant information about the organisation and the development programs. Member checking was also conducted following the interviews to allow participants the opportunity to check their interview transcript for accuracy (Lincoln et al., 2013).

The data were collected from a single case study and arguably, may represent a further limitation as single cases are not considered as strong a basis for generalising to a population of cases as are other research designs (Yin, 2009). Nonetheless, there is still a great deal that is general that can be learned from a single case (Stake, 1995). Results drawn from a single organisation may not allow for the results to be generalised but it may also be flawed logic to assume results should generalise. Organisations are unique and vary on many structural criteria, but also comprise a workforce with different levels of motivation and therefore one should not assume the replicability of what worked in one organisation will be successful in another Stake (1995).

A further limitation is arguably the small sample size; six participants were drawn from each of the four programs. Morse (1994) recommends using at least six interviews for phenomenological studies and Guest et al. (2006) advises that six to twelve interviews is sufficient to enable the development of meaningful themes and

useful interpretations. In this research project twenty-four participants were interviewed and thus the sample size was considered sufficient.

Finally, the interview questions may have compelled the participants to focus on the social issues impacting their learning and ignored technical or physical factors that could have hindered their learning. The researcher was familiar with the organisation and may have brought an unconscious bias to the interview. At the same time, this familiarity permits greater rapport and allows better follow up questions to be asked.

6.6. DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This research is one of the first that has sought to understand the 'black-box' of identifying the meaning of supervisor and organisational support, the role of leadership and that of culture in creating positive work environments that support learning and transfer. Therefore, future studies should aim to overcome the limitations that were raised in the previous section.

One recommendation is to conduct further studies across multiple cases to assess the strength of the present findings (Yin, 2009). Organisations and employees vary on a number of criteria and if across these characteristics the results are consistent with the present results, these findings serve to support the utility of the PDA model of supervisor support (Lancaster et al., 2013). Additionally, further studies should seek to validate this study's results in relation to learning cohorts comprised from across sub-cultural groups assisting to create unified organisational cultures and supportive learning environments.

A second recommendation is to develop a survey tool that includes program graduates, their supervisors and their team members. This would increase the sample size and enable expansion of the scope of the study. For example, gathering data from

the three levels would assist to validate graduate's claims of learning and transfer and the survey could be designed to capture details of second hand learning, which was mentioned in this research, but unable to be validated.

The results also raised some questions about potential gender differences relating to gaining confidence. A significantly higher percentage of female participants than male participants reported that the development program enhanced their confidence to apply leadership skills in the workplace. Gender differences were not a specific focus of this research and therefore further research is required to understand the implications of this finding.

6.7. THESIS SUMMARY

The results from the present set of studies provide clarity on how organisations can create environments that support learning and transfer. Such environments require a systematic and holistic approach to learning. An organisation with an overarching learning strategy that incorporates all levels of the organisation will likely have better outcomes than one employing an uncoordinated approach to learning. For example, whilst supervisors may provide support for their employees' learning and transfer, the desired outcomes are less likely to be achieved if the work environment and organisation aren't aligned to support learning. The importance of providing consistent support at all organisational levels should not be underestimated.

The PDA model of supervisor support (Lancaster et al., 2013) should be included in the organisation's learning strategy and all supervisors trained in the importance and practical understanding of how to support employees' learning and transfer. Similarly senior leaders should be made aware of their impact and influence on learning and the potential benefits to the organisation of their ongoing support for learning. The support provided from senior leaders down to supervisors should be

aligned through the organisation's learning strategy to ensure there is a shared understanding of the organisation's philosophical beliefs about the importance of learning.

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APPENDIX A: LEADERSHIP PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Leadership Programs				
PROGRAM	Management Foundations (MF)	Leadership Development Program (LDP)	Leadership Foundations (LF)	Senior Leadership Development Program (SLDP)
TARGET GROUP	Workgroup and team leaders, supervisors	Middle managers (direct report to a senior manager)	Senior manager (direct report to a general manager)	Senior managers (prerequisite leadership foundations program)
PROGRAM DURATION	Conducted over several months : 2 day blocks	Residential 1x5 days	Residential 2x4 days	Residential 2x4 days
PROGRAM CONTENT	<p>Work priorities and professional development</p> <p>Effective workplace relationships</p> <p>Operational plans</p> <p>Workplace safety</p> <p>Team effectiveness</p> <p>Workplace information systems</p> <p>Customer service</p> <p>Innovation and Change</p> <p>Continuous Improvement</p> <p>Managing people</p> <p>Learning organisations</p>	<p>Leadership – setting the scene</p> <p>Self-awareness and personal effectiveness</p> <p>Emotional intelligence</p> <p>Influence & conflict</p> <p>Leadership and team dynamics</p> <p>Leadership and Coaching</p> <p>Change management</p> <p>Managing performance through change</p> <p>Leadership and strategy</p>	<p>Leadership and self - personal awareness and development</p> <p>Leadership and team-effective teamwork and coaching</p> <p>Leadership and the organisation-culture and teams</p> <p>Leadership and the future-managing change</p> <p>Futures thinking</p> <p>Strategic leadership and innovation</p> <p>Leadership, networking and communication</p>	<p>Strategic Thinking</p> <p>Building and maintaining relationships</p> <p>Innovation and creativity</p> <p>Stakeholder influencing</p>
EXIT OUTCOME	Certificate iv or Diploma in Business	Tertiary standard non accredited	Tertiary standard non accredited	Tertiary standard non accredited

APPENDIX B: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE



<Date>

<Addressee>

Dear <name>

I am writing to request your involvement as a participant in my research looking at supervisor and organisational support for learning, which is being conducted as part of my Doctor of Business Research (DBR) studies with Central Queensland University.

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the factors that may either help or hinder the transfer of skills and knowledge learned in training programs back to the workplace. A better understanding of the barriers to transfer the learning may be beneficial to your career development and will inform those within the organisation who are responsible for implementing change.

For this stage of my DBR project, I will conduct interviews with a sample of participants from <organisation> leadership programs. Participation in this study is purely voluntary and you may elect to withdraw your participation at any point during the interview. Not participating will have no negative consequences for your career.

The interviews should take no more than one hour of your time. During the interview I will record your answers on paper only. Your responses will be treated as confidential and anonymous.

The information collected from the interviews will be used solely for the purpose of my University studies. Summary information will be used in journal articles and in my final research, but there will be no information used that could identify you in any way. You may request a copy of the final report which will also be available to <organisation>.

I will also attach an Information Sheet and Consent form for your information.

If you are willing to participate, would you please respond by email or telephone before the <date>, and I will then telephone you to arrange a convenient interview time and location.

Thank you for considering my request,

Sue Lancaster

Email: <.....>

Telephone: <.....>



Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research looking at supervisor and organisational support for learning, which is being conducted as part of my Doctor of Business Research (DBR) studies with Central Queensland University.

This research is concerned with gaining a better understanding of the factors that support learning and the issues faced by individuals in their efforts to transfer the skills and knowledge gained in training programs back to the workplace. A better understanding of the factors that either help or hinder transferring learning in the workplace will help individuals with their own careers and will also inform those within organisations responsible for implementing change.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are guaranteed confidentiality. The interviews should take no more than one hour of your time. During the interview I will record your answers on paper only. Your responses will be treated as confidential and anonymous.

Participation in this project does not expose respondents to any possible personal, legal, or psychological risk. However, should any participant feel any concern whatsoever, there is an Employee Assistance Program available for support - on 1800 808 374; web link: www.assureprograms.com.au

This research will be reported within my final DBR report, and elements of it will be reported in journal articles. In all of these situations, no individual will be identified and the level of information provided about individuals views will not allow for identification. Choosing not to participate in this study will have no adverse impact on you whatsoever and you may choose to withdraw your participation at any time.

Data will be stored for five years in accordance with the CQU Code of Conduct for Research. Please contact the CQU Office of Research (tel 0749 23 2607 or e-mail research-enquiries@cqu.edu.au) should there be any concerns about the nature and/or conduct of this research project.

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM



Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research on supervisor and organisational support for learning, which is being conducted as part of my Doctor of Business Research (DBR) studies with Central Queensland University.

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- Have read and understood the information provided in the information sheet about this project
- Have had any questions answered to your satisfaction
- Understand that you are free to withdraw at any time without comment or penalty
- Understand that you can contact the researcher if you have any questions about the project
- Agree to participate in this project

Name:	
Signature:	
Date:	

If you would like to receive a summary report of the research findings please complete your contact details below:

I would like to receive a copy of the research findings - Yes ☐ No ☐

Address to send copy of research findings to:

Sue Lancaster

Email: <.....>

Telephone: <.....>

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW QUESTION GUIDE

1. What did you find most interesting about the Leadership Development program?
2. How does the organisation demonstrate that it is genuinely interested in helping its managers to become better leaders?
3. What was the nature of any discussion or communication with your manager about the LDP prior to attending?
4. Do you think your manager understands the concepts you learnt in the LDP and how is/would it be helpful if he/she did?
5. Can you tell me about any discussions that you had with your manager about the program since you completed it?
6. What new skills has the Leadership Development Program (LDP) provided you with to be more effective on the job?
7. How have you been able to apply any of the learning outcomes or new skills from the program back at work?
 - Can you give me an example/tell me more about what you have done differently
 - What benefits have there been?
8. How have you shared any of the concepts that you learnt on the program with anyone else since you completed it?
 - Who have you discussed it with?
 - What has been the benefit?
9. Can you describe how having attended the course has made any difference to the way you manage your staff, or interact with others?
10. How does your manager or the organisation encourage you to use the new skills that you learnt in the leadership development program?
11. Is your manager tolerant of changes that you initiate as a result of learning new skills in training?
 - Can you tell me a bit more about that?
12. How could policies, procedures or any other expectations get in the way of using any of the new skills or processes you learnt on the program?
13. Is there anything else that you can think of that may either help, or hinder being able to apply learning outcomes from Leadership Development Programs back on the job?