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**Returning the favor: Positive employee responses to supervisor and peer support for training transfer**

**Abstract**

Drawing on social exchange theory and associated notions of reciprocity, we argue that interpersonal support for training transfer in the workplace is associated with increased employee task performance and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), and reduced turnover intention. We test our hypotheses using survey data from 786 Chinese retail employees. The findings showed that when employees’ perceive high levels of supervisor/peer support for training transfer, they are more likely to deliver higher levels of task performance and OCB in response, which in turn, lead to reduced turnover intention. We also found that the strength of the relationship between supervisor/peer support for training transfer on individuals’ OCB varied across regions within China. The results confirmed the moderating role of regional context (coastal and inland regions) on the relationship between supervisor/peer support for training transfer on individuals’ OCB with a stronger effect found in less economically developed inland regions. The moderating effect of region indicates that cross-cultural researchers need to be aware of possible within-country variation in employee attitudes and values.

**Keywords:** Supervisor support; peer support; training transfer; task performance; organizational citizenship behavior; turnover intention; collectivism; China

**Introduction**

With billions of dollars expended annually on work-related training in the world’s major economies (ASTD, 2013; Carliner & Bakir, 2010), it is little wonder that human resource development (HRD) literature has moved beyond training provision concern, towards measures that capture training evaluation-related factors including work environment, trainee reactions, learning, and behavior change, and work-related outcomes (Werner, 2014). Identifying and promoting effective training transfer strategies, in particular, has become a key focus within HRD, for researchers and practitioners alike (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009; Grossman & Salas, 2011; Tharenou, Saks, & Moore, 2007). One of the most studied factors with respect to training transfer is the degree to which trainees receive interpersonal support for their transfer efforts when they apply learnt skills/knowledge in the workplace (Grossman & Salas, 2011).

Interpersonal support refers primarily to the behavior and attitudes of supervisors and co-workers that either support or inhibit learning transfer in the workplace (Bates, Holton, Seyler, & Carvalho, 2000, p. 20). Many authors consider this support crucial to the utilization of workplace learning (e.g., Blume, Ford, Baldwin, & Huang, 2010; Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Grossman & Salas, 2011; Holton, Bates, & Ruona, 2000). Such positive reciprocity is consistent with social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). Norms of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) suggest that people frequently feel an obligation to respond in kind when they receive favorable treatment from others. Research into reciprocity in social exchanges at work indicates that people who perceive themselves as being generally supported, cared for and valued by the organization and those acting on its behalf (e.g. supervisors) will be motivated to reciprocate that support in some way, such as through increased effort on the job and engaging in citizenship behavior (Colquitt *et al*., 2013; Konovsky & Pugh, 1994; O'Boyle Jr, Forsyth, Banks, & McDaniel, 2012).

The proposition that interpersonal support plays a strong role in training transfer has an intuitive appeal. However, the positive reciprocity relationship between interpersonal support for training transfer and transfer outcomes may not be as straightforward as the HRD literature would lead us to believe. For instance, cross-cultural research suggests that the ways in which people respond to support from others will vary across different cultural contexts (Chen & Aryee, 2007; Miller *et al*., 2014; Shen, Wan, & Wyer Jr, 2011). It has been observed, for instance, that people from countries where the cultural values of interdependence and communality (collectivism) predominate are more likely to feel obliged to reciprocate favorable treatment in social exchanges than in countries that promulgate a more individualistic, independent view of the self (Shen *et al*., 2011). In the context of interpersonal support for training transfer, this may mean that people in more collectivistic cultural settings are predisposed to respond more favorably to such acts of support than those from more individualistic cultural settings.

Building upon existing HRD literature, this paper draws upon the basic insights of social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Shore, Coyle-Shapiro, Chen, & Tetrick, 2009) to develop a more fine-grained theoretical perspective on how employees respond to support for training transfer provided by others at work. Firstly, we propose that support from supervisors and peers for an employee’s attempts to transfer what they have learned will generate benefits to the organization beyond those associated with increased task performance. That is, not only will such support exert a positive influence by enabling more effective transfer of task-relevant learning, employees will also feel obliged to reciprocate this favorable treatment by behaving in ways that benefit the organization and their peers more generally, for example, by engaging in organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). Secondly, we argue that supervisor and peer support for training transfer will, by virtue of its positive influence on task performance and OCB, have the added benefit of reducing employees’ turnover intention. This will, in turn, assist employers in recouping and amortizing the costs of investments in human capital brought about through training. Finally, echoing the view that “even if reciprocity is a human universal”, “individuals differ in the degree they endorse reciprocity (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005, p. 877). we propose that cultural context will have an impact on how employees respond to support for training transfer. We seek to demonstrate that employees working in societal contexts characterized by more collectivistic cultural values will be more likely to positively reciprocate supervisor and peer support for training transfer than those working in contexts where collectivistic values are weaker. Figure 1 depicts the study’s overall theoretical framework.

**-----------------------INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE---------------------**

**Support for training transfer and transfer outcomes**

It is generally accepted that extensive investment in workplace training is a key feature of HRD-practices designed to produce high levels of performance at both the individual and organizational level (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009; Jiang, Lepak, Hu, & Baer, 2012; Werner, 2014). However, the extent of the returns received by organizations on such investments in human capital are crucially dependent upon the effective transfer of what employees learn through training (Blume *et al*, 2010; Grossman & Salas, 2011). Research into factors influencing effective transfer of training has consistently linked the degree of support provided by both supervisors and peers to better transfer outcomes (Blume *et al*., 2010; Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Chiaburu, Van Dam, & Hutchins, 2010; Grossman & Salas, 2011). It should be noted that interpersonal support can be categorized as either ‘content general’ or ‘content specific’ support. General interpersonal support refers the degree to which employees perceive that supervisors or peers ‘care about their global well-being on the job through providing positive social interaction or resources’, whereas ‘content-specific support involves perceptions of care and the provision of resources to reinforce a particular type of role demand’ (Kossek, Pichler, Bodner, & Hammer, 2011, p. 292).

In this study, we examine interpersonal support for training transfer, focusing specifically on the degree to which perceived supervisor or peer support reinforce the use of training on the job (Holton *et al*., 2000). We follow Holton *et al*.’s (2000) definition of supervisor and peer support for training transfer. Supervisor support for training transfer refers to the degree to which the trainee’s supervisor provides opportunities to use newly learned knowledge, skills and abilities, and recognizes and rewards the use of skills on the job. Peer support for training transfer involves coworkers encouraging the trainee to use what has been learned in the work setting, and offering positive feedback on the application of those skills.

The beneficial impact of such interpersonal support for training transfer is traditionally viewed in terms of its enabling impact on employees’ task performance. That is, to the extent to which it is instrumental in effecting better transfer of learned competencies, support for training transfer will lift the performance of individuals in receipt of that support (Blume *et al*., 2010; Grossman & Salas, 2011; Shantz & Latham, 2012). Thus, an employee who is provided with extensive opportunities to practice and apply valuable knowledge, skills and abilities acquired through training by their supervisor, or is given constructive feedback on their transfer efforts by their co-workers, will tend to outperform someone who is denied such support.

However, social exchange theory provides a second possible mechanism whereby interpersonal support for training transfer can generate benefits for the organization. Just as the provision of training itself can be viewed as a ‘gift’ from an employer that predisposes the employee to respond in-kind, for example, by providing commitment, loyalty and performance to the organization (Balkin & Richebé, 2007), so the provision of support for transfer by supervisors and peers potentially also invokes acts of reciprocity. Supervisor and peer support is often interpreted by employees as signaling support and recognition from the organization (Chen, Tsui, & Farh, 2002; Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002; Hui, Lee, & Rousseau, 2004). Social exchange theory, therefore, predicts that employees who perceive support from supervisors and peers will be motivated to return the favor by engaging in behaviors that are helpful to these supporters and, by extension, the organization (Aryee, Budhwar, & Chen, 2002; Aryee, Chen, Sun, & Debrah, 2007; Colquitt *et al*., 2013; Ilies, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007; Wilson, Sin, & Conlon, 2010).

Studies have consistently shown that employees reciprocate the support they receive from supervisors and peers by producing higher levels of task performance and engaging in OCB (LePine, Erez, & Johnson, 2002; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000; Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006; Tse, Dasborough, & Ashkanasy, 2008). Task performance is defined as ‘the effectiveness with which job incumbents perform activities that contribute to the organization’s technical core either directly by implementing a part of its technological process, or indirectly by providing it with needed materials or service’ (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997, p. 99). OCB, meanwhile, refers to discretionary behavior in the form of ‘performance that supports the social and psychological environment in which task performance takes place’ (Organ, 1997, p. 95). Such behavior can include ‘helping others, taking on additional responsibilities, putting in extra hours, defending the organization, and speaking out about important organizational issues’ (Bolino, Klotz, Turnley, & Harvey, 2013, p. 542). Since OCB is not enforced by formal job descriptions, it is heavily contingent on motivational influences (van Knippenberg, van Prooijen, & Sleebos, 2015). It is, therefore, particularly suited to test predictions regarding perceived support from supervisors and peers, and the motivation to reciprocate it, at the individual level of analysis.

We apply social exchange theory and associated notions of reciprocity to the specific context of interpersonal support provided to employees in transferring their training to the workplace. When employees perceive that their supervisors and/or peers genuinely care about their training and development and assist them to apply learned skills and knowledge, norms of reciprocity in social exchange will mean that they are likely to feel obliged to reciprocate that support by engaging in higher levels of both task performance and OCB. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

*H1.* Perceived supervisor support for training transfer will be positively related to employees’ reported (a) task performance, and (b) organizational citizenship behavior.

*H2*. Perceived peer support for training transfer will be positively related to employees’ reported (a) task performance, and (b) organizational citizenship behavior.

The benefits of supervisor and peer support for training transfer may extend even further, however. Studies have consistently shown that both task performance and OCB have a negative effect on employee turnover intention (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000; Mossholder, Settoon, & Henagan, 2005; Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, & Blume, 2009). Meanwhile, OCB has been found to mediate the negative relationship between perceived support and voluntary turnover (Allen, Shore, & Griffeth, 2003). In line with this evidence, we argue that interpersonal support for training transfer will have an indirect negative impact on turnover intention, mediated by task performance and OCB. Therefore, we hypothesize:

*H3.* The negative relationship between perceived support for training transfer and employee turnover intention is mediated by employees’ reported (a) task performance and (b) organizational citizenship behavior.

**Sociocultural context and responses to transfer support**

Although reciprocity has often been regarded as a normative feature of employment-related social exchanges, it has also been recognized that its extent will vary across contexts (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Shore *et al*., 2009; Westphal & Clement, 2008). Some recent research has focused on cross-cultural variations in the nature and strength of reciprocity norms (Shen *et al*., 2011; Thams, Liu, & Von Glinow, 2013; Thomas, Au, & Ravlin, 2003; Zhang & Jia, 2010). Notably, researchers have argued that people from Asian countries (particularly east-Asian countries such as China, Japan, & Korea) place greater emphasis on the importance of social relationships and communal sharing than their Western counterparts, and are consequently more likely to reciprocate favorable treatment in social relationships (Chen, Chen, & Portnoy, 2009; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Thams *et al*., 2013). This might imply that workers from countries that are traditionally characterized as being collectivistic, may be more likely to engage in discretionary OCB in response to support for training transfer than their counterparts from more individualistic sociocultural contexts, such as Australia or the United States.

However, caution is necessary when making such broad country-level generalizations. Consider the case of China, whose national culture is typically described in terms of strong collectivistic values. In common with many other Asian countries, China has now experienced several decades of spectacular economic development, and has increasingly adopted features of a market-based economy (Cowan, 2013; Yan, 2009). Economic development, it is frequently argued, is associated with a weakening of collectivistic values (Ball, 2001; Earley & Gibson, 1998; Fincher, Thornhill, Murray, & Schaller, 2008; Hofstede, 2001), thereby reducing the salience of reciprocity in social exchanges (Miller & Bersoff, 1994; Thams *et al*., 2013).

Furthermore, although cross-cultural studies often cast China as a monolithic collectivistic culture, it is actually highly diverse in terms of its economic and sociocultural make-up (Chan, Makino, & Isobe, 2010; Redfern & Crawford, 2010; Zhou, Arnold, Pereira, & Yu, 2010). In a review of cross-cultural studies, Tsui, Nifadkar, and Ou (2007) argue that regional variation is ‘especially important for those scholars who study nations with rapid economic, technological, and social development, such as China, India, Mexico, Russia and Brazil’ (p. 465). Indeed, research has shown that considerable variation exists in the strength of collectivistic values held by people across different regions and subcultures within China (Cui & Liu, 2000; Gong, Chow, & Ahlstrom, 2011; Koch & Koch, 2007; Ralston, Holt, Terpstra, & Kai-Cheng, 2008; Ralston, Yu, Wang, Terpstra, & He, 1996 Gamble & Tian, 2015). In particular, collectivistic values have been found to be less predominant in the more economically developed coastal regions, such as Shanghai and Fujian, than in less developed inland regions, such as Lanzhou and Wuhan (Koch & Koch, 2007; Ralston *et al*. 1996;).

We anticipate such regional variation in the strength of collectivistic values within China to be reflected in differences in the extent to which employees feel obliged to reciprocate supportive behavior from others at work. Correspondingly, we might expect to find regional differences in the degree to which employees perceive that they should respond to support for transfer by increasing levels of task performance and OCB. We therefore hypothesize as follows:

*H4.* The relationship between perceived (a) supervisor and (b) peer support for training transfer and reported OCB will be stronger for employees working in inland regions than for those working in coastal regions of China.

*H5.* The relationship between perceived (a) supervisor and (b) peer support for training transfer and reported task performance will be stronger for employees working in inland regions than for those working in coastal regions of China.

**Methods**

**Participants**

Participants comprised 786 employees of a leading clothes retailer in mainland China. Most respondents were female (85.8%), and in the age groups 20-24 (52.6%). The majority were frontline employees (84.8%), who had a high school education (63%) and had been working in the company for less than 2 years (57.7%). Although the sample is comprised largely of young female employees, its demographic characteristics are typical of the retail sector (Carré, Tilly, & Holgate, 2008). The sample also reflects the overall demographic characteristics of the firm’s workforce, where over 80% are female and about 50% are aged between 20 to 24 years.

Our sample is drawn from stores located in two coastal regions (Shanghai and Fujian), and two inland regions (Hunan and Sichuan). This regional grouping corresponds with differences in their level of economic growth, coastal provinces generally being more developed than inland provinces (Fan, Kanbur, & Zhang, 2011). In particular, coastal regions, relative to the inland and Western regions of China, have benefitted from the economic reforms and open-door policy initiated in 1978. Notably, coastal regions ‘have attracted far more FDI and generated more trade volume than inland provinces during the liberalization process’ (Kanbur & Zhang, 2005, p. 12); this has contributed considerably to inland-coastal inequality.

**Procedure**

Parallel translation has been advocated as a preferred method to achieve equivalence in meaning (Douglas & Craig, 2007). Accordingly, the questionnaire was translated separately from English into Chinese by two independent experts in both Chinese and English, each with extensive research and work experience in China. Amendments were made to ensure the questionnaire’s comprehensibility and applicability in the Chinese context. The Chinese version was subsequently pilot-tested on employees of the participating organization who were not included in the final sample. The questionnaire was then posted to a cross-section of 1,350 employees in the four locations across China. Respondent anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed and completed questionnaires returned in sealed envelopes. Of questionnaires distributed, a total of 786 were returned, giving an effective response rate of 58.2%.

**Measures**

*Supervisor Support for Training Transfer*

A six-item scale developed by Holton *et al*. (2000) was used to measure perceptions of supervisor support for training transfer. Sample questions include ‘My supervisor meets with me regularly to work on problems I may be having in trying to use my training’ and ‘My supervisor meets with me to discuss ways to apply training on the job’. The scale’s coefficient alpha was .88.

*Peer Support for Training Transfer*

A four-item scale developed by Holton *et al*. (2000) was used to measure perceived peer support for training transfer. Sample questions include ‘My colleagues appreciate my using new skills I have learned in training’ and ‘At work, my colleagues expect me to use what I learn in training’. Coefficient alpha was .81.

*Task Performance*

An eight-item scale developed by Borman and Motowidlo (1993) was used to measure self-reported task performance. Sample questions include ‘I adequately complete my assigned duties’ and ‘I fulfill responsibilities specified in the job description’. Coefficient alpha was .76.

*Organizational Citizenship Behavior*

A fifteen-item scale developed by Borman and Motowidlo (1993) was used to measure self-reported organizational citizenship behavior. Sample questions include ‘I comply with instructions even when supervisors are not present’ and ‘I volunteer for additional duties that are not required’. Coefficient alpha was .91.

*Turnover Intention*

Thiswas measured based on six items derived from the literature (e.g., Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins, & Klesh, 1979; Davy, Kinicki, & Scheck, 1997). Sample questions include ‘I intend to leave this organization soon’ and ‘I intend to leave this organization before too long’. Coefficient alpha was .85.

Apart from the demographic items, all response options were measured on a five point Likert scale ranging from (1) ‘strongly disagree’ to (5) ‘strongly agree’.

**Analyses**

A two-step approach to examine the hypothesized model was followed. First, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted in order to assess the independence of the measures (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). In the second stage of data analysis, the hypothesized model (including tests of mediation) was tested using structural equation modeling (SEM). Mplus 6.12 (Muthén & Muthén, 2007) was used to conduct the CFA and SEM in this study.

**Results**

We compared the fit of the hypothesized five-factor model with two four-factor models (Model 1, combining supervisor and peer support for training transfer items; and Model 2, combining the two dimensions of job performance, task performance and OCB), a three-factor (Model 3, combining supervisor and peer support for training transfer, task performance and OCB), and a one-factor model. The hypothesized five-factor model (CFI = .95, TLI = .94, RMSEA = .039, SRMR = .037) proved to be a better fit to the data than either the four-factor Model 1 (CFI = .92, TLI = .92, RMSEA = .046, SRMR = .04), the four-factor Model 2 (CFI = .92, TLI = .92, RMSEA = .046, SRMR = .041), the three-factor Model 3 (CFI = .90, TLI = .89, RMSEA = .053, SRMR = .044), or the one-factor model (CFI = .68, TLI = .66, RMSEA = .095, SRMR = .091). Furthermore, the chi-square difference test showed that the hypothesized five-factor model fitted the data significantly better than the four-factor Model 1 (∆χ2 = 453.58, ∆df = 4), the four-factor Model 2 (∆χ2 = 448.98, ∆df = 4), the three-factor Model 3 (∆χ2 = 902.03, ∆df = 7), and the one-factor model (∆χ2 = 5244.90, ∆df = 10). All factor loadings for the five-factor model were over .50. The CFA results thus indicate strong support for the hypothesized five-factor model.

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, inter-correlations and reliabilities of the study variables. The alpha reliabilities are .76 or higher and, therefore, satisfactory for SEM (Hair *et al*. 2010). The correlation coefficients of all variables are moderate and in the expected directions, indicating preliminary support for the hypothesized relationships in this study.

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Following Podsakoff, MacKenzie and Podsakoff (2012), we used two statistical remedies to assess the influence of common method bias (CMB) in our data. First, a Harman’s single factor test was conducted. All variables in the study were loaded into an exploratory factor analysis, and the unrotated solution results revealed that neither a single nor a general factor accounts for more than 20% of the total variance in the variables. Following this, we restricted the number of factors extracted to equal to one, and the result revealed low total variance explained (19.74%). Second, we statistically controlled for the effects of an unmeasured latent methods factor. This technique requires all items to be loaded on their theoretical constructs, as well as on a latent CMB factor, and the significance of the structural parameters is examined both with and without the latent CMB factor. The Chi-square value of these two measurement models was then compared and the Chi-square value was not found to be significant, providing further evidence that CMB is unlikely to be a major concern for the current study.

**Hypothesis Testing**

The structural model indicated a good fit in all indices (χ2 = 1530.96, df = 481, p < .01, CFI = .95, TLI = .94, RMSEA = .039, SRMR = .037). The CFI and TLI are both above 0.9, and the RMSEA is less than 0.5, indicating a good fit to the proposed model (Hair et al., 2010). All the hypothesized direct paths were supported, showing statistically significant path coefficients (p < .05). Hypothesis 1a and 1b received support in that supervisor support for transfer was positively related to task performance (β = .23, p < .001) and OCB (β = .22, p < .001). Peer support for transfer was found to be significantly and positively associated with task performance (β = .17, p < .001) and OCB (β = .23, p < .001), thus providing support for Hypothesis 2a and 2b.

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To test for mediation (Hypothesis 3a/b), the bootstrap approach implemented in Mplus was used for testing the indirect effect. Results indicated that supervisor support for training transfer significantly influenced the hypothesized mediator’s task performance (β = .23, p < .001) and OCB (β = .22, p < .001). Similarly, peer support for training transfer was related to task performance (β = .17, p < .001), as well as OCB (β = .23, p < .001). Furthermore, task performance (β = -.20, p < .001) and OCB (β = -.16, p < .01) were negatively related to employees’ turnover intention.

We compared the fit of the hypothesized fully mediated model with that of an alternative partial mediation model, in which we added two direct paths from supervisor and peer support for transfer to turnover intention. The fully mediated model indicated a good fit (χ2 = 1530.96, df = 481, p < .001; CFI = .95, TLI = .94, RMSEA = .039, SRMR = .037). The partial mediation model exhibited almost an identical fit to the data (χ2 = 1526.42, df = 479, p < .001; CFI = .95, TLI = .94, RMSEA = .039, SRMR = .037) to the hypothesized model. However, the two additional direct relationships turned out to be non-significant (peer support for training transfer-turnover intention, β = -.07, p > .05; supervisor support for training transfer-turnover intention, β = -.04, p > .05). Since the goodness of fits between two models are equivalent, the hypothesized model was preferred on the basis of parsimony. Mplus’s bootstrapping results confirmed that employees’ task performance and OCB served as mediators between the supervisor support for training transfer-turnover intention relationship (task performance, β = -0.13, p < .01; OCB, β = -.09, p < .05), and peer support – turnover intention relationship (task performance, β = -.10, p < .05; OCB, β = -.12, p < .01). Thus Hypotheses 3a and 3b were supported.

Multiple group analysis in SEM was used to test the moderating effects of region (Thompson & Green, 2006). We divided the sample into two groups based on their store location (inland and coastal regions), and estimated a multi-group model that let all structural parameters vary across subgroups. This model reproduced observed covariances precisely (χ2 = 1881.12, df = 1018, p < .001, CFI = .916, TLI = .913, RMSEA = .048, SRMR = .057). For a nested model, we equated **structural** parameters presumed to be moderated by region between subgroups. This nested model exhibited slightly inferior fit to the data than the unconstrained model (χ2 = 1886.52, df = 1024, p < .001, CFI = .916, TLI = .913, RMSEA = .048, SRMR = .060), indicating possible regional moderation. To test the interaction of region and supervisor/peer support for training transfer on OCB, equality constraints were placed, one at a time, on the paths from supervisor support for training transfer to task performance and OCB. Table 2 presents the results of the test for moderation. Multiplier tests of these constraints indicated that supervisor support for training transfer-OCB (∆χ2 (1) = 4.29, p<0.05), and peer support for training transfer-OCB (∆χ2 (1) = 4.17, p<0.05) path coefficients varied between the coastal and inland regions. In inland regions supervisor/peer support for transfer had a stronger effect on employees’ OCB, and hence both Hypothesis 4a and 4b are supported. The moderation effect was not significant for the relationships between supervisor/peer support for training transfer and task performance (supervisor support for training transfer-task performance, ∆χ2 (1) = 1.42; peer support for transfer-task performance, ∆χ2 (1) = 1.36). Therefore, Hypotheses 5a and 5b are not supported.

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 Researchers have used region as a categorical variable for understanding self-orientations (e.g. Ralston *et al*., 1996). However, using country or region as a proxy to infer cultural values has the potential limitation that one cannot be sure to what extent individuals’ cultural orientations play the role hypothesized in the model. To address this, we collected additional data on collectivism from a non-overlapping sample of 344 employees in the same organization and located in both coastal and inland regions. We used the four-item scale developed by Triandis and Gelfand (1998); a sample item was ‘I feel good when I cooperate with others’.We compared employees’ collectivism scores between the coastal (Fujian and Shanghai; n = 164) and inland (Hunan and Sichuan; n = 180) regions. As expected, mean scores on collectivism differed significantly between the two regions [*t* (342) = 3.66, *p* < 0.001]: employees from the less developed regions (*mean* = 4.91) rated significantly higher on collectivism than employees from the more developed regions (*mean* = 4.55).

**Discussion**

Our findings highlight the importance of interpersonal support for training transfer in promoting positive employee work-related behaviors with respect to task performance, OCB and turnover intention. We hypothesized that employees would be likely to respond to the provision of support for training transfer by supervisors and peers by behaving in a manner that is likely to benefit those parties and the organization. The results revealed that when employees perceive high levels of supervisor and peer support for training transfer, they are more likely to deliver higher levels of both task performance and OCB in response. Furthermore, these behavioral outcomes were likely to be associated with increased organizational attachment, assessed in terms of expressed intentions to quit the organization.

In general, our findings provide support to the growing literature that suggests both supervisor and peer support play an important role in ensuring effective training transfer. They indicate that such interpersonal support is a resource that may be exchanged for increased loyalty, effort and commitment on the part of employees, thereby forming part of a beneficial employment exchange relationship (Mossholder, Richardson, & Settoon, 2011). Previous HRD research has highlighted the fact that organizations can facilitate the formation of social exchange relationships by investing in employees’ training and career development (Hom *et al*., 2009). Our study complements this line of research by showing that an additional way to nurture high quality social exchange relationships is to provide support for training transfer and use of the trained knowledge and skills. In other words, our findings suggest that the provision of support for training transfer within the workplace, and not just the provision of opportunities for training and development, should be considered an important component of a high performance work system. Thus, beyond making a contribution to training transfer literature, this study add empirical evidence that supervisor and peer action in support of HRD-related activities aligns with general social exchange theory and acts of reciprocity in the workplace.

The results also provide evidence that the strength of the relationship between supervisor/peer support for training transfer and employee behavior is context-dependent. Drawing on prior research indicating that economic development tends to promote more individualistic values in working populations, we proposed that workers from coastal regions within China would feel less obliged to reciprocate support received from supervisors and peers by engaging in OCB. Providing support for these predictions, we found that employees in the less economically developed inland regions, Hunan and Sichuan, were indeed more predisposed to reciprocate perceived supervisor/peer support for training transfer by engaging in activities above and beyond their assigned work duties. Our findings accord with existing research which shows that personal relationships play a larger role in motivating OCB in collectivist cultural contexts than they do in more individualistic cultural settings (Chen *et al*., 2002; Farh, Zhong, and Organ, 2004). While theoretical frameworks have long recognized that the external environment has a profound influence on organizational practices (Armstrong & Shimizu, 2007), empirical research in this area remain sparse. This study provides support for the argument that HRD researchers should further contextualize training and development-related studies (Becker & Gerhart, 1996). We did not, however, find support for the hypothesised regional differences in the impact of supervisor/peer support for training transfer on task performance. This suggests that collectivistic value contexts strengthen other-oriented reciprocal acts (e.g. helping others), but not task-focused acts.

Our results have practical implications for managers and HRD professionals. The literature has long recommended that trainees should receive general support in order to promote transfer and maximize organizations’ return on investment in training and development. However, the results of this study suggest that the benefits of providing support for training transfer can extend beyond increasing the quantum of knowledge and skill that is transferred. The impacts of transfer support on task performance, OCB and reduced turnover intention provide compelling evidence to support the argument that those responsible for managing HRD need to ensure that a supportive interpersonal transfer work environment exists. This is likely to require consideration of training needs both for supervisory level staff as well as that of co-workers. There might also be implications for recruitment criteria and reward mechanisms to ensure, for instance, that those with appropriate supportive characteristics and skills are recruited and that those who display them in the workplace are suitably rewarded.

Several limitations to our study and future research directions should be noted.Firstly, although it seems likely that positive support from supervisors and peers for training transfer in the workplace will reduce employees’ turnover intention, all the variables were measured at a single point in time, which means that the direction of causality cannot be unequivocally established. Future research that employs a longitudinal research design would be best suited to assess the causal status of the variables examined in this study. Secondly, the study could be criticized for its reliance on self-report data, obtained from a single source. However, our objective was to assess the degree to which employees’ perceptions of interpersonal support for transfer were associated with a felt obligation to produce higher task performance and increased OCB. Arguably, using self-reported data on task performance and OCB comprises a valid means to assess how employees respond to peer and supervisor support for training transfer. We encourage future researchers to consider separating the measurement of independent and dependent variables while concurrently using different raters of these variables.

Thirdly, this study did not include other sources of interpersonal support within organizations such as subordinate support. While our conceptualization of interpersonal support (supervisor and peer support) is consistent with the categorization used in the training transfer literature (e.g., Bates et al., 2000; Holton *et al.*, 2000), we encourage future research to consider including support from all sources at the workplace, including subordinate support and organizational support, to form a more comprehensive social support construct. The latter could be broadened further by examining sources of support beyond the organization, such as that provided by employees’ family and friends. Fourthly, our research focused upon a single sector with a distinctive workforce demographic. Future research could examine employees in different industrial sectors and in other national contexts in order to determine the extent to which our findings can be generalized. Finally, we tested mediation and moderation as separate hypotheses in this study. While we consider this appropriate for our research purpose, we encourage future researchers to identify relevant workplace variables (e.g. training type, job autonomy) and to consider investigating moderated mediation relationships to further understand whether the mediation relations are contingent on the level of potential moderators.

**Conclusion**

The findings from this study extend existing knowledge relating to the impact of support for training transfer, providing evidence that perceptions of supervisor support and peer support for training transfer are both associated with reports of higher task performance and OCB, and reduced turnover intention. Interpersonal support for training transfer can thus be seen as a potentially important component of a high performance HRM system. In addition, we found that the strength of the relationship between supervisor/peer support for training transfer on individuals’ OCB varied across regions within China, suggesting that local social and cultural contexts have an impact on the potency of interpersonal support in generating beneficial outcomes. As we have indicated, these findings have managerial implications for organizations operating in China or other large, diverse countries that are undergoing rapid economic, technological and social development (Tsui *et al*., 2007). They also indicate that cross-cultural researchers need to be aware of the potential for within-country variation.

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*Figure 1. Hypothesized model*

*Figure 2. Structural path estimates of the hypothesized mediation model*

0.23\*\*\*

0.23\*\*\*

0.22\*\*\*

0.17\*\*

-0.20\*\*\*

-0.16\*

*Note: \*p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001*

*Table 1. Descriptive statistics, correlations and reliabilities among study variables*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Variables | Mean | S.D. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |  |
| 1 | Gender a | .82 |  .39 | - |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2 | Age b | 2.35 | .96 |  .03 | - |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 3 | Education c | 1.84 | 1.49 |  .01 |  .01 | - |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 4 | Job type d | .17 | .37 | -.05 | .26\*\* | -.01 | - |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 5 | Region e | 1.46 | .50 | .08\* | -.03 | -.07\* | .06\* | - |  |  |  |  |  |
| 6 | Supervisor support for training transfer | 3.57 | .61 | -.01 | .06\* | .01 | .01 | .03 | [.88] |  |  |  |  |
| 7 | Peer support for training transfer | 3.63 | .65 | -.03 | .03 | -.03 | .03 | .07\* | .59\*\* | [.81] |  |  |  |
| 8 | OCB | 3.85 | .49 | -.04 | .24\*\* | -.04 | .09\*\* | .06 | .31\*\* | .31\*\* | [.91] |  |  |
| 9 | Task performance | 3.75 | .52 | -.08\*\* | .21\*\* | -.06\* | .08\*\* | .04 | .27\*\* | .28\*\* | .64\*\* | [.76] |  |
| 10 | Turnover intention | 2.51 | .70 | -.08\*\* | -.18\*\* | -.03 | -.10\*\* | -.13\*\* | -.18\*\* | -.18\*\* | -.27\*\* | -.28\*\* | [.85] |

Note: Figures in parentheses are alpha reliabilities. n = 786

a Gender, 0 = male, 1 = female; b Age, 1 = under 20 years, 2 = 20-24 years, 3 = 25-29 years, 4 = 30-34 years, 5 = 35-39 years, 6 = 40-49 years, 7 = 50 years and over; c Education, 1 = high school, 2 = diploma, 3 = bachelor degree, 4 = master degree, 5 = doctor degree, 6 = others; d Job type, 0 = office employee, 1 = store employee; e Region, 1 = costal region, 2 = inland region.

 \**p* < .05

\*\**p* < .01

*Table 2. Assessment of moderating relationships*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Hypothesized Path** | **Hypothesis** | **Coastal (β)** | **Inland (β)** | **∆χ2 (df=1)** | **Result** |
| SSP → OCB | H4a | .26\*\* | .41\*\*\* | 4.29\* | Supported |
| PS → OCB | H4b | .10 | .24\*\* | 4.17\* | Supported |
| SSP → Task performance | H5a | .24\*\* | .20\*\*\* | 1.42 | Rejected |
| PS → Task performance | H5b | .25\*\* | .22\*\* | 1.37 | Rejected |

*Note:* ∆χ2 represents the difference in χ2 between the constrained and the free models for the path being tested with 1 degree of freedom.

*\*p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001*