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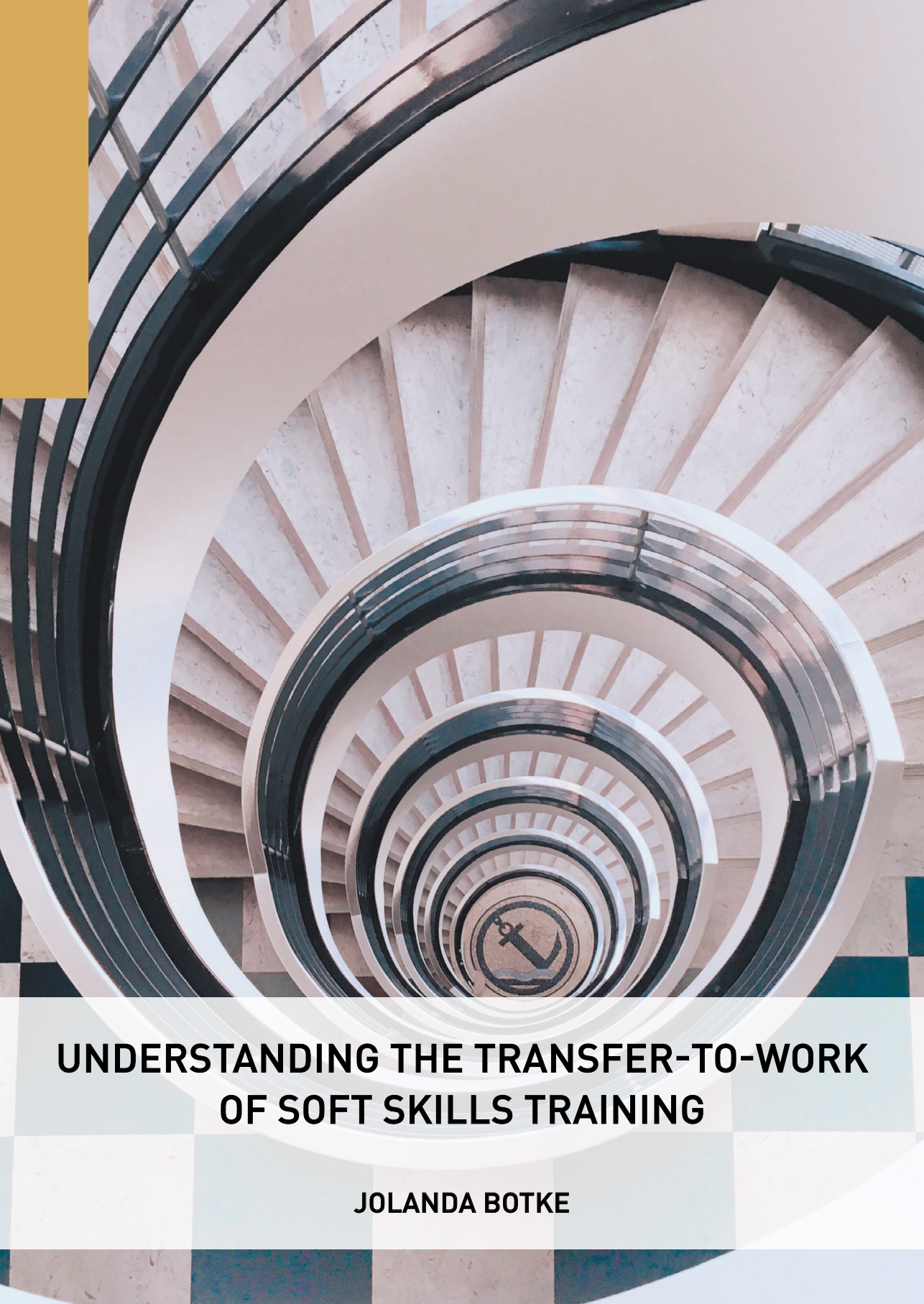
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UNDERSTANDING THE TRANSFER-TO-WORK OF SOFT SKILLS TRAINING

JOLANDA BOTKE

UNDERSTANDING THE TRANSFER-TO-WORK OF SOFT SKILLS TRAINING

Examining Transfer Stages, the Role of Work Factors and Self-Efficacy

Jolanda Aafje Botke

VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT

**UNDERSTANDING THE TRANSFER-TO-WORK OF SOFT SKILLS TRAINING:
Examining Transfer Stages, the Role of Work Factors and Self-Efficacy**

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Botke, Jolanda

Understanding the transfer-to-work of soft skills training: Examining transfer stages, the role
of work factors and self-efficacy

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door

Jolanda Aafje Botke

geboren te Leeuwarden

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| Chapter 1. | |
| Introduction | 7 |
| Chapter 2. | |
| Work Factors Influencing the Transfer Stages of Soft Skills Training: A Literature Review | 31 |
| Chapter 3. | |
| Transfer of Self-Leadership Skills: A Three-Wave Study Within the Dutch police | 69 |
| Chapter 4. | |
| The Effect of Self-Leadership Training on Detached Concern and the Proactivity of Human Service Professionals | 101 |
| Chapter 5. | |
| Discussion | 125 |
| References | 151 |
| Summary English | 191 |
| Samenvatting Nederlands | 199 |
| Appendices | 209 |
| Dankwoord (Acknowledgements) | 215 |

Chapter 1.

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

CFO asks CEO: "What happens if we invest in developing our people and then they leave us?"

CEO: "What happens if we don't, and they stay?"

Trish Bertuzzi, *The Sales Development Playbook:*

Build Repeatable Pipeline and Accelerate Growth with Inside Sales

Organisations invest in training because they assume that it will help to sustain organisational health and growth and contribute to competitive advantages (Grossman & Salas, 2011; Salas et al., 2012). However, the impact of training cannot be realised unless employees are both willing and able to use the skills they gain from the training on the job (Jiang, Lepak, Han, et al., 2012). This so-called “transfer of training” is generally defined as the long-term effective use of skills developed in training (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Blume et al., 2019). Although research has long been conducted on the transfer of training (e.g., Poell, 2017), both scholars and practitioners still have a limited understanding of how the trainee behaves when returning to the workplace after a training, so organisations fail to optimise this transfer (Baldwin, Ford, & Blume, 2017).

Even more unclear is the transfer process of soft skills training. Soft skills refer both to intrapersonal skills, such as the ability to manage oneself, and to interpersonal skills, such as the managing of interactions with others (Laker & Powell, 2011). The limited understanding of the transfer to work of soft skills is first due to a *limited scholarly focus on the transfer in the context of work*. A search in the Web of Science database for articles between 2001 and 2021 containing the words “transfer” and “training” in the title yielded 862 references. Of these studies, only 12% focussed on the post-training transfer in a corporate setting (i.e., a company—not a school). Second, the training transfer can be investigated from many different viewpoints, for example, from a learning (e.g., Billett, 2013), a social psychology (Weisweiler et al., 2013), a social network (Van den Bossche & Segers, 2013) or an

economic perspective (Grip & Sauermann, 2013). Thus, *there are different ways of looking at the transfer outcomes*, and many of them lack a focus that is relevant for organisations. This fact leaves unclear the definition and operationalisation of a successful transfer of training in a corporate setting. These factors are even more unclear with regard to the transfer of soft skills training because they are considered more “open” than hard skills (such as learning how to operate a tool or drive a car). In this case, “open” refers to the fact that the choice is greater as to how (i.e., what kind of performance in what kind of context) trained principles and concepts can be applied to the job (Blume et al., 2010). Consequently, the successful transfer of soft skills varies more. For example, self-leadership training (i.e., training on developing self-leadership skills) may be aimed at improving general self-efficacy (McCormick & Tanguma, 2007), team performance (Politis, 2006) or academic performance (Sampl et al., 2017). This variety makes it often difficult and time consuming to specify the expectations of the outcomes of soft skills trainings; consequently, *research avoids such specifications of (context of) performance* and focusses on more general (not consumer-oriented) measures.

Third, the transfer outcomes may be affected by the characteristics of the training, the trainee and the transfer situation (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Blume et al., 2010; Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Cheng & Hampson, 2008). However, since barriers to success tend to vary depending on how the transfer is conceptualised, this situation leads to opacity about how such factors affect the specific transfer outcomes during the post-training transfer process. For example, the factors that influence the short-term transfer may differ from those that influence the long-term transfer, as may the factors that stimulate the use of new skills from those that influence specific individual performance.

In sum, the scholarly literature on the transfer of soft skills training has three main gaps. First, understanding is limited of the transfer of soft skills training to work because research in a corporate context is limited. Second, the definition and operationalisation are unclear of the successful transfer of soft skills training. Third, the way in which the barriers to success are related to the different outcomes during the post-training transfer process are unclear. These gaps in the research mean the results of the previous research in a corporate context are difficult to apply to improve the transfer process. This situation results in the

following general research question for this dissertation:

How can the successful work transfer of soft skills training be ensured?

Specifically, this dissertation aims to (1) provide clarity on the different conceptualisations of the transfer outcomes of soft skills training, (2) examine the impact of context-specific measures on the transfer outcomes of soft skills training and (3) examine how the barriers to success are related to different measures of the transfer. This dissertation has important societal urgency since the research on the transfer of training has prompted increasing concerns about the applicability of the research findings (Baldwin et al., 2017). Consequently, in organisations, the transfer problem remains acute, and calls are recurring for more evidence that can inform the design and execution of effective training initiatives (Baldwin et al., 2017). Additionally, in their recent review of the transfer research, Ford, Baldwin and Prasad (2018) call for the development of more organisationally relevant outcome measures.

In this Chapter, I first discuss the transfer definitions and conceptualisations. Then, I elaborate on the key concern and research questions in this dissertation. Finally, I present an outline of this dissertation.

1.2 Transfer Definitions and Conceptualisations

Transfer may refer to different phenomena depending on the context or perspective. The transfer concept was first introduced by Woodworth and Thorndike in 1901. The common idea in school-based learning at that time was that student learning in one context (e.g., in a mathematics course) would automatically benefit student development in another context (e.g., in a course on logical reasoning). Based on their theory of identical elements, Woodworth and Thorndike disputed this common idea by suggesting that transfer occurred only when the original and the new contexts shared identical elements (Woodworth & Thorndike, 1901). During the first half of the twentieth century, the transfer in the school context (Bransford et al., 2004). After World War II, the dramatic increase in the demand for trained workers created by the expanding wartime economy and technological innovations led to a new era in the transfer research. Transfer became not only about school-

based learning but also about the transfer of knowledge and skills from (often off-site) training to the work context (Torraco, 2016). The training-to-work transfer is the focus of is influenced by different stages in the training process (e.g., before, during, and after the training; Kavanagh, 1998), our focus is on the definitions and conceptualisations of the post-training transfer to work (i.e., what happens when trainees return to the workplace after completing a training?), because this post-training transfer stage is the most crucial for the transfer of training (Blume et al., 2010; Salas et al., 2012; Tannenbaum & Yukl, 1992).

Within the body of research on the post-training transfer, several transfer conceptualisations exist. Some studies talk about the transfer “in general”, while others use more specific definitions of the transfer (e.g., the near, far, vertical, horizontal, low-road, or high-road transfer), focussing on different but sometimes overlapping aspects of the post-training transfer. The different conceptualisations make it difficult to interpret the results of individual studies (i.e., a successful transfer may have different referents). To clarify this issue, I use three perspectives to talk about the transfer to work: a criterial (What should be measured as a transfer outcome?), a temporal (When should the transfer be measured?) and a contextual perspective (In which context should the transfer occur?). Some transfer conceptualisations include multiple perspectives. Although these perspectives have been used previously (see, for example, Blume et al., 2019), many empirical studies focus only on one or two perspectives or are even unclear about the perspectives they include, leaving it difficult to see how their results contribute to the body of knowledge on the transfer of soft skills training.

With regard to the first perspective, the *criterial perspective* (Blume et al., 2010; Cheng & Ho, 2001; Ford, 1997; Gegenfurtner, 2011; Gruber, 2013; Knyphausen-Aufsess et al., 2009), the central question underlying this transfer perspective is what should be measured as a transfer outcome. This perspective has two different conceptualisations. A first research stream defines a successful transfer as the use of the new skills gained from the training (e.g., Brown & Warren, 2009; Noe, 1986). A second research stream focusses on the effect of the training on work performance caused by the effective use of the newly learned skills (e.g., Blume et al., 2010, 2019; Ford et al., 2019; Kontoghiorghes, 2002; Yelon et al., 2013).

The second perspective is the *temporal one* (Blume et al., 2019; Yelon et al., 2013). The underlying question is when the transfer outcomes should be measured. Again, this

perspective has two different conceptualisations. The transfer results can be measured either directly after the training (e.g., within two weeks) or longer after it. A long-term transfer is referred to as transfer maintenance (Foxon, 1993) or a far transfer (Cheng & Ho, 2001; Stenling & Tafvelin, 2016). A short-term transfer is referred to as an “initial transfer” (Laker, 1990), a “transfer initiation” (Laker, 1990) or a near transfer (Cheng & Ho, 2001; Stenling & Tafvelin, 2016).

The third transfer perspective is the *contextual one* (Barnett & Ceci, 2002). The underlying question is in which context should knowledge and skills from the training be applied. Again, there are two different conceptualisations: the work situation can be more or less similar to the training situation. From this perspective, a near transfer refers to one in which the work tasks are highly similar to the learning tasks (Blume et al., 2010) and to what Perkins and Salomon (1989) call a “low-road transfer”. From this perspective, a far transfer means that tasks and situations in the learning situation are quite different from the transfer context (Blume et al., 2010) and similar to what Perkins and Salomon (1989) call a “high-road transfer”. Blume et al. (2010) refer to bridging this contextual difference between training and work as “generalisation”. The transfer can be generalised to different situations at the same level (e.g., the skills are practised during the training; the transfer is successful if the trainee uses the trained skills in a different situation). This situation is referred to as a horizontal transfer (Kozlowski et al., 2000). A vertical transfer occurs when skills from a training lead to higher level results in the organisation (e.g., the skills are practised during training; the transfer is successful if the skills are used during work and lead to increased performance). Being specific about the context in which the transfer should occur is important, since leaving the situation open may lead to vague (i.e., “the training improved my work”) or unintended outcomes (a negative transfer, Zubairy et al., 2015). Table 1.1 presents an overview of the definitions and their perspectives.

Table 1.1

Constructs and Definitions of the Training-to-Work Transfer

| Construct | Definition | Perspective | | |
|----------------------|--|----------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| | | Criteria | Temporal | Contextual |
| Transfer of training | A transfer of training occurs when the knowledge learned is used on the job for which it was intended (Noe, 1986). | X (use) | | |
| | The training transfer addresses how often new learning or behaviour is applied in the workplace (Brown & Warren, 2009). | X (intensity of use) | | |
| | The transfer is about not only a specific performance by an individual after training but also the varied use of the knowledge and skills learned (Ford et al., 2019; Yelon et al., 2013). | X (use and performance) | | X (varied used) |
| | The “[t]raining transfer includes the maintenance, use, and generalisation of learned knowledge, skills, and attitudes to facilitate effective performance” (Blume et al., 2019, p. 270). See also Baldwin and Ford (1988), Kontoghiorghes (2002), and Blume, et al. (2010). | X (use and performance) | X (maintenance) | X (generalisation) |
| Positive transfer | A positive transfer occurs “when an individual correctly applies knowledge, skills, and abilities learned in one environment (e.g., simulation) to a different setting” (Liu et al., 2008, p. 50). | X (use) | | X (different setting) |
| | A positive transfer refers to “the extent to which the learning that results from [the] training transfers to the job and leads to relevant changes in work performance” (Goldstein & Ford, 2002). | X (performance) | | |
| Negative transfer | A negative transfer occurs when “existing knowledge and skills (from previous experiences) impede proper performance in a different task or environment” (Liu et al., 2008, p. 50). | X (performance) | | X (different task or environment) |
| | A negative training transfer can be defined as a situation in which training outcomes have been applied when their use is invalid or unacceptable (Zubairy et al., 2015). | | | X (invalid context) |
| Transfer initiation | A transfer initiation represents “the initial application of the new skills on the job” (Laker, 1990, p. 210), also referred to as “initial transfer” (Axtell et al., 1997). | | X (transfer stages) | |

Table 1.1 (Continued)

| Construct | Definition | Perspective | | |
|-------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| | | Criteria | Temporal | Contextual |
| Transfer maintenance | Transfer maintenance refers to maintaining the application of the learning to the job over time, so the job performance is permanently enhanced (Baldwin & Ford, 1988). According to Foxon (1993), transfer maintenance includes two stages. In the first stage, the trainees still make conscious choices to use the skills whenever their use is appropriate. In the second stage, the application of the “new” skills is no longer consciously undertaken (see also Blume et al. (2010)). | X (permanent behavioural change) | X (transfer stages) | |
| Transfer generalisation | “The extent to which the knowledge and skills acquired in a learning setting are applied to different settings, people, and/or situations from those trained” (Blume et al., 2010, p. 1067). | | | X (different setting) |
| Horizontal transfer | A horizontal transfer of training refers to a transfer across settings or contexts at the same level (Kozlowski et al., 2000). | | | X (across settings) |
| Vertical transfer | A vertical transfer of training refers to an “upward transfer across different levels of the organizational system. A vertical transfer is concerned with the link between individual-level training outcomes and outcomes or results at higher levels of the organizational system” (Kozlowski et al., 2000, p. 159). | X (different outcome levels) | | |
| Near transfer | A near transfer requires a close match between the training and the task content and between the training and the task outcomes and an emphasis on specific concepts and skills (Kim & Lee, 2001), for example, when the trainees encounter problems similar to those they used for practice during the training (Hajian, 2019). | | | X (similarity) |
| | A near transfer refers to transfer measures administered immediately after the training programme (Cheng & Ho, 2001; Stenling & Tafvelin, 2016). | | X (measurement time) | |
| Far transfer | A far transfer requires an approximate match between the training and the task content and between the training and the task outcomes and an emphasis on general concepts and skills. Less similarity suggests the need for more far transfers and a different training design (Kim & Lee, 2001). | | | X (similarity) |
| | A far transfer refers to long-term transfer measures (i.e., 1 year after the training programme) (Cheng & Ho, 2001; Stenling & Tafvelin, 2016). | | X (measurement time) | |

Table 1.1 (Continued)

| Construct | Definition | Perspective | | |
|--------------------|--|-------------|----------|--------------------------------|
| | | Criterial | Temporal | Contextual |
| Low-road transfer | A low-road transfer occurs when the target and original activities share a countless number of features (Hajian, 2019; Salomon & Perkins, 1989). | | | X (<i>similarity</i>) |
| High-road transfer | A high-road transfer occurs as a result of the mindful abstraction of general principles among different events in different contexts and a deliberate search for connections among their structures (Hajian, 2019; Salomon & Perkins, 1989). A high-road transfer demands time for exploration and discovery; the flexible adaptation of skills; and the asking of questions such as what the problems are, what principles need to be applied and how the final outcomes need to be assessed (Hajian, 2019). | | | X (<i>generalisation</i>) |

I argue that studying the transfer to work in a corporate context requires the consideration of all three perspectives. Consequently, this dissertation uses the following definition of the transfer of training: the transfer of training refers to the use of skills from training during work and to the consequences of the effective use, that is, of (changed) work behaviours leading to improved individual and/or organisational performance. Thus, our focus is on both the use of skills and the resulting change in performance. Consequently, we study the maintenance transfer (i.e., beyond the initial transfer) as we expect that transferring skills from training to work performance requires applying and maintaining newly learned skills on the job over time. Since this dissertation focusses on the transfer of soft skills, the work context is by definition more complex and specific than the learning context (the far transfer).

1.3 Key Concern and Research Questions

Given our definition of the transfer of training, its essential ingredients include the learning of knowledge and (soft) skills (during the training), followed by the use or application of such skills (on the job) and the assessment of their effective use (performance) according to a work-specific criterion. I previously introduced three main gaps in the scholarly research regarding the transfer of soft skills training (i.e., the lack of research in a corporate setting, the lack of conceptual clarity and the consequent lack of insights into the barriers to successful transfer). Consequently, I argue that, to provide an improved transfer

to work of soft skills, we need a better understanding of the transfer process and its antecedents. Thus, the key concern here is to provide clarity on the post-training transfer of soft skills training so the results from the transfer research can be used to optimise the transfer of soft skills training to a corporate setting. This dissertation intends to provide information on how to ensure the successful transfer to work of soft skills training. It aims to contribute to the scholarly research on the transfer of soft skills training in the work context by addressing four research questions regarding the transfer of soft skills training. These research challenges are closely linked to the gaps in the literature presented in Section 1.1 and the different transfer conceptualisations presented in Section 1.2. Table 1.2 provides an overview. In the remainder of this section, I elaborate on these research questions.

Table 1.2

From the Main Gaps in the Literature to the Research Questions of This Dissertation

| Main gaps in the literature on the transfer of soft skills training (Section 1.1) | Transfer conceptualisations (Section 1.2) | Research questions of this dissertation (Section 1.3) |
|--|---|---|
| Limited research in a corporate context | | |
| Confusion about the characteristics of a successful transfer | Criterial dimension | RQ1. <i>What is a successful transfer?</i> |
| | Contextual dimension | RQ2. <i>What is the effect of adding context to the transfer outcomes?</i> |
| | Temporal dimension | RQ3. <i>When should the transfer be measured?</i> |
| Unclarity about how the barriers to success are related to different transfer conceptualisations | | RQ4. <i>How are the barriers to success related to different transfer outcomes?</i> |

RQ1. *What is a successful transfer?*

Previous research shows no agreement on the definition or operationalisation of a successful transfer (Blume et al., 2019; Cheng & Ho, 2001; Ford et al., 2018; Knyphausen-Aufsess et al., 2009; Schoeb et al., 2020). For example, some authors have measured the intention to transfer (e.g., Baldwin & Magjuka, 1991) or whether skills from a training were used during work shortly after training (e.g., Antle et al., 2008; Richman-Hirsch, 2001), while

others have measured increased individual (e.g., Deane et al., 2014; Johnson et al., 2012) or organisational performance (e.g., Voegtlin et al., 2015) as a consequence of training. This “criterion problem” (i.e., being clear about the change expectations as a function of the training and about the settings or situations in which trainees should show adaptability in transferring and effectively using the newly acquired skills) has been mentioned by many scholars (Blume et al., 2010; Cheng & Ho, 2001; Ford, 1997; Gegenfurtner, 2011; Gruber, 2013; Knyphausen-Aufsess et al., 2009). However, it remains a major gap in the transfer research (Volet, 2013) because of the missing research in a corporate setting and the limited performance-oriented approach of such research. Therefore, a “successful transfer” can mean many different things, depending on the definition or measure. Clarity regarding this definition is important, since the intention to transfer, the use of soft skills during work, or the performance outcomes may lead to different conclusions about the effectiveness of training (Ford et al., 2018). Additionally, distinguishing the transfer outcomes raises questions about the vertical transfer (e.g., does intention lead to the use of skills and consequently to increased performance?).

RQ2. What is the effect of adding context to the transfer outcomes?

The research lacks agreement on how to measure specific transfers (Blume et al., 2019; Cheng & Ho, 2001; Ford et al., 2018; Knyphausen-Aufsess et al., 2009; Schoeb et al., 2020). For example, some studies have used very general, self-assessment post-training transfer measures (e.g., “I have incorporated the learned training content in my daily work activities”, Govaerts, 2017, p. 158), while others have used more objective measures specific to the behaviour or performance that was supposed to change after training (e.g., “The staff shared relevant client information that was obtained while performing the audit with team members”, Sookhai & Budworth, 2010, p. 266) or have even focussed on improved transfer behaviours in specific work situations (e.g., teamwork in the cockpit, Brannick et al., 2005). From the previous research, we assume that being more specific about the transfer context will impact the transfer results due to the influence of the social context on it. For example, Barnett and Ceci (2002) mention that “a skill acquired in a group setting might not be equally well applied when alone or vice versa” (p. 623). Kozłowski and Salas (1997) state that the level at which the training is to have its intended impact must be specified explicitly because

in a team context, issues of team composition and cross-level contextual linkages will impact the transfer results. Thus, being more detailed about the situation in which the transfer should occur may lead to different transfer outcomes compared to leaving the context vague (“during work”). However, very few studies have included or compared context-specific measures. By being specific about the performance measure and context, I address the call for clarity about the changes expected as a function of the training and about the settings or situations in which the trainees should show adaptability in transferring and effectively using the newly acquired skills (Baldwin et al., 2017).

RQ3. When should the transfer be measured?

The applied time lapse between training and assessing the transfer of training affects the transfer outcomes (Axtell et al., 1997; Yelon et al., 2013). That is, a measure applied shortly after the training may lead to different conclusions about the effectiveness of the training compared to a longer-term measure because a long-term transfer requires the application and maintenance of newly learned skills on the job (Laker, 1990). Short-term measures reflect an initial transfer: trainees’ attempts to apply any aspect of the learning in the work environment (Laker, 1990). This initial transfer is suggested to be a predictor of a long-term transfer (Axtell et al., 1997; Foxon, 1993) but has different antecedents. Although several authors describe temporal “steps” (i.e., from initiation to unconscious maintenance) in the transfer process (Foxon, 1993; Powell, 2009; Seiberling & Kauffeld, 2017), the appropriate time lapse that should be used to measure the transfer remains unclear.

RQ4. How are the barriers to success related to different transfer outcomes?

Baldwin and Ford (1988) suggest that the transfer outcomes are affected by three categories of factors: trainee characteristics, training design and work environment. However, the effect of such factors was found to vary depending on the conception of the transfer outcome (Blume et al., 2010). For example, Axtell et al. (1997) found that content relevance and the motivation to transfer are relevant for the initial transfer, while autonomy is important for the transfer after one year (temporal perspective). Lee et al. (2014) found that peer support was important for the motivation to transfer but not for the use of skills (criterial perspective). Thus, barriers to success may depend on the measured transfer

outcome. Consequently, organisations find it unclear or confusing to use results from previous studies on barriers to a successful transfer to enhance the transfer in their organisations.

In line with Gruber's suggestion (2013), this dissertation focusses on three "main barriers to the success" of the transfer: the lack of motivation to transfer; work factors, and self-efficacy. With these three barriers, we include two very important individual antecedents of the transfer (the motivation to transfer and self-efficacy) as well as the organisation (work factors). Additionally, we include the role of the supervisor as a key representative of the organisation. The motivation to transfer, referring to the trainee's desire to apply the skills and knowledge gained during training to the workplace (Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Cheng & Hampson, 2008; Tracey, Tannenbaum, & Kavanagh, 1995), is expected to influence the transfer (Cheng & Hampson, 2008; Massenberg et al., 2015). However, it has mainly been studied in relation to the initial (i.e., short-term) transfer (Axtell et al., 1997; Marx, 1982), leaving unstudied how it is related to the vertical transfer (i.e., how it impacts sequential steps in the transfer process).

Features of the work environment have been thought to be particularly important to the post-training transfer (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Tannenbaum & Yukl, 1992) because, while employees may be highly motivated individuals who have attended excellent training courses and are keen to use their new skills, constraints in the post-training work environment may prevent them from applying the learned content or skills in their jobs (e.g., Blume et al., 2010; Salas et al., 2012). Kastenmüller et al. (2012) mention that a facilitating work environment is especially necessary for the transfer of soft skills training because these training types and their transfers require the participation of colleagues and supervisors.

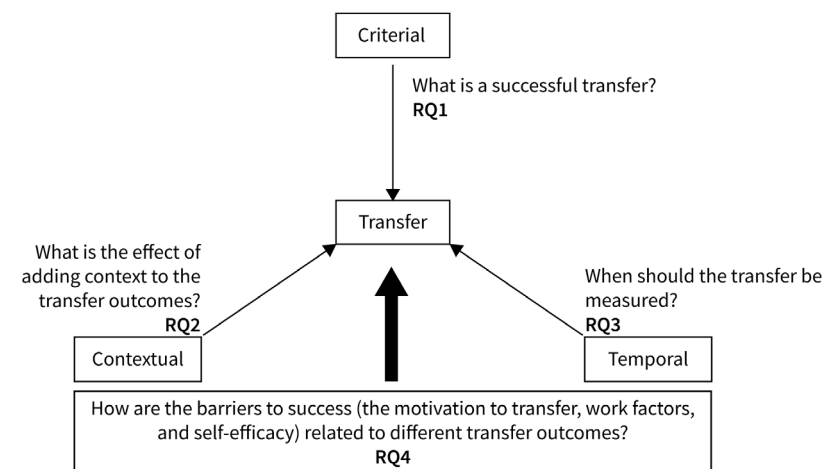
Regarding the supervisor role during the transfer, some authors have noted a strong positive correlation between supervisor support and the training transfer (e.g., Grossman & Burke-Smalley, 2018; Van den Bossche et al., 2010), while other studies have found this relationship to be nonsignificant (e.g., Hutchins et al., 2013; Massenberg et al., 2017) or even negative (e.g., Facticeau et al., 1995; Nijman et al., 2006). According to Govaerts and Dochy, "discrepancies in the results are conceivably due to different ways in which the construct of supervisor support has been conceptualised and subsequently operationalised in the different studies" (2014, p. 79), leaving unclear what a supervisor should do or say

when the trainee returns to work after a training to positively influence the transfer.

Regarding the effect of self-efficacy on the transfer, traditional transfer research suggests that high self-efficacy is important for the transfer. For example, based on goal-setting theory (Latham & Locke, 1991), trainees with high pretraining self-efficacy set more challenging goals regarding the transfer of training, which leads to higher performance outcomes compared to trainees with low pretraining self-efficacy (e.g., Chiaburu & Marinova, 2005; Ford et al., 1992; Simosi, 2012). However, other studies found a negative moderating effect of pretraining self-efficacy on the training transfer (e.g., Quesada-Pallarès & Gegenfurtner, 2015; Saks, 1995; Velada et al., 2007). Pan et al. (2011) refer to this phenomenon as the "dual moderating effect of self-efficacy" without being clear about how it can be explained (i.e., under which conditions the moderating effect of self-efficacy is positive or negative).

In sum, the research challenges here include providing clarity on (1) the transfer conceptualisation; (2) the temporal measurement of the transfer outcomes; (3) the effect of context-specific measures on the transfer; and (4) how the motivation to transfer, the work environment and self-efficacy relate to sequential steps in the transfer process. Figure 1.1 provides an overview.

Figure 1.1
Four Research Questions



1.4 Dissertation Outline

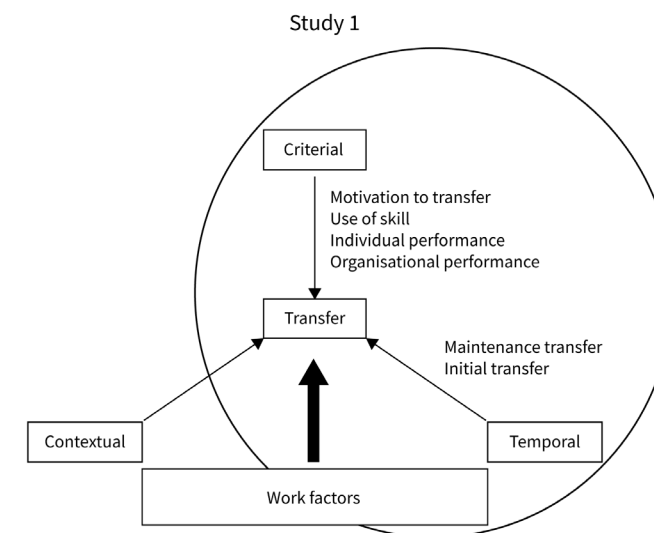
Here, I aim to answer these four research questions. The subsequent chapters address one or more of these research questions. Each chapter builds on the previous one. This dissertation employs a methodological triangulation approach to answer the general research question. Triangulation refers to the practice of using multiple theories and/or research methods to analyse data to enhance the credibility of a research study (Hoque et al., 2013). Methodological triangulation research uses more than one kind of method to study a phenomenon (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012). Methodological triangulation is of two types: “across method” and “within method”. Across-method studies combine quantitative and qualitative data-collection techniques (Casey & Murphy, 2009). Within-method studies use two or more data-collection procedures, quantitative or qualitative, but not both. Following within-method methodological triangulation logic, this dissertation draws on three data-collection procedures to answer the general research question: “*How can the successful work transfer of soft skills training be ensured*”

This dissertation consists of five chapters, of which three are research papers. In **Chapter 2**, I report a systematic literature review on the post-training transfer process of soft-skills training (**study 1**; Botke et al., 2018). Based on the Ability Motivation Opportunity (AMO) model (Appelbaum et al., 2000), I theorise that the motivation to transfer is an important step in the post-training transfer process. Thus, after a training (“Ability”), trainees should first be motivated to transfer the knowledge and skills from the training (“Motivation”, the first stage of the transfer). This motivation (together with the “Opportunity” to use the learned skills) should lead to the use of the skills during work (second stage). Practising the skills should finally lead to increased performance (third stage). In the review, I focus on these transfer stages, the relations between the outcomes per stage (the vertical transfer) and how work factors are related to each transfer outcome. The review includes 34 empirical studies on the transfer of soft-skills training published in academic journals between 1988 and 2017.

This literature review addresses research questions 1 and 3 by unravelling different transfer outcomes, their temporal measurements, and relations between such outcome measures (the vertical transfer). Additionally, this review addresses research question 4 by presenting work factors influencing each type of transfer outcome. Figure 1.2 provides an overview of the issues covered in study 1.

Figure 1.2

Overview of the Issues Covered in Study 1



The review outcomes suggest that the transfer can be seen as a stepwise process. First, the trainees must be motivated to transfer, and then they start using the skills that consequently can lead to increased performance. However, no studies on the transfer of soft skills training were found that included all these transfer stages. Additionally, this chapter identifies different types of work factors and their impact on each transfer stage and clearly illustrates how the impact of specific work factors on the transfer of soft skills depends on the transfer conceptualisation. The literature review also highlights limitations concerning the knowledge available regarding the transfer of soft skills. The outcome of this review formed the starting point for the subsequent empirical studies.

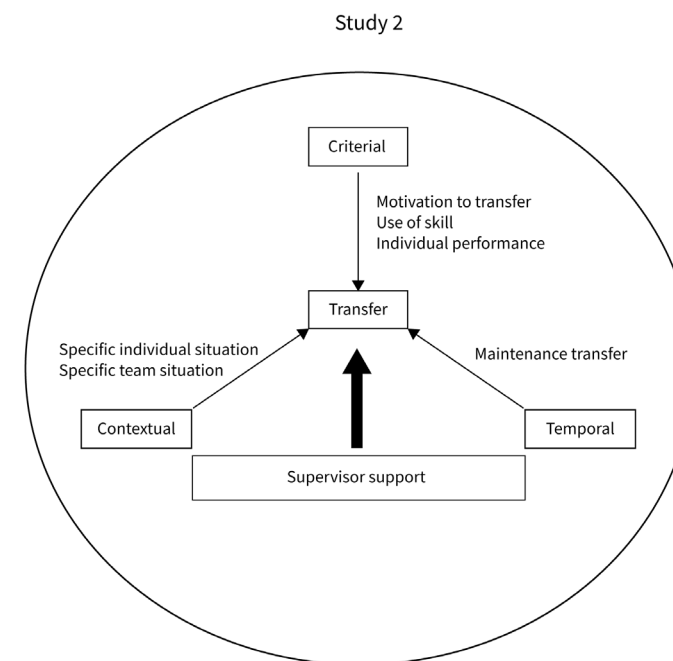
In **Chapter 3 (study 2)**, the stepwise process from study 1 was empirically tested for two performance outcomes (detached concern and dealing with a heavy workload) in a three-wave study using a within-person design. The contextual perspective was added to this study by measuring each performance outcome in an individual (i.e., can you effectively use the skills from the training when you work alone?) and a team situation (i.e., can you effectively use the skills from the training when you work in a team situation?). I expected transfer outcomes to occur in both situations. However, testing transfer outcomes in two different situations enabled us to establish in what way the specific work situation affects

transfer results (i.e., the long-term transfer) requires the application and maintenance of newly learned skills on the job (Laker, 1990). Consequently, I expect the effect of motivation to the transfer on post-training performance to be fully mediated by the use of skills from the training. Additionally, I theorised that supervisor support plays a key role during the transfer by providing “opportunities to use” trained skills during work (Govaerts, Kyndt, & Dochy, 2017). By including two specific supervisor support behaviours (emotional and appraisal) during the transfer, I elaborate on Nijman (2004) and Govaerts (2017). These authors both identified different behaviours supervisors could show during the transfer, but the authors were unable to show how different supervisor behaviours would lead to different transfer results. To test the hypothesised model, a three-wave study was conducted with a sample of 155 crime-scene investigators following a self-leadership skills training programme.

This study covers research questions 1 and 3 by addressing different transfer outcomes (motivation to transfer, use of skills and performance) in a three-wave study. Additionally, this study addresses research question 2 by measuring the use of skills and performance results among the participants in two specific work situations (individual and team). Finally, this study addresses research question 4 by including specific supervisor support behaviours as the antecedents of the transfer. Figure 1.3 provides an overview of the issues covered in study 2.

Figure 1.3

Overview of the Issues Covered in Study 2



This three-wave study shows the importance of specificity regarding the transfer results of soft skills training. If we had not included the specific context in our research (i.e., if we had asked generally whether the participants had used the skills “during work”), the results would probably have been different. Additionally, this study shows the importance of specificity regarding supervisor behaviour during the transfer. Again, the results would probably have been different if we had asked participants simply “if their supervisor helped them during the transfer”.

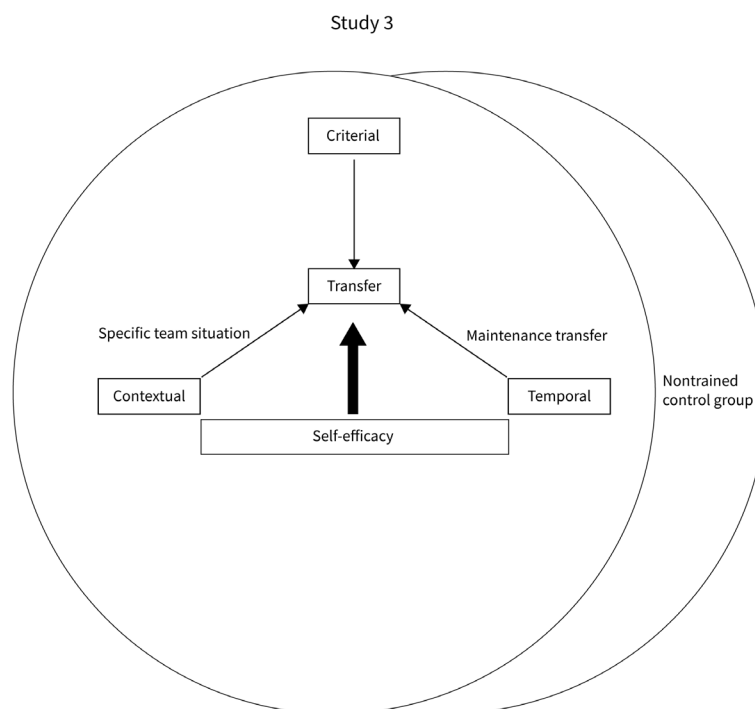
Although study 2 addressed the different transfer outcomes and the relations between such outcomes, the different contexts and the measures at three moments in time, this study could not address any causal effect from the training because it lacked a nontrained control group. To ensure that the observed changes were due to training rather than other environmental or organisational influences, a field experiment (**study 3, Chapter 4**) was added to the dissertation. In line with study 2, two different performance outcomes (detached concern and proactivity) were tested in a specific situation (i.e.,

a team). For this study, we included the effect of the trainees' occupational self-efficacy as a possible barrier to success. Based on behavioural plasticity theory (Brockner, 1988), I theorised that people with low occupational self-efficacy are more susceptible to the influence of self-leadership training than are individuals with higher levels of occupational self-efficacy. To test the hypothesised model, a field study was conducted including a pretest/post-test design with a sample of 223 human service professionals who were assigned either to a training group (n = 94) or a wait-list control group (n = 129).

This two-wave study addressed research questions 1 and 3 by focussing on two different performance measures in a two-wave study, research question 2 by focussing on the transfer outcomes in a specific work situation (i.e., a teamwork situation) and research question 4 by including the effect of pretraining occupational self-efficacy on the transfer outcomes. Figure 1.4 provides an overview of the issues covered in study 3.

Figure 1.4

Overview of the Issues Covered in Study 3



This field study shows the importance of specifying the performance results of a soft skills training and suggests that some performance results may take longer to materialise than others (i.e., the proper time lag to measure the transfer outcomes may depend on the specific measure). Additionally, this study confirms that trainee attributes may influence the effect of a soft skills training. However, this effect may be different per transfer measure.

In **Chapter 5**, I provide the main conclusions for the four research questions discussed here. In addition, I synthesise and discuss the findings of the previous chapters. Furthermore, I outline the implications for research and practice and discuss the limitations and suggestions for future research on the transfer of soft skills training. Table 1.3 provides an overview of chapters 2-4 and explains how the four research questions and methodological triangulation are embedded in the three studies as well as of the theories and variables included in each study. Tables 1.4 and 1.5 present an overview of the research output of this dissertation.

Table 1.3
Overview of the Studies

| | Study 1 (literature review; Chapter 2) | Study 2 (empirical; Chapter 3) | Study 3 (empirical; Chapter 4) |
|-------------------|---|--|---|
| Theory | AMO model (Appelbaum et al., 2000) Baldwin & Ford's transfer model (1988) | AMO model (Appelbaum et al., 2000) Self-leadership theory (Manz, 1986) | Self-leadership theory (Manz, 1986) Behavioural plasticity theory (Brockner, 1988) |
| Context | Soft skills training | Self-leadership training | Self-leadership training |
| Research question | 1, 3 and 4 | 1-4 | 1-4 |
| Outcomes | Motivation to transfer Use of skills Individual performance Organisational performance | Motivation to transfer Use of self-leadership skills Individual performance - detached concern - dealing with heavy a workload | Individual performance - detached concern - proactivity |
| Time lapse | Diverse | 3-wave survey (pretraining and two post-training measures) | 2-wave survey (pretraining and post-training measures) |
| Work situations | None | Critical work situations - individual - team | Team |
| Antecedents | Motivation to transfer Work factors | Motivation to transfer Supervisor support | Self-efficacy |
| Design | Systematic literature review | Within-person design | Quasi-experimental field study |
| Sample | N=34 (1986-2017) | N=155 (crime fighters at the Dutch police) | N=223 (human service professionals at the Dutch police) |

Table 1.4
Dissertation Output

| Chapter | Title | Method | Sample | Journal publication status |
|---------|---|---------------------------------|--|--|
| 1 | Introduction | | | |
| 2 | Work Factors Influencing the Transfer Stages of Soft Skills Training: a Literature Review | Literature review | 34 empirical papers | Published in <i>Educational Research Review</i> in 2018 |
| 3 | Transfer of Self-Leadership Skills: a Three-Wave Study within the Dutch Police | 3-wave survey | 155 crime scene investigators working for the Dutch police | Under review at the <i>Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology</i> |
| 4 | The Effect of Self-Leadership Training on the Detached Concern and the Proactivity of Human Service Professionals | Quasi-experimental field survey | 223 human service providers working for the Dutch police | Under review at the <i>Journal of Business and Psychology</i> |
| 5 | Discussion | | | |

Table 1.5

Overview of Conference Presentations and Nonscientific Publications

| Paper | Congress/Journal | Date |
|---|--|------------|
| Transfer van training. Van leren naar toepassen ("Transfer of training. From learning to application" Dutch book chapter) | In Schenning, J. Simons, R.J., & T. Besieux (red.). <i>Mensenorganisaties: 24 evoluties onder de loep</i> (pp. 371-384). Zaltbommel: Thema | 2016 |
| Transfer of Soft Skills Training: a systematic review (Conference presentation) | Academy of Management 2017 Annual Meeting; Atlanta | 08-08-2017 |
| Effects of work factors on the three stages of post-training transfer: An empirical investigation within the Dutch Police (Conference presentation) | EARLI SIG 14 Learning and Professional Development Conference 2018; Geneva | 13-09-2018 |
| Transfer van training: Effectonderzoek in de politiepraktijk ("Transfer of training: the effect of training within the Police organisation"; Dutch journal article) | <i>Cahiers Politiestudies</i> , 49(4), 51-62. | 2018 |
| Transfer of Soft Skills in Mission-Critical Work Situations (Conference presentation) | Academy of Management 2019 Annual Meeting; Boston | 13-08-2019 |
| Effects of learning climate and self-efficacy on transfer results in mission-critical work situations (Conference presentation) | EARLI 2019 Conference; Aachen | 12-08-2019 |
| The effect of a self-leadership training on detached concern of police professionals (Conference presentation) | EARLI SIG 14 Learning and Professional Development Conference 2020; Barcelona <i>Paper was accepted; however the conference was cancelled due to Covid-19</i> | 2020 |
| Het effect van soft-skills training ("The effect of soft-skills training"; Dutch journal article) | <i>Opleiding & Ontwikkeling</i> , 33(2), 18-22. | 2020 |
| Training Mentale Kracht ("Training Mental Strength"; Dutch journal article) | <i>Tijdschrift voor de Politie</i> , 82(3), 28-31. | 2020 |
| Jolanda Botke, PhD-onderzoeker naar transfer en effect van trainingen (Jolanda Botke; PhD research on transfer and effect of training"; Dutch interview) | <i>De Compliance Officer</i> , 10(35), 6-9. | 2020 |
| Transfer of training: the Achilles heel of the training process (Journal article) | <i>Amsterdam in Science, Business and Society</i> , 3, 36-38. | 2021 |

Chapter 2.

Work Factors Influencing the Transfer Stages of Soft Skills Training: A Literature Review

This chapter appeared as: Botke, J. A., Jansen, P. G., Khapova, S. N., & Tims, M. (2018).

Work factors influencing the transfer stages of soft skills training: A literature review.

Educational Research Review, 24, 130-147. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2018.04.001>

Abstract

The transfer of training can be considered the Achilles heel of the training process. When trainees fail to use their new knowledge and skills on the job, training resources are wasted, and business results go unrealised. Research shows that the most problematic type of training transfer relates to soft skills training. To better understand the factors that influence the success of the transfer of soft skills training, we review studies published in top academic journals between 1988 and 2017. Our review reveals that three groups of work factors influence the post-training transfer of soft skills: job-related factors, social support factors, and factors related to the organisational facilitation of learning. The effects of specific factors vary by transfer stage. Our review also suggests that future research should devote more attention to the stages of transfer and consider both the behaviours of supervisors at each stage and the use of transfer-enhancing interventions.

2.1 Introduction

Although organisations invest billions of dollars in training every year, many trained competences reportedly fail to transfer to the workplace (Grossman & Salas, 2011). It is clear that the impact of training cannot be realised unless employees are both willing and able to use their new skills on the job (Jiang, Lepak, Hu, et al., 2012). This “transfer of training” is considered the Achilles heel of the training process. When trainees fail to use their new skills to improve performance, training resources are wasted and business results go unrealised (Chiaburu, Van Dam, et al., 2010), which leads to a waste of valuable time, energy and money for both organisations and their employees (Laker & Powell, 2011; Van der Locht et al., 2013; Volet, 2013). Despite the large investments in and potential benefits of training, organisational decision makers are often unsure of the extent to which employees perform differently once they have returned to work (Blume et al., 2010; Mathieu et al., 1992), and they also fail to understand how to optimise this transfer (Baldwin et al., 2017).

Even more problematic is the transfer process of soft skills training. Soft skills refer both to intrapersonal skills, such as the ability to manage oneself, and to interpersonal skills, such as managing interactions with others (Laker & Powell, 2011). Although most training transfer research and theory assumes that training content is irrelevant to the success of the training transfer (e.g., Burke & Hutchins, 2007), some studies mention how the transfer of soft skills differs from the transfer of hard skills. For example, Laker and Powell (2011) link the transfer of soft skills to far transfer (whereas the transfer of technical skills, for example, is more related to near transfer because a trainee can “mirror” the skills from the training in the work environment). “The imprecision involved in the application of soft-skill training is due to the uncertainty involved in exactly what the trainee needs to know and in what contexts he or she needs to apply that learning” (Laker & Powell, 2011, p. 116). Massenberg et al. (2017) found that the mediating effect of motivation to transfer between supervisor support and training transfer appeared only after soft skills training and not after hard skills training. Additionally, soft skills, and therefore the transfer of the results of soft skills training, are often more difficult to measure relative to functional skills in business areas such as finance, accounting, and marketing (Brown & Warren, 2009; Nijman, 2004). At the same time, across professional fields, employers agree that soft skills are increasingly important to employee mobility and success in the workforce (Carvalho & Roque, 2015; Deming, 2017; Griffith & Hoppner, 2013; Ibrahim et al., 2017).

Research has addressed various factors that explain the success of the transfer. The influencing variables are traditionally divided into three broad categories: trainee characteristics, the design and content of the training programme, and the work environment (Baldwin & Ford, 1988). Although many factors influence transfer, the period after training seems to be most important in facilitating transfer (Hawley & Barnard, 2005). Only those employees who successfully apply their gained skills in the workplace (i.e., those who transfer their training) provide benefits to organisations through enhanced performance (Laker & Powell, 2011). Features of the work environment have been thought to be particularly important to post-training transfer (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Tannenbaum & Yukl, 1992) because, while employees may be highly motivated individuals who have attended excellent training courses and are keen to use their new skills, constraints in the post-training work environment may prevent them from applying what they have learned in their jobs (Blume et al., 2010; Chiaburu et al., 2010; Govaerts & Dochy, 2014; Salas et al., 2012; Tannenbaum & Yukl, 1992; Van der Locht et al., 2013). Kastenmüller et al. (2012) mention that a facilitating work environment is especially necessary for the transfer of soft skills training because these types of training and their transfer require the participation of colleagues and supervisors. Qualitative reviews have provided some evidence of the factors and interventions that can affect post-training transfer. However, these reviews have not examined how (e.g., which conditions, situations, or support behaviours) and when (in which transfer stage) these factors influence the transfer. Additionally, so-called transfer-enhancing interventions have been used to optimise the post-training transfer, but there is significant variability in the findings across the relevant studies and a lack of consistent support for particular transfer interventions (Blume et al., 2010). If we want to improve the training transfer of soft skills training, we need to understand both the post-training transfer process and the work factors that influence the process and results of post-training transfer.

With this literature review, we aim to bring clarity to this issue by reviewing and integrating findings regarding the effects of work factors on the post-training transfer of soft skills training. Specifically, we focus on answering the following question: What is the influence of work factors on the transfer of soft skills training at different post-training transfer stages? To do so, we first provide a stage model of the post-training transfer process by integrating previous reviews (Blume et al., 2010; Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Cheng &

Hampson, 2008; Cheng & Ho, 2001; Grossman & Salas, 2011; Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001). We subsequently use this stage model to review the literature. To better understand the factors that influence the successful transfer of soft skills training, we review empirical studies published in academic journals between 1988 (which marks the publication of Baldwin and Ford's well-regarded review of the "transfer problem" in training research) and 2017.

Our review reveals that three groups of work factors influence the transfer of soft skills: job-related factors, social support factors, and the organisational facilitation of learning. The effects of specific factors are found to vary by transfer stage, and some factors are mediated by transfer-enhancing interventions. We conclude this paper with suggestions for further research on the transfer of soft skills training. Such research will not only contribute to a better understanding of the transfer process but will also optimise transfer results in organisations.

Modelling the Transfer Process

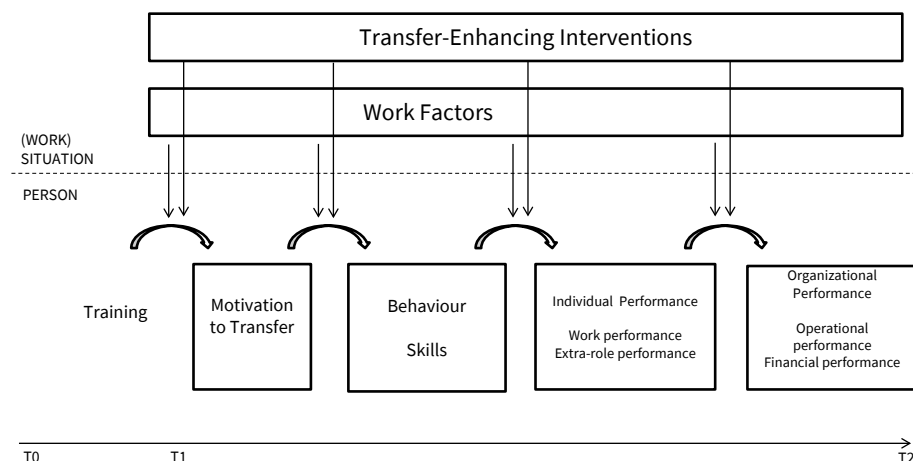
To study the transfer of soft skills training, it is important to examine the total post-training transfer process and to clarify the transfer results at each stage. Blume et al. (2010) recommend training transfer researchers to increase the precision of their selection and reporting of transfer outcomes. How transfer is conceptualised and how and when it is measured are important (Blume et al., 2010). Furthermore, Gruber (2013) states that "you have to be explicit about what kind of performance you have in mind when you seriously want to talk about transfer and about training" (Gruber, 2013, p. 97). This criterion problem has also been mentioned in other studies (Cheng & Ho, 2001; Knyphausen-Aufsess et al., 2009). In line with Blume et al. (2010), De Rijdt et al. (2013) and Yelon et al. (2014), we conceptualise training-to-work transfer as transfer not only to the employee's job but also to the consequences of doing the job well, that is, of (changed) work behaviour leading to improved individual and organisational performances.

In our transfer model presented in Figure 2.1, T0 represents the situation before the training (referring to the knowledge/skills, behaviours and/or performance of the trainee), and T1 represents the situation directly after the training. At T1, the trainee is supposed to have gained knowledge and skills but has used the new knowledge and skills only in the

context of the training and not on the job; thus, there is not yet a change in work behaviour or work performance. It is clear that the influence of training cannot be realised unless employees are both willing and able to use their new skills on the job (Jiang, Lepak, Hu, et al., 2012). If the transfer is successful, measures at T2 indicate changes in work behaviour and work performance at the individual or organisational level. Whereas the main evaluation question during the training is “Have you learned the new skills?” (learning perspective), the main question during the transfer is “Did the training improve your performance?” (work perspective).

Figure 2.1

Model of Training Transfer



If we examine post-training transfer, four transfer stages can be identified as occurring in periods T1-T2. Stage 1, i.e., the motivation to transfer, is defined as the trainee’s desire to apply the skills and knowledge gained during training to the workplace (Burke & Hutchins, 2008; Cheng & Hampson, 2008; Tracey et al., 1995). Motivation to transfer is expected to influence transfer behaviour (Cheng & Hampson, 2008). Stage 2 is the actual use of the trained skills in the workplace (Arthur et al., 2003; Blume et al., 2010; Cheng & Hampson, 2008; Grossman & Salas, 2011; Van den Bossche & Segers, 2013). The trainees start to use the new behaviours. Some researchers distinguish between individual and

collective use. Individual training transfer reflects the individual trainees’ efforts to apply training content in their jobs. In turn, collective training transfer reflects the efforts of groups, such as work teams or units, to apply training content (Lee et al., 2014).

Stage 3 includes individual performance improvements (Cheng & Ho, 2001; De Grip & Sauermann, 2013; Grossman & Salas, 2011; Salas et al., 2012; Taylor et al., 2009). The trainee behaves according to a norm or a performance requirement that leads to improved job-specific or non-job-specific individual performance. Job-specific individual performance is also called work performance. Non-job-specific individual performance is also denoted as commitment performance or extra-role performance and includes, for example, demonstrating effort (see also Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009; Blume et al., 2010), efficacy, and emotional responses (Baumann et al., 2011) and facilitating either peer and team performance or an improved social network (Van den Bossche & Segers, 2013). Individual performance might subsequently transfer into improved organisational performance (stage 4). This transfer from individual to organisational performance improvement is called vertical transfer (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009; Nijman, 2004; Saks & Belcourt, 2006) or micro-to-macro transfer (Tharenou et al., 2007). Organisational performance improvement includes both operational and financial outcomes. Operational outcomes are related to the goals of an organisational operation, including productivity, product quality, quality of service, and innovation. Financial outcomes reflect the fulfilment of the organisation’s economic goals. Typical financial outcomes include sales growth, returns on invested capital, stock market outcomes and returns on assets (Jiang, Lepak, Hu, et al., 2012; Tharenou et al., 2007).

The model in Figure 2.1 assumes that a transfer stage is influenced only by the preceding stage. Although some authors have studied the motivation to transfer as a prerequisite for behaviour (Axtell et al., 1997; Burke & Hutchins, 2008; Cheng & Hampson, 2008; Grossman & Salas, 2011; Knyphausen-Aufsess et al., 2009), to our knowledge, no research has addressed the full sequence of post-training effects on individual and organisational performance. The transfer outcomes of each stage are likely influenced by (different) factors in the work environment. These factors are the focus of our subsequent literature review. We now present our study.

2.2 Methodology

Literature Search and Selection Criteria

To identify relevant studies for our review, we used a systematic review methodology (Tranfield et al., 2003). This approach aims to remove the subjectivity of data collection by using a predefined selection algorithm. As a starting point for our review, we choose the publication date of the review paper on training transfer by Baldwin and Ford (1988). Consequently, we identified papers concerned with the transfer of soft skills training published between 1988 and 2017. Our initial search in the Web of Science database included the keywords “transfer of training” and “training transfer”. The keywords were used as selection criteria for topic and title. We selected only papers in English. This search resulted in an initial sample of 598 papers. After reading the abstracts, the pool was reduced to 139 papers. These references were loaded in EndNote, and then the complete articles were screened, heedful of the criteria for inclusion.

Studies were included or rejected based on their relevance. First, a study was considered relevant if it concerned the transfer of training to the workplace; therefore, a study had to relate to an employee sample in an organisational setting. We only included empirical studies on healthy adult employees (we excluded studies on children, student and adults with medical problems, and studies on sport performance). Second, a study was considered relevant if it focused on soft skills training. We used Kantrowitz’s categories of soft skills to identify these studies. She mentions ten categories of soft skills: (1) communication skills, (2) leadership skills, (3) decision making/problem solving skills, (4) self-management skills, (5) management skills, (6) organisation skills, (7) interpersonal skills, (8) political skills, (9) analysis/creativity skills, and (10) selling skills (Kantrowitz, 2005). We excluded all studies that did not focus on one of these skills. Our final sample included 34 empirical papers (see Figure 2.2).

All of the reviewed papers were published between 1995 and 2017 (see Figure 2.3) in 23 different journals. Although Figure 2.3 reveals a small increase in the number of papers published on the transfer of soft skills in the last 10 years, many issues remain, and we attempt to refresh researchers’ interest in the study of training transfer.

Figure 2.2
Selection Process

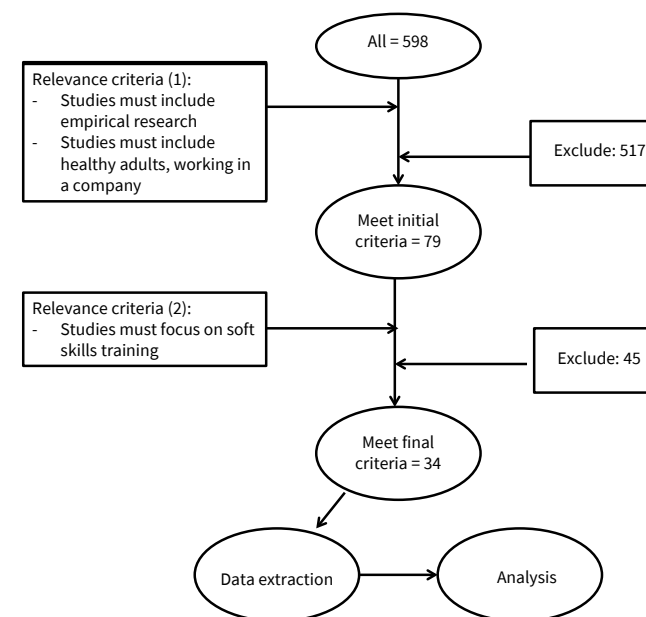
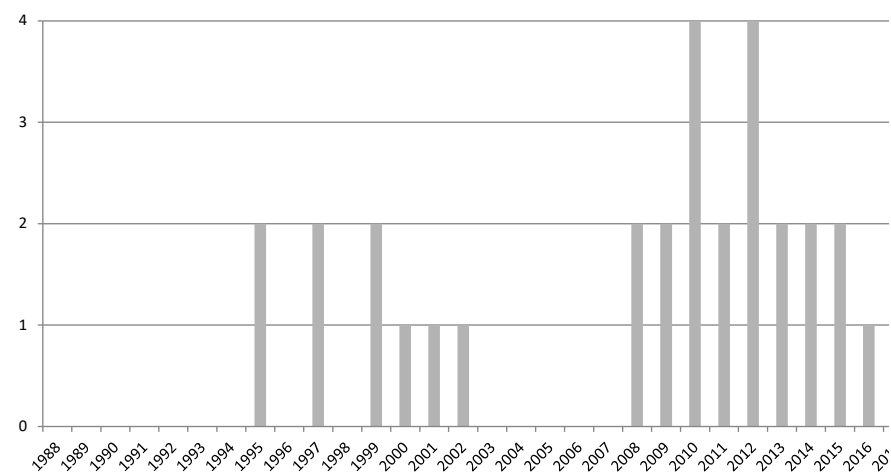


Figure 2.3
Publications per Year (1988-2017)



Analysis of the Literature

First, we summarised the literature based on a range of characteristics: author(s), date of publication, type of soft skills, and duration of the training. We also summarised how the transfer results were measured and when they were measured (Blume et al., 2010).

Second, we grouped the papers according to the relevant transfer stages. Although we realise that there is a difference between motivation to transfer and intent to transfer, we have collapsed motivation and intent into one stage because they both concern pre-behaviour drives. While all of the studies measured transfer, it was not always clear which stage(s) the studies addressed. For example, some studies suggested that they measured performance. However, in reality, they measured only whether or how often skills are used in the workplace (i.e., work behaviour) (Antle et al., 2008; Axtell et al., 1997; Lee et al., 2014). To decide whether a paper concerned behaviour or performance, studies that collected data through questionnaires were searched for their measurement items. In qualitative studies, the authors looked for the ways in which the transfer results were uncovered (e.g., interview questions, coding schemes). If only the use of skills was measured, we included the study in stage 2, i.e., the use of trained skills. If the use included a norm or performance rating, the study was included in stage 3, i.e., individual performance improvement. De Rijdt et al. (2013) also used this distinction but called it “a use measure” and “an effectiveness measure”. In their study on a manager’s training of five Canadian national sport organisations, Millar and Stevens (2012) suggested they measured organisational performance. However, the example item for organisational performance was “understanding how risk management can be applied to the organisation”. Therefore, we did not include this study under organisational performance (we included this study under individual performance because of other measures). We checked for studies that measured more than one transfer stage. Third, we examined the papers on work factors. “Work factors” refer to any influence(s) on transfer in the work environment that exist or occur outside the training itself (Burke & Hutchins, 2007). Based on earlier reviews from Knyphausen-Aufsess et al. (2009); Salas and Cannon-Bowers (2001); Cheng and Ho (2001); and Cheng and Hampson (2008), we worked with three groups of work factors: job-related work factors, social support variables, and the organisational facilitation of learning.

Based on both the abovementioned reviews and other transfer studies, we found several work factors per group that could influence transfer. Job-related work factors include job relevance (Burke & Hutchins, 2008; Knyphausen-Aufsess et al., 2009; Taylor et al., 2009), job or task autonomy, and workload (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009; Clarke, 2013; Nijman, 2004). Social support is believed to play a central role in the transfer process (Govaerts & Dochy, 2014; Tracey et al., 1995) and includes the attitudes and actions of supervisors, subordinates, and peers towards the training and learned skills (Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001). The third group of work factors includes the organisational facilitation of learning. Earlier research has confirmed the importance of the organisational learning climate for post-training transfer (e.g., Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Burke & Baldwin, 1999; Tracey et al., 1995; Tziner et al., 2007). We used the learning climate scale of Nikolova et al. (2014) to categorise our review results in this category. These authors used the following three dimensions to measure learning climate: a facilitation learning climate, an appreciation learning climate, and an error-avoidance learning climate.

Finally, we analysed papers on transfer-enhancing interventions that focused on identifying both the barriers that hinder the application of learned skills in the work environment and the trainees’ plans to overcome those barriers (Sookhai & Budworth, 2010). Three types of interventions have been studied: goal-setting, relapse prevention (including self-management), and programme-framing (i.e., optimistic previews). Goal-setting is based on a theory of employee motivation regarding task performance (Morin & Latham, 2000). The theory states that if an employee has the requisite ability, then a difficult, specific goal not only influences the employee’s subsequent behaviour through choice, effort, and persistence but also affects behaviour cognitively through the search for knowledge of ways to achieve the goal (Morin & Latham, 2000; Shantz & Latham, 2012). Goal-setting interventions involve either the actual setting of goals with regard to the implementation of new knowledge, skills and attitudes on the job or the teaching of how to set such goals (Nijman, 2004). Relapse prevention is a self-management technique (also called self-management training) by which individuals can become aware of environmental and intrapersonal threats to skill maintenance to anticipate, prevent, and recover from possible lapses into “old” behaviours (Burke & Baldwin, 1999; Marx, 1982). The focus is to promote the transfer of training by “immunising” learners against environmental obstacles

to transfer through heightened awareness, group problem-solving, realistic goal-setting, and simulating the necessary coping skills (Milne et al., 2002). Finally, the third type of transfer-enhancing intervention is programme-framing through (for instance) optimistic previews. This type of intervention includes activities that are expected to lead to a more positive perception of the organisational climate, which in turn may increase transfer (Kastenmüller et al., 2012).

Table 2.1 provides an overview of results of the analysis.

Table 2.1
Stages of Transfer of Soft Skills Training, Work Factors and Transfer-Enhancing Interventions

Studies only Focusing on Motivation to Transfer

| Study | Type of Soft Skills | Duration of Training | Sample Size | Rating source | Time of Measurement | Work Factors*** | | Transfer-enhancing Interventions**** |
|----------------------------------|---|----------------------|-------------|---------------|----------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| | | | | | | Job Factors | Social Support | |
| Al-Eisa et al. (2009) | Various hard and soft skills (e.g., negotiation skills) | 3.5 day | 287 | Self | Before <2 w | | Supervisor + | |
| Chiaburu, Van Dam, et al. (2010) | Service improvement skills | * | 111 | Self | <2 w 2-6 w 6 w - 3 m | | Supervisor + | Facilitation + |
| Hutchins et al. (2013) | Leadership skills | * | 235 | Self | <2 w | Job relevance 0 | Supervisor 0 Peer 0 | Appreciation 0 |
| Kastenmüller et al. (2012) | Communication and leadership skills | 1 day | 147 | Self | <2 w | | | Error-avoidance - (after OP) |
| Massenberg et al. (2017) | Management skills | 4 days | 353 | Self | Before <2 w | | Supervisor 0 Peer + | OP + |

Studies only Focusing on Use of Trained Skills

| Study | Type of Soft Skills | Duration of Training | Sample Size | Rating Source | Time of Measurement | Work Factors *** | | Transfer-enhancing Interventions**** |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|-------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------------|-------------------------|---|
| | | | | | | Job Factors | Social Support | |
| Antle et al. (2008) | Supervisory skills | 5 days | 72 | Self Subordinates | Before <2 w 2-6 w | | Supervisor + Peers 0 | Facilitation + |
| Antle et al. (2010) | Team building skills | 2.5 day | 163 | Self | Before <2 w 3-6 m | | Supervisor 0 Peers 0 | |
| Burke and Baldwin (1999) | Employee coaching skills | 0.5 day | 78 | Self Subordinates | <2 w 2-6 w | | | Facilitation/ appreciation + (after RP) |
| Chiaburu, Sawyer, et al. (2010) | Personal development skills | 1-2 days | 71 | Self Supervisor | 6 w - 3 m | | | |
| Clarke (2002) | Risk assessment skills | 2 days | 14 | Self | Before <2 w 3-6 m | Workload + | Supervisor 0 | |
| Ladyshewsky and Flavell (2012) | Leadership skills | 20 weeks | 10 | Self | 6 m - 1 y | Workload + | | |
| Richman-Hirsch (2001) | Customer service skills* | * | 267 | Supervisors Peers | 2-6 w | | | Appreciation + (after G) Appreciation 0 (after RP) |

Studies only Focusing on Use of Trained Skills (Continued)

| Study | Type of Soft Skills | Duration of Training | Sample Size | Rating Source | Time of Measurement | Work Factors *** | | Transfer-enhancing Interventions**** |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|-------------|-----------------|---------------------|------------------|----------------|---|
| | | | | | | Job Factors | Social Support | |
| Tracey et al. (1995) | Basic supervisory skills | 3 days | 104 | Self Supervisor | Before 6 w - 3 m | | | Facilitation + Appreciation + |
| Stenling and Tafvelin (2017) | Leadership skills | 6 days | 121 | self | Before <2w 6m-1y | | | Facilitation 0 (for near transfer) Facilitation + (for far transfer) |

Studies only Focusing on Individual Performance Improvement

| Study | Type of Soft Skills | Duration of Training | Sample Size | Rating Source | Time of Measurement | Job Factors | Work Factors *** Social Support | Learning Climate | Transfer-enhancing Interventions**** |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------|-------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|---|------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Bennett et al. (1999) <i>Work performance</i> | Teamwork skills | * | 564 | Self | Unclear** | | Supervisor + Peers + | Appreciation + | |
| Deane et al. (2014) <i>Work performance</i> | Personal leadership skills | 2 days | 188 | Company data | Before 3-6 m 6 m – 1y | | | | G+ |
| Facteau et al. (1995) <i>Work performance</i> | Management skills | * | 967 | Self | Unclear** | | Supervisor – Peers + Subordinates + | Appreciation 0 | |
| Frisque and Kolb (2008) <i>Work performance</i> | Ethical skills | 6 hours | 91 | Self | Before <2 w 3-6 m | | | | |
| Ibrahim et al. (2017) <i>Work performance</i> | Soft skills | 2+2+1 days | 260 | Self Supervisor | Before <2 w | | | | |

Studies only Focusing on Individual Performance Improvement (Continued)

| Study | Type of Soft Skills | Duration of Training | Sample Size | Rating Source | Time of Measurement | Job Factors | Work Factors *** Social Support | Learning Climate | Transfer-enhancing Interventions**** |
|--|------------------------|----------------------|-------------|--|--------------------------|-------------|------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Johnson et al. (2012) <i>Extra-role performance</i> | Leadership skills | 5 days | 294 | Self Supervisors Peers Subordinates | 3-6 m | | | | G + |
| Kylesten and Nahlinder (2011) <i>Extra-role performance</i> | Decision making skills | 2 days | 7 | Project leader Instructor | <2 w | | | | |
| Martin (2010) <i>Work performance</i> | Management skills | 12 weeks | 237 | Supervisor | Before 2-6 w 3-6 m | | Peers + | Facilitation + | |
| Millar and Stevens (2012) <i>Work performance</i> | Risk management skills | 2 days | 22 | Self | Before <2w 3-6m | | | Facilitation 0 | |

Studies only Focusing on Organisational Performance Improvement

| Study | Type of Soft Skills | Duration of Training | Sample Size | Rating Source | Time of Measurement | Job Factors | Work Factors *** Social Support | Learning Climate | Transfer-enhancing Interventions**** |
|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-------------|---------------|---------------------|-------------|------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Voegtlin et al. (2015) | Personal mastery skills | 3 days | 2638 | Self | Unclear** | Autonomy 0 | | | |

Studies focusing on Motivation to Transfer and Use of Trained Skills

| Study | Type of Soft Skills | Duration of Training | Sample Size | Rating Source | Time of Measurement | Work Factors *** | | Transfer-enhancing Interventions**** |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|-------------|-----------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| | | | | | | Job Factors | Social Support | |
| Axtell et al. (1997) | Interpersonal skills | * | 75 | Self Supervisor | <2w 2-6w >1y | Job relevance + Autonomy + | Supervisor 0 | Error-avoidance 0 |
| Lee et al. (2014) | Leadership skills | * | 365 | Self | Unclear** | | Supervisor + Peer + (MTT) Peer 0 (use) | Facilitation 0 |
| Massenberg et al. (2015) | Reflectivity skills | 1 day | 45 | Self | 2-6w | | Supervisor + Peer + | |
| Seiberling and Kauffeld (2017) | Leadership skills | 2 days | 287 | Self | <2w 6 w-3 m | | Supervisor + | |
| Van derLocht et al. (2013) | Social skills for managers | 2-10 days | 595 | Self | Unclear** | Job relevance + | | |

Studies Focusing on Use of Trained Skills and Individual Performance Improvement

| Study | Type of Soft Skills | Duration of Training | Sample Size | Rating Source | Time of Measurement | Work Factors *** | | Transfer-enhancing Interventions**** |
|--|------------------------------------|----------------------|-------------|--------------------|----------------------------|------------------|----------------|--------------------------------------|
| | | | | | | Job Factors | Social Support | |
| Brown and Warren (2009) <i>Extra-role performance</i> | Self-awareness | * | 89 | Self Peers | <2w 6 m - 1 y | | | G+ |
| Morin and Latham (2000) <i>Extra-role performance</i> | Interpersonal communication skills | 1 day | 41 | Self Peers | 2-6w 3-6m | | | |
| Olivero et al. (1997) <i>Work performance</i> | Managerial skills | 3 days | 31 | Self | Before <2w 6 w - 3 m | | | G + |
| Sparrr et al. (2017) <i>Work performance</i> | Leadership skills | * | 60 | Self | Unclear** | | | |
| Tuleja and Roberts (2011) <i>Extra-role performance</i> | Management communication skills | 4 days | 720 | Self Supervisor | Unclear** | Job relevance + | | |

Note.

* For some training programs, the duration of the training was either unclear or not mentioned.

** Some studies measure transfer by gathering data on all employees who have attended training during a certain time period (e.g., one year). In this situation, the time delay between the training and the result measure is unclear.

*** + = Positive impact on transfer results, 0 = No impact on transfer results, - = Negative impact on transfer results

**** OP = Optimistic previews, RP = Relapse prevention, G = Goal-setting

2.3 Results

The Post-Training Transfer Process

To improve the training transfer of soft skills training, we first need to understand the post-training transfer process. Empirical studies were found for each of the transfer stages. The studies addressed a broad range of soft skills training, such as communication (e.g., Kastenmüller et al., 2012; Morin & Latham, 2000), leadership (e.g., Facticeau et al., 1995; Martin, 2010; Seiberling & Kauffeld, 2017; Stenling & Tafvelin, 2016), coaching (Burke & Baldwin, 1999), teambuilding (Antle et al., 2010), decision making skills and risk management (Kylesten & Nahlinder, 2011; Millar & Stevens, 2012) and ethical skills (Frisque & Kolb, 2008). The sample sizes ranged from 7 to 2638, and 41% of the studies had a sample size of more than 200. Most of the studies collected data through questionnaires (26 of 34 studies). Eight studies (also) used qualitative data. Among the 34 studies, 15 addressed performance outcomes. Where performance was measured, it was conceptualised as individual-level performance, with the exception of the study by Voegtlin et al. (2015), who also measured organisational performance. Some trainings were very brief (one day or less; Burke & Baldwin, 1999; Frisque & Kolb, 2008; Massenberg et al., 2015). According to Taylor et al. (2009), this issue influences transfer results. In their meta-review, Taylor et al. (2009) studied the influence of the length of training on the effect size (measured as the difference between post-test and pretest scores regarding on-the-job behaviour after training divided by the pretest standard deviation). These authors found that for short managerial training (one day or less), the effect sizes were small (within a range of 0.13 for self-ratings to 0.34 for supervisor ratings). Long programmes (more than five days) were found to have modest effects (Taylor et al., 2009). There was a predominant orientation towards self-reports; 27 of the 30 studies used self-reports, and 16 studies used only self-reports.

Some studies measured only near transfer (i.e., immediately after the training programme), while other studies (also) measured far transfer (i.e., one year after the training). Taking a minimum time lapse of three months between training and impact measure as suggested by Cheng and Ho (2001), of the 29 studies that measured behaviour and/or performance, only 14 included a measure after three months or more (this minimal time lapse should allow trainees adequate opportunities to use newly learned skills and allow raters adequate observational opportunities).

Finally, ten papers studied two stages of the transfer process. Of these ten papers, five papers included the stages “motivation to transfer” and “use of trained skills”. Four of these five studies found that motivation to transfer was positively related to the use of new skills after training (Axtell et al., 1997; Massenberg et al., 2015; Seiberling & Kauffeld, 2017; Van der Locht et al., 2013). Moreover, five papers included the stages “use of trained skills” and “individual performance improvement”. However, only two papers reported a positive relationship between the use of trained skills and individual performance improvement (Morin & Latham, 2000; Sparr et al., 2017).

In sum, empirical studies were found for each of the transfer stages. Only ten studies included more than one stage. We found only one study that included a measure of organisational performance. Holton (2005) mentioned that “there has been almost no research on factors influencing the transfer of individual performance into organisational performance” (Holton, 2005, p. 49). These findings suggest that the full sequence of effects after training on individual and organisational performance has not yet been studied.

Work factors per Transfer Stage

To improve the training transfer of soft skills training, we need to understand not only the post-training transfer process but also the factors that influence each of the transfer stages.

Stage 1: Motivation to Transfer

All ten of the studies that focused on motivation or intent to transfer addressed the influences of work factors on the motivation or intent to transfer. In this transfer stage, the job-related factors of job relevance and autonomy are related to the motivation to transfer. For example, Axtell et al. (1997) studied the effects of job relevance (how useful the content of the training is for doing a job) and autonomy (how much autonomy the employee has to implement new skills) on the transfer of an interpersonal skills training and found that both were key variables in determining the level of motivation to transfer. Motivation to transfer is also related to the social support factors of supervisor support and peer support. For example, Chiaburu, Van Dam et al. (2010) found a positive relationship between social support from the supervisor and motivation to transfer. Moreover, other studies found

positive relationships between supervisor support and motivation to transfer (Al-Eisa et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2014; Massenberg et al., 2015; Seiberling & Kauffeld, 2017). Lee et al. (2014) found that peer support had a significant effect on motivation to transfer skills from a leadership programme in a large Korean insurance firm. Motivation to transfer is also influenced by a “facilitating” learning climate. For example, Chiaburu, Van Dam et al. (2010) found that perceived organisational support enhanced trainees’ motivation to transfer the skills learned in a service improvement programme. One study addressed transfer-enhancing interventions (Kastenmüller et al., 2012) and found that trainees who were asked to write down positive (vs. negative) aspects of their training reported a more positive perception of the openness of the climate and, in turn, increased motivation to transfer. A perceived (negative) organisational climate mediates the effect of optimistic previews on motivation to transfer.

In sum, positive relationships have been found between motivation to transfer and job relevance, autonomy, supervisor support, peer support, and a facilitating learning climate. In other words, if new soft skills are to be transferred to the workplace, a first stage is being motivated to transfer. For this motivation to transfer, it is important that trainees feel that the course is relevant to their jobs, perceive that they have the autonomy to implement the new behaviour, receive support from supervisors and peers and perceive that the organisation facilitates their learning. Optimistic previews seem to increase motivation to transfer (but only one study was found on this relation).

Stage 2: Use of Trained Skills

Nineteen of the 34 empirical studies included in the review focused on the use of skills. However, only 15 of these 19 studies addressed the influence of work factors on the use of skills. The job-related factors of job relevance (utility), autonomy, and workload are positively related to individual skill use. For example, Clarke (2002) found that a lower workload improved the use of new skills after training on care management skills. Van der Locht et al. (2013) found that expected utility was related to individual skill use after management training. Axtell et al. (1997) found positive relationships between autonomy and the use of skills after training courses aimed at developing interpersonal skills at work at by supervisor support. For example, Antle et al. (2008) found that supervisor support had

a positive influence on the use of new skills in the workplace. Massenberg et al. (2015) found positive relationships of individual supervisor support, team supervisor support and peer support with the use of trained skills after team training in reflectivity skills among blue-collar workers in an automotive supply company in Germany.

The use of new skills has also been found to be associated with a facilitating learning climate. For example, Antle et al. (2008) found that a facilitating learning culture was positively related to the transfer results for supervisory training for welfare professionals. Additionally, the use of new skills has been found to be related to an appreciating learning climate. Stenling and Tafvelin (2016) found that a facilitation learning culture predicted far transfer (i.e., one year after the training programme) for a leadership development programme among organisational leaders in Swedish sports clubs.

Two studies in the sample address the relationships between the use of skills, an organisational learning climate and transfer-enhancing interventions (goal-setting and relapse prevention). Richman-Hirsch (2001) examined the effect of goal-setting and self-management training on customer service skills. Her findings indicate that training in goal-setting is effective in improving the extent to which trainees apply their new skills to the job. Further, goal-setting has been found to be more effective in supportive work environments. Burke and Baldwin (1999) studied the effects of two relapse prevention (RP) modules that were designed to supplement a training programme on trainee coaching skills. Their research suggests that there is less of a need for RP tools when the transfer climate becomes more supportive. Using a full RP intervention in a favourable transfer climate may even have a negative effect on transfer.

In sum, scholars have found that job relevance, workload, autonomy, supervisor support, peer support, a facilitating learning climate, and an appreciating learning climate are positively related to the use of new skills after training. In other words, for the use of new soft skills after training, it is important that trainees feel that the training is relevant to their jobs and perceive that they have the autonomy to use the new skills, that the workload allows for attempts to use the new skills, that supervisors and peers support the transfer, and that the trainees feel that the organisation facilitates and rewards their learning. Additionally, goal-setting and relapse prevention have been found to be positively related to the use of new skills and to interact with some of the work factors.

Stage 3: Individual Performance

Fourteen of the 34 empirical studies included in the review focus on individual performance, of which five studies focus on extra-role performance, and nine studies focus on work performance. Only five of the studies included in this stage have examined whether the relationship between training and individual performance is mediated by work factors. Focusing on the positive relationship between work factors and individual performance after training, we see that one study found that job relevance is positively related to extra-role performance. Tuleja and Roberts (2011) found a positive relationship between job relevance and extra-role performance improvement (communication effectiveness) after management communication training. The 14 studies included no information about the influence of job-related factors (job relevance, autonomy and workload) on the relationship between training and work performance.

The findings on the influence of social support on work performance after training are mixed. One study found a negative relationship between supervisor support and individual performance and a positive relationship of peer support and subordinate support with individual (work) performance after training (Facteau et al., 1995). Bennett et al. (1999) studied the influence of peer and supervisor support on the transfer of teamwork skills and found that both supervisor and peer support were important for work performance. No relationship was found between social support and improvement in extra-role performance after training.

Two studies included the relationship between organisational support of learning and work performance after training. Bennett et al. (1999) found that trainees who felt blocked from applying their training reported significantly less customer orientation after the training than untrained employees, whereas those who reported a helpful learning culture reported significantly more customer orientation after the training than the untrained group. Martin (2010) found that trainees in a division with a more favourable climate exhibited greater improvement after management skills training. Additionally, peer support mitigated the effects of a negative climate. Four studies included transfer-enhancing interventions. All four included goal-setting (no work factors were included in these studies). For example, Johnson et al. (2012) examined the relationship between goal-setting and training transfer after a five-day leadership development programme. Their research suggested that leaders

who set multiple goals were perceived as having improved more across competences than leaders who set only one goal (Johnson et al., 2012). Morin and Latham (2000) also studied the effect of goal-setting on the transfer of supervisors' communication training. Their research demonstrated significantly higher self-efficacy among supervisors who engaged in either mental practice or in mental practice combined with goal-setting than among supervisors in the goal-setting only or control conditions. Deane et al. (2014) studied the effect of coaching that included goal-setting on the transfer of service-provision training for medical staff. These authors found that training followed by the goal-setting intervention led to significant sustained improvements in the quality of care planning.

In sum, positive relationships are found between extra-role performance improvement and job relevance; between work performance improvement and supervisor support (but not in all studies), peer support, and subordinate support; and between work performance improvement and a facilitating learning culture and work performance and an appreciating learning culture. In other words, job relevance is important for improving extra-role performance after soft skills training. To improve work performance after soft skills training, support from supervisors, peers and subordinates is important, and the trainees should feel that the organisation facilitates and rewards their learning. Goal-setting could have a positive influence on this transfer stage (on both work performance and extra-role performance).

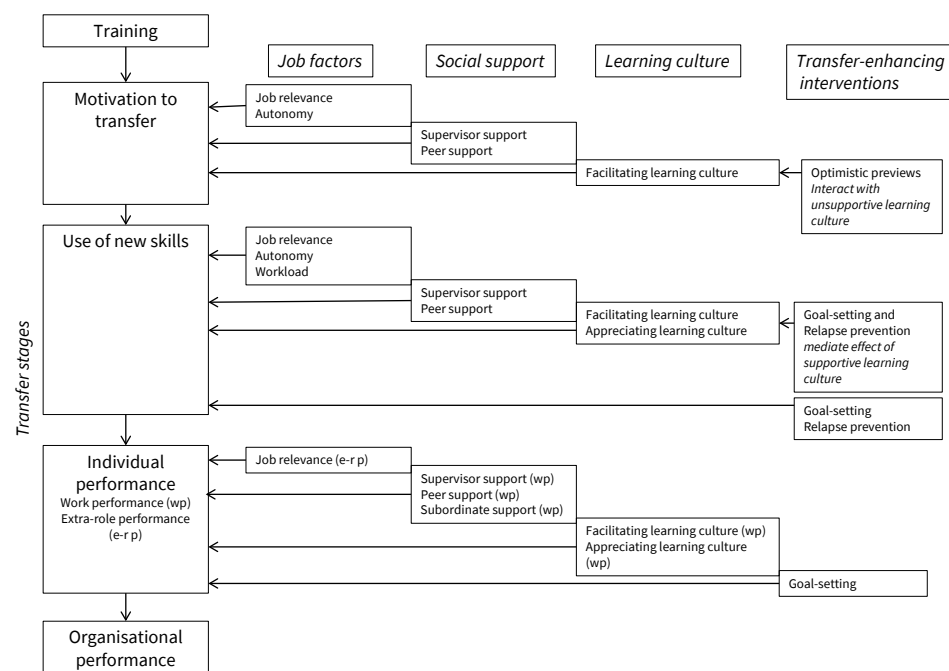
Stage 4: Organisational Performance

Only one of the 34 empirical studies included in the review focused on organisational performance. Voegtlin et al. (2015) studied the transfer of skills after a three-day empowerment programme in a Swedish multinational company specialising in power and automation technologies. These authors assessed collective empowerment at the work-unit level of analysis and found that the training did not significantly relate to the perceived autonomy of the work units. No transfer-enhancing interventions were included in this study.

Figure 2.4 provides an overview of all of the relationships found between transfer stages, work factors and transfer-enhancing interventions.

Figure 2.4

Overview of Positive Relations Found between Post-training Transfer Stages, Work Factors, and Transfer-Enhancing Interventions



2.4 Discussion

The Relevance of the Transfer Stages

This paper's purpose was to explore the effects of work factors on the transfer of soft skills training. Specifically, we focused on answering the following question: What is the influence of work factors on the transfer of soft skills training at different post-training transfer stages? To answer this question, we conducted a systematic literature review involving 34 empirical studies published in academic journals between 1988 and 2017. We used a stage model to analyse these papers. The stage model included four stages of transfer: motivation to transfer, use of new behaviours in the work setting, individual performance improvement and improvement of organisational performance. Our results also show that the impact of

work factors differs by stage. Therefore, it is relevant to distinguish between the transfer stages if we want to understand how to optimise the transfer results of soft skills training.

We found only one study on the relationship between soft skills training and organisational performance improvement, and this study found no positive relationships between training and performance improvement (Voegtlin et al., 2015). No studies were found on the relationship between training and financial organisational outcomes. Based on a meta-analysis of 67 studies, Tharenou et al. (2007) suggest that training is positively related to human resource outcomes and organisational performance but is only very weakly related to financial outcomes. These authors also suggest that training leads to organisational-level outcomes to the extent that it results in the acquisition of the skills, behaviours, and performance necessary to achieve desired organisational outcomes. In line with Tharenou et al. (2007), we propose a transfer model with a direct link between soft skills training and individual transfer outcomes (behaviour and performance) and with an indirect link between training and organisational performance at an operational level.

The Relevance of Work Factors

Based on earlier reviews (Cheng & Ho, 2001; Knyphausen-Aufsess et al., 2009; Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001), we worked with three groups of work factors that may influence the transfer of soft skills training: job-related factors, social support variables, and the organisational facilitation of learning. The first group of factors, i.e., job-related factors, include more individually oriented variables (i.e., workload, job-relevance, and autonomy). The second group of factors is related to the social environment of the trainee. The third group of factors focuses on the learning culture in the organisation. We found that different work factors influence each transfer stage and that the effects of specific factors vary by transfer stage. For example, workload seems to be particularly relevant to the use of new skills on the job (Clarke, 2002; Ladyshewsky & Flavell, 2012), job relevance is relevant in all transfer stages (e.g., Tuleja & Roberts, 2011; Van der Locht et al., 2013), and autonomy is important both for motivation to transfer and for the use of new skills (Axtell et al., 1997). Supervisory support and peer support are important in all transfer stages (e.g., Bennett et al., 1999; Lee et al., 2014; Olivero et al., 1997). A facilitating learning climate is positively related to the motivation to transfer (Chiaburu, Van Dam, et al., 2010), the use of new skills

(Antle et al., 2008; Burke & Baldwin, 1999; Tracey et al., 1995), and work performance (Martin, 2010), whereas an appreciative learning culture is positively related to the use of new skills (Burke & Baldwin, 1999; Tracey et al., 1995) and work performance (Bennett et al., 1999). A question that arises from these results is whether trainees can differentiate between the communication with their direct social environment (supervisors and peers) and the organisational learning culture. Most of the time, the behaviours of the supervisor and peers will mirror the organisational learning culture. For example, in a study of store employees, Eisenberger et al. (1999) found that job autonomy was positively related to perceived organisational support, which has been found to have a close relationship with perceived supervisor support. This raises another question, namely, whether some (groups of) factors are more important than others or precede each other. In their Learning Transfer System Inventory (LTSI), Holton et al. (2000) present an instrument that measures and compares different factors affecting the transfer of learning. The instrument includes work factors (e.g., peer support and performance support) as well as other factors that influence transfer (e.g., learner readiness and personal capacities for transfer). This work has been translated into multiple languages, and the scales have been used in many studies (e.g., Hutchins & Burke, 2006; Massenberg et al., 2015, 2017). The broad range of measures included in the LTSI makes it possible to compare the relative weights of factors that influence transfer. However, most measures of the LTSI might be too global (e.g., the measure for supervisors includes only three items) to pinpoint exactly how work factors influence post-training transfer, which makes the instrument relevant for a first diagnosis but not suitable for determining exactly how work factors could be modified to influence post-training transfer. Moreover, the LTSI model gives no indication of interactions between the factors (Kirwan & Birchall, 2006).

Different Supervisor Behaviours in Different Stages

The literature indicates that the support of the supervisor is critical for an employee to apply the competences developed during a training programme on the job (Govaerts & Dochy, 2014; Nijman et al., 2006). In our review, some studies found a positive relationship between supervisor support and the post-training transfer results of soft skills training (Al-Eisa et al., 2009; Antle et al., 2008; Bennett et al., 1999; Chiaburu, Van Dam, et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2014; Massenberg et al., 2015; Seiberling & Kauffeld, 2017), whereas others

found no relationship (Antle et al., 2010; Axtell et al., 1997; Clarke, 2002; Hutchins et al., 2013; Massenberg et al., 2017). One study found a negative relationship between supervisor support and work performance (Facteau et al., 1995). According to Govaerts and Dochy, “discrepancies in the results are conceivably due to different ways in which the construct of supervisor support has been conceptualised and subsequently operationalised in the different studies” (Govaerts & Dochy, 2014, p. 79). Based on a review study, Govaerts and Dochy defined 24 specific behaviours and attitudes that a supervisor can adopt to support training transfer. When we compared the measures of supervisor support in our review with the 24 behaviours and attitudes specified by Govaerts and Dochy, we found that in four of the 13 studies that included measures of supervisor support, supervisor support behaviours were either unclear or could not be identified (Antle et al., 2008, 2010; Bennett et al., 1999; Clarke, 2002). The other nine studies included ten different types of supervisor support behaviours. Table 2.2 presents an overview of the behaviours identified in our review studies. For example, Al-Eisa et al. (2009) and Chiaburu, Van Dam et al. (2010) both found a positive relationship between supervisor support and the motivation to transfer, but they used different constructs to measure supervisor support. Al-Eisa et al. measured whether a supervisor encourages the use of training on the job, openly values trainees’ participation in training and gives trainees rewards for the use of training on the job. However, Chiaburu and Van Dam et al. measured whether a supervisor discusses the use of training on the job with trainees and provides trainees with resources and practical support (e.g., time, money, and practical tools) to practice and apply new soft skills. From Table 2.2, the difference between the positive relationship between supervisor support and work performance found by Bennett et al. (1999) and the negative relationship found by Facteau et al. (1995) can be explained by the fact that they construed support differently. Bennett et al. measured how supervisors’ “attitudes and way of doing things” both pretraining and post-training block or enable transfer. Facteau et al. used a 10-item scale that measured only the post-training activities of supervisors. Their measures focused on how well supervisors provide and support opportunities for trainees to practice new skills. Accordingly, regarding supervisor support, specific behaviours seem to be important during transfer.

Table 2.2
Supervisor Support Split up into Specific Behaviours

| Study | Stage(s) | Supervisor Support | Categories of Supervisor Support (Govaerts & Dochy, 2014)* | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|--------------------|--|---------------------|---------------|--------------|------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------|---------|--|---|---|----|
| | | | Coaching and learning transfer | Discuss application | Encouragement | Goal setting | Informal reinforcement | Interest in training content | Opportunities to practice and apply | Positive attitude towards training | Practical support | Rewards | | | | |
| Al-Eisa <i>et al.</i> (2009) | Motivation to transfer | + | | | x | | | | | | | x | | | x | |
| Antle <i>et al.</i> (2008) | Use of skills | + | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ** |
| Antle <i>et al.</i> (2010) | Use of skills | 0 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ** |
| Axtell <i>et al.</i> (1997) | Motivation to transfer Use of skills | 0 | | | x | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Bennett <i>et al.</i> (1999) | Work performance | + | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ** |
| Chiaburu, Van Dam, <i>et al.</i> (2010) | Motivation to transfer | + | | x | | | | | | | | | | x | | |
| Clarke (2002) | Use of skills | 0 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ** |
| Hutchins <i>et al.</i> (2013) | Motivation to transfer | 0 | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | | | | | | |

Table 2.2 (Continued)

| Study | Stage(s) | Supervisor Support | Categories of Supervisor Support (Govaerts & Dochy, 2014)* | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|---|--------------------|--|---------------------|---------------|--------------|------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------|---------|--|--|---|--|
| | | | Coaching and learning transfer | Discuss application | Encouragement | Goal setting | Informal reinforcement | Interest in training content | Opportunities to practice and apply | Positive attitude towards training | Practical support | Rewards | | | | |
| Facteau <i>et al.</i> (1995) | Work performance | - | x | | | x | | | | | | | | | | |
| Massenberg <i>et al.</i> (2015) | Motivation to transfer Use of skills | + | x | x | | x | x | | | | | | | | | |
| Massenberg <i>et al.</i> (2017) | Motivation to transfer | 0 | x | x | | x | x | | | | | | | | | |
| Lee <i>et al.</i> (2014) | Motivation to transfer Use of skills | + | | | | | | | | | | | | | x | |
| Seiberling & Kauffeld (2017) | Motivation to transfer Use of skills | + | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | | | | | | | |

Note.

*Govaerts & Dochy (2014) describe 24 behaviours, but only 10 of them could be identified in our studies.

**For these studies, the type of behaviour was unclear or could not be identified.

Transfer-enhancing Interventions are Mediated by Work Factors

Transfer-Enhancing interventions (goal-setting, relapse prevention and using optimistic previews) are positively related to transfer outcomes (Brown & Warren, 2009; Burke & Baldwin, 1999; Kastenmüller et al., 2012; Olivero et al., 1997; Richman-Hirsch, 2001). However, it remains unclear why and how these interventions influence transfer. For example, Richman-Hirsch (2001) suggests that the perception of the work environment moderates the effectiveness of post-training interventions on transfer. She found that both goal-setting and self-management training were more effective in supportive work environments. The tendency of the post-training transfer intervention literature to ignore mediator variables is mentioned in several studies (Hutchins & Burke, 2006; Rahyuda et al., 2014; Richman-Hirsch, 2001). In their review study on the effect of relapse prevention, Hutchins and Burke (2006) mention self-efficacy as a possible mediator between relapse prevention and transfer outcomes. Sookhai and Budworth (2010) mention the relationship between self-efficacy and environmental factors. These authors found that the transfer climate mediated the relationship between self-efficacy and the transfer of training. According to their study, the success of transfer-enhancing interventions is largely attributable to the fact that such interventions increase self-efficacy for the application of the skills learned in training because “a similar feature of all those interventions is that they ask the trainee to consider barriers that might be encountered during the application of learned skills and to develop a plan for overcoming such barriers” (Sookhai & Budworth, 2010, p. 269). Morin and Latham (2000) note that mental practice is effective not only because it increases the amount of practice of the skills that are taught during training but also because it implicitly includes goal-setting, which in turn, increases self-efficacy with regard to applying training on the job. When studying the effect of transfer-enhancing interventions, it is relevant to include mediator variables. We propose including organisational culture and self-efficacy as mediator variables.

Study Limitations

This study has limitations that should be noted. First, we did not include the relationship between needs assessment and transfer in this review because this relationship primarily impacts the training design (i.e., determining what the trainee already knows and

training them accordingly). Second, in this study, we included only research on post-training transfer. However, the authors of several of the reviewed papers signalled the relevance of considering pretraining transfer (Grossman & Salas, 2011; Salas et al., 2012; Whitener & Brodt, 1994), during which pretraining motivation (Govaerts & Dochy, 2014), the relationship between pretraining motivation to learn and post-training motivation to transfer (Chiaburu & Lindsay, 2008; Smith-Jentsch et al., 1996), the impact of pretraining information about the training programme on intention to transfer (Baldwin & Magjuka, 1991), or the preparation of the learning climate before the training (Salas et al., 2012) play important roles. While all these factors are important for the training transfer, the scope of this review did not allow us to include pretraining transfer. We suggest that future research and review efforts consider this highly important transfer stage.

Third, within the research framework, we did not attempt to study the impact of individual characteristics or training design on the transfer of soft skills training. Individual characteristics and training design influence transfer, but they have already been studied in more detail, and the results have led to optimised training designs. The main questions from practice and science lie in understanding the contextual factors that influence the application and post-training transfer of skills (Blume et al., 2010) because trainees not only must apply what they have learned in training to the job but also must maintain and enhance that application over the long term.

Fourth, the model does not distinguish between near and far transfer. Baldwin and Ford (1988) mention the dynamic nature of the transfer process: “Unfortunately, most studies examining motivational factors and transfer have examined motivation from a static perspective, gathering information at one period of time” (Baldwin & Ford, 1988, p. 92). It is thought that the period of time on the job immediately after training is critical for transfer to occur (Noe, 1986). However, while immediate transfer is likely to be an important prerequisite for subsequent skill application, another key question concerns what helps to sustain the use of these trained skills. Moreover, Hesketh mentions that the “methods of training that maximise immediate outcomes may do so at the costs of the long-term benefits of developing transferable skills” (Hesketh, 1997, p. 317). Simons (1999) uses a different conceptualisation of near and far transfer. According to him, in near transfer, there is a close connection between the learning situation and the work situation. In far transfer,

the distance between learning and applying the behaviour at work is much greater. Near transfer, according to Simons, means focusing on practice and automatisisation. Far transfer means focusing on decontextualisation and variety. For a post-training transfer model, this would mean that different measures (measuring different behaviours, differentiating between near and far transfer behaviours) are needed over time.

This leads to our fifth limitation, which is that the model is mainly focused on “job behaviour”, i.e., trainees applying something they have learned to a new situation in their work environment. Some studies assume that training affects not only job-related skills but also other outcomes, which suggests that work performance and extra-role performance are not the only performance results (Koster et al., 2011; Yelon et al., 2014). Some authors suggest a broadening of the conception of transfer by, for example, including an emphasis on people’s preparation for future learning (Van den Bossche & Segers, 2013) or even the use of a taxonomy of use that includes the “use to perform”, “use to assess”, “use to explain”, “use to instruct” and “use to lead” (Yelon et al., 2014) and is based on the assumption that for open skills, such as soft skills, graduates of the same training may elect to use the skills in different ways. Other authors assume that the transfer process is not a fully mediated stage model. For example, Vermeulen (2002) uses a two-way model of transfer. She assumes training transfer is a recurrent process of learning and performance that occurs both in the training context and in the work context. A similar approach is taken by Akkerman and Bakker (2011). These authors use the concept of boundary crossing to refer to ongoing, two-sided actions and interactions between learning and working contexts. It should also be noted that work performance and extra-role performance are aimed at different types of organisational outcomes. Work performance is aimed at high performance, whereas extra-role performance is aimed at high commitment (Boxall & Purcell, 2003). Rousseau and Greller (1994) mention that it is not HR practice (in this case the soft skills training) in itself that determines whether an employee feels stimulated for high performance or high commitment; rather, it is the intervention as experienced by the employee. A model that incorporates internal and external environments, as well as the institutional and competitive perspectives, is the contextually based human resource theory (Paauwe, 2004).

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the review, several key limitations in the literature on the transfer of soft skills training have been identified. These limitations encourage us to propose four recommendations for future research to address. First, more research on the complete-stage model is needed if we want to understand and optimise the post-training transfer process. One important question is whether the transfer stages are fully mediated by each preceding stage. Another question is what transfer results are measured and how these results differ by stage over time, which includes the question of how transfer initiation (the degree to which the trainee initiates or attempts to apply the training he or she has received on the job) differs from transfer maintenance (the degree to which the trainee persists in applying the training he or she has received on the job), as addressed by Laker (1990, p. 210).

Second, the supervisor has been found to have a crucial role in the transfer process, especially for soft skills training (Laker & Powell, 2011). However, it remains unclear how a supervisor should behave in each stage to achieve the best transfer results. Further research on this issue could help us understand the transfer process and optimise transfer results. The behaviours identified by Govaerts and Dochy (2014) could help clarify the most effective behaviours of supervisors. Additionally, Nijman (2004) has developed a classification of four types of supervisor support (instrumental, informational, appraisal and emotional). Applying such an approach to the post-training transfer process might help to explore the optimal roles and behaviours of the supervisor during the various stages of the post-training transfer process.

Third, transfer-enhancing interventions seem to influence transfer. However, it appears from our review that to study the effect of transfer-enhancing interventions, it is relevant to include mediator variables because the process through which these transfer-enhancing interventions seem to be mediated is either by changes in trainee self-efficacy or by changes in organisational culture. For example, Marx (1982) describes cognitive and behavioural self-control strategies designed to reduce the likelihood of relapse. These strategies include different coping responses (e.g., monitoring situations in which the transfer is at risk such as conditions of a high workload). These coping responses lead to increased self-efficacy. This increased self-efficacy regarding the use of new skills in a situation in which transfer is at risk in turn lead to a decreased probability of relapse in new,

other risky situations (e.g., a colleague is not supporting the new behaviour). Regarding goal-setting, Latham and Seijts (1997) suggest that proximal goals should be set for maintenance and enhancement after training, and distal goals should be set for continuous learning regarding skill acquisition 1–3 years subsequent to the training. The proximal goals facilitate the identification of a series of controllable opportunities of modest size that produce visible results. These small wins are stable building blocks for high self-efficacy, which in turn has a direct effect on performance. More research on the relationship between these transfer-enhancing interventions and the mediator variables is needed to understand how these post-training interventions impact the various transfer stages and subsequently produce a certain level of transfer.

Finally, the amount of self-reported data raises validity questions (30 of the 34 studies used self-reports, and 20 studies used only self-reports). These self-ratings may be affected by social desirability, cognitive dissonance, and memory distortions (Chiaburu, Sawyer, et al., 2010). According to Taylor et al. (2009), the use of only trainees' self-ratings in evaluations of training transfer may lead to overly optimistic assessments of transfer results. This potential bias is particularly the case for soft skill trainings because the performance norms are often more subjective. Thus, there is a need for empirical research on both the transfer stages and the work factors that uses multiple data sources. To the extent of our knowledge, there is not yet any research on the transfer of soft skills training in a work context that includes both multiple measures in time, multiple data sources and multiple outcomes.

Implications for Practice

The inability to transfer results from soft skills training is an extremely costly waste of time, energy and money. What happens in the training is not the only thing that matters. A focus on what happens after the training should be as important. Steps should be taken to ensure that trainees are motivated to transfer the soft skills they practised during the training and feel the opportunity to use their skills once on (or back on) the job. The stage model may help organisations to identify at what stage transfer fails or could fail and modify relevant work factors to be more supportive towards training transfer. For example, if a trainee is motivated to use soft skills after training, but the actual use of the skills fails,

workload and supervisor support might hinder the transfer. A high workload might simply block the trainee from starting to use the new skills, and support from a supervisor might be completely missing or not include the relevant behaviours (Govaerts & Dochy, 2014; Nijman, 2004). Taking the relationships between the post-training transfer process and the work factors seriously might help organisations to optimise the transfer results of soft skills training and thus contribute to the need for such skills in today's workforce. Based on our review, some practical advice can be provided. First, in all transfer stages, it is important that the trainee understands the relevance of using the new skills in his or her work. Employees should understand how using the new skills can influence their performance. During post-training transfer, both managers and peers can play an important role in explaining this relevance, for example, by giving examples of how using the skills leads to improved performance. Managers and peers can also support and coach the trainee when s/he tries to use the new skills. Feedback on the use of the skills is crucial in this stage. Are the new skills used in the proper manner? Second, a manager should realise that s/he is a role model for the trainee. If a manager is not using the skills in the correct manner, this will reduce the chance that the trainee will start using the skills in the proper way. Third, making trainees aware of the relapse process of transfer is an important first step in relapse prevention. Tell trainees that transfer will be hindered by work factors and that it will be a challenge to overcome them. Fourth, an organisation should realise that the overall learning culture might overrule transfer attempts. If a trainee is not allowed to try new behaviour, make errors and learn from them (e.g., if making an error will lead to "punishment"), the chance that trainees will start using the new behaviour is small. In general, if "old" behaviour is more rewarding than new behaviour, nothing will change after a training.

2.5 Conclusions

While there is growing evidence that investments in training lead to demonstrable results that positively affect individual and organisational performance (Arthur et al., 2003; Tharenou et al., 2007), we need to continue to increase our understanding of the factors that influence the application and transfer of training. This study demonstrated that different transfer stages are relevant after soft skills training and that the work environment, defined in terms of job-related factors, social support and the organisational facilitation of learning, is directly related to the transfer of soft skills training. However, the effects of specific factors vary by transfer stage. This review synthesises what we know to date, and our hope is that the findings transfer to more precise and impactful transfer investigations as well as to more effective training practice. Future research that pursues this line of inquiry is necessary if we are to move beyond the question of whether training works to the more important question of why training works.

Chapter 3.

Transfer of Self-Leadership Skills: A Three-Wave Study Within the Dutch police

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Transfer of self-leadership skills: A three-wave study within the Dutch police

Abstract

The transfer process is complex and depends on numerous factors. Two important steps forward are taken in the present study. First, we take into account all transfer steps in one study to gain insights into the transfer process, and second, by being specific about the work situation in which transfer outcomes should occur, we address the “criterion problem” that is often mentioned in transfer research. This three-wave study examined the transfer process of a self-leadership skills training programme for crime scene investigators working for the Dutch police force. Based on the Ability Motivation Opportunity model, we hypothesised that the transfer process starts with being motivated to transfer and that this motivation increases the use of trained skills during work. Another aspect that may facilitate the use of trained skills is supervisor support, as it offers opportunities to use the trained skills during work. In turn, the use of trained skills at work was hypothesised to lead to increased work performance. We tested our transfer model in two different work situations experienced by crime fighters. Our findings show that the use of emotional self-leadership skills mediates the relation between motivation to transfer and work performance in specific work situations. Additionally, our findings show that including different transfer steps (i.e., motivation to transfer, use of skills and performance), different performance measures and different work situations in the transfer process provides more insight into when and how transfer occurs. These findings suggest that if organisations aspire to improve transfer, they should be specific about the intended training outcomes (i.e., behaviours and performance) and work situations in which these outcomes should emerge.

3.1 Introduction

Training is considered essential for the quality of work performance in dangerous or challenging jobs, such as those of health professionals and first responders (e.g., fire brigade, police and ambulance professionals) (Adang, 2012; Salar et al., 2017). However, for training to be effective, the skills from the training need to actually be used during the work itself. Only in that way may the use of the skills lead to performance results (Saks et al., 2014). Several studies have confirmed the relation between trained skills and improved performance (e.g., Brown & Warren, 2009; Sparr et al., 2017; Tuleja & Roberts, 2011). However, other studies found no relation between the use of skills after training and (improved) performance results (e.g., Tuleja & Roberts, 2011). Some authors argue that the training might not affect performance via the deployment of skills; rather, it is the worker’s higher motivation (as a result of the training) that increases his or her performance (e.g., De Grip & Sauermann, 2013; Gegenfurtner, 2013). A major gap in the research on the transfer of training is a profound overview of stages in the post-training transfer process (Botke et al., 2018) as well as a focus on the actual context in which transfer occurs and how it occurs (cf. Baldwin et al., 2017). Consequently, scholars and practitioners still have a limited understanding of transfer, and organisations fail to optimise this transfer.

In this study, we address this gap in the literature by examining the full post-training transfer process. Based on the Ability Motivation Opportunity (AMO) model (Appelbaum et al., 2000), we theorize that the post-training transfer process consists of three separate stages. After a training (in which participants gain the “Ability”), trainees should be motivated to transfer the knowledge and skills from the training (“Motivation”, the first stage of transfer). Additionally, we expect that supervisor support plays a key role during the first stage of transfer by providing “Opportunities to use” trained skills during work (Govaerts, Kyndt, & Dochy, 2017). This motivation and opportunity to use learned skills should lead to the actual use of skills during work (second stage). Practising the skills should finally lead to increased performance (third stage) (cf. Botke et al., 2018).

Our study focuses on the transfer of self-leadership training for crime scene investigators. Self-leadership has been defined as “a comprehensive self-influence perspective that concerns leading oneself towards performance of naturally motivating tasks as well as managing oneself to do work that must be done but is not naturally motivating”

(Manz, 1986, p. 589). Self-leadership is generally conceptualised as a skill or capability to engage in specific sets of prescriptive self-influence strategies (Neck & Houghton, 2006). We specifically focus on emotional self-leadership, which refers to the self-influence of emotions (Manz et al., 2016) and suggest that emotional self-leadership skills may help crime scene investigators perform in challenging situations because emotional self-leadership helps to regulate emotions that come with such situations (Manz et al., 2016).

An important note in the third stage of transfer is that increased performance depends on the specific work situation in which the new skills are applied (Barnett & Ceci, 2002). For example, the use of skills in an individual situation may be more (or less) difficult than using the same skill in a team context. Previous transfer research refers to this as the “criterion problem”, suggesting that research should be clear about what is expected to change as a function of the training and about the settings or situations in which trainees should show adaptability in transferring and effectively using the newly acquired skills (Ford, 1997; Gegenfurtner, 2011). To address this suggestion, we study the three-stage transfer process in teamwork situations (i.e., cooperation with other disciplines) and an individual situation of crime fighters (i.e., making a police report). We expect transfer outcomes to occur in both situations. However, testing transfer outcomes in two different situations helps to establish in what way the specific work situation affects the transfer outcomes.

This paper makes several important contributions to the literature. By studying the full transfer process (i.e., motivation to transfer, use of skills, and performance) in specific work situations and by focusing on how transfer occurs in a specific situation for a specific target group, we address the previously mentioned “criterion problem” as well as Baldwin, Ford and Blume’s call for a “more consumer-centric mindset in transfer research” (Baldwin et al., 2017, pp. 25-26), focusing on the applicability of findings from transfer research (e.g., how to design and execute effective training interventions) as on getting closer to key stakeholders and the actual context of where and how learning and transfer occur. Additionally, by focusing on supervisor support behaviours that may facilitate the initial transfer, we address an important antecedent of post-training transfer (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Govaerts, Kyndt, Vreye, et al., 2017; Nijman et al., 2006; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) since the supervisor may be in the position to lower barriers of transfer, such as by providing the proper context to practice new skills, influencing workload and autonomy

(Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) and assuring a learning-supportive work climate (Nikolova et al., 2014).

Motivation to Transfer: the Start of Post-Training Transfer

The AMO model (Appelbaum et al., 2000) suggests that how a training intervention will affect performance depends not only on the knowledge and skills of the professional (in our case, the skills learned during the training) but also on the will or attitude to engage in the behaviours (motivation to transfer these skills). The motivation to transfer is defined as the trainee’s desire to apply the skills and knowledge gained during training to the workplace (Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Cheng & Hampson, 2008; Tracey et al., 1995) and includes the transfer of knowledge and skills, as well as attitudes, beliefs, and utility values (Gegenfurtner, 2013). If motivation to transfer (transfer stage 1) is low, the use of skills (transfer stage 2) will stay behind, and consequently, performance after training (transfer stage 3) will not improve (Gegenfurtner et al., 2009). Earlier research on the transfer of training addressed the relation between motivation to transfer and post-training use of skills. Among others, Axtell et al. (1997) and Massenberg et al. (2015) provided evidence for the relation between motivation to transfer and post-training use of skills. Axtell et al. (1997) studied the transfer results of nonmanagerial, technical staff from a multinational organisation who attended interpersonal skills training. They found motivation to transfer to be a key variable in the level of transfer of training after one month. Additionally, they found that the transfer of training at one month was a significant predictor of trainee-rated transfer after one year. Massenberg et al. (2015) studied the transfer results of blue-collar workers in two medium-sized companies in Germany. They found that motivation to transfer was significantly related to behavioural change six weeks after one-day team reflexivity training. Hence, motivation to transfer represents the first stage of transfer (Botke et al., 2018), and we test the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1.

Motivation to transfer increases the use of emotional self-leadership skills after training.

Supervisor Behaviour during Post-Training Transfer

Additionally, based on the AMO model, we expect that the opportunity to use skills is important during post-training transfer (Botke et al., 2018). The supervisor of the trainee plays a key role in providing opportunities to perform (Ford et al., 1992). Supervisors may facilitate practice opportunities, for example, by including participants in planning and decision-making, chairing meetings, broadening their roles and encouraging them to develop and try new ideas (Lancaster et al., 2013). As such, a positive relationship between supervisor support and the use of trained skills can be expected. In their meta-analysis on the transfer of training, Huang et al. (2015) confirmed the positive relationship between supervisor support and the extent to which trainees utilise newly acquired competences on the job. Additionally, other authors noted a strong positive correlation between supervisor support and training transfer (e.g., Grossman & Burke-Smalley, 2018; Van den Bossche et al., 2010). However, some studies have found nonsignificant (e.g., Hutchins et al., 2013; Massenberg et al., 2017) or even negative relationships (e.g., Facticeau et al., 1995; Nijman et al., 2006) between supervisor support and transfer outcomes. According to Govaerts and Dochy (2014, p. 79), “discrepancies in the results are conceivably due to different ways in which the construct of supervisor support has been conceptualised and subsequently operationalised in the different studies”.

Accordingly, for this study, we examine *specific* supervisor support behaviours during transfer. Based on Nijman (2004), we focused on two specific post-training supervisor support behaviours, namely, appraisal supervisor support and emotional supervisor support during the initial transfer (transfer stage 1). Initial transfer refers to initial attempts of trainees shortly after the training to start using skills from the training in the work environment (Foxon, 1993; Laker, 1990). Appraisal supervisor support involves the provision of information that is relevant to an individual’s self-evaluation (House, 1981; Nijman, 2004). Individuals use information from others (e.g., the supervisor) to evaluate their own opinions and abilities. Appraisal supervisor support refers to information that provides a positive evaluation, for example, giving compliments or providing feedback about the use of new skills during work. Its main – theoretical – benefits are that appraisal supervisor support decreases perceived deviancy (i.e., feeling insecure about proper functioning), allows acceptance of feelings, provides favourable comparisons and increases feelings of being

able to handle problems (Cohen et al., 2000). Consequently, employees can fully benefit from the intervention because they feel rewarded when they start using the skills from the training during work. To illustrate, Lee et al. (2014) found that supervisor reward behaviours in a Korean insurance company had significant effects on the degree to which trainees used knowledge, skills and attitudes they had gained through training at work three months after training.

Emotional supervisor support consists of the availability of persons who can listen sympathetically when one is facing difficulties or problems and who can provide empathy, care, love and trust (House, 1981; Nijman, 2004). For example, a supervisor can emotionally support a trainee during transfer by creating a work climate that is open to change, showing confidence in successful training participation and transfer of training, and indicating understanding for possible difficulties in using new knowledge and skills on the job (Nijman & Gelissen, 2011). Consequently, employees can fully benefit from the intervention because they feel protected and supported when they start using the skills from the training during work. The results of a study by Ng (2015) on the role of supervisors in a transfer study in Malaysia suggest that emotional support by supervisors during post-training transfer (e.g., enhancement of employee self-confidence by reassuring employees that they are capable of improving work performance through learning) increased the application of new learning on the job. Hence, we test the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2.

Appraisal supervisor support (a) and emotional supervisor support (b) increase the use of emotional self-leadership skills after training.

The Relation Between Using Emotional Self-Leadership Skills and Detached Concern

Self-leadership theory explains the process through which employees motivate themselves and employ self-direction (Lovelace et al., 2007). Based on social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), self-leadership can help employees “better manage their thoughts, behaviours, and environment to create a better workplace for improved results” (Goldsby et al., 2020, p. 38). Emotional self-leadership is specifically focused on the self-influence of emotions (Manz, 2015). Referring to Fredrickson’s broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson,

2004), emotional self-leadership is focused on reducing negative emotions and creating positive emotions because such positive emotions can expand potential options for thought and action, while negative emotions tend to reduce such options. In line with this theory, Manz et al. (2016) suggest that the use of emotional self-leadership skills during work may increase the performance of professionals in challenging situations because these skills help them manage their emotions in such situations. The current study focuses on the effects of emotional self-leadership training on detached concern and dealing with a heavy workload.

Detached concern refers to a professional balance blending concern with distance (Lampert & Glaser, 2018). In this process of balancing empathy and detachment, emotion regulation is important (Dormann & Zapf, 2004), as the main purpose of detachment is an intrapersonal regulation process of emotions in which professionals retain a personal boundary between them and their clients (Lampert et al., 2019). In this study, we focused on the effect of using six different emotional self-leadership skills: the behavioural-focused strategies “self-goal setting”, and “self-observation”, the cognitive-focused strategies “evaluation of values and beliefs”, “self-imagery” and “self-talk” and the physiological-focused strategy “deep relaxed breathing” (see Table 3.1), since these skills are found to be related to the emotional regulation that is needed for a balanced detached concern. More specifically, the skill “self-goal setting” is important for goal pursuit, which is an important resource for keeping detached concern (Dormann & Zapf, 2004). The skill “self-observation” helps to obtain information about current behaviour and performance levels and supports employees in self-setting effective (future) goals (Shahin & Salehzadeh, 2013). The skill “evaluation of values and beliefs” helps employees understand the success, failure, or consequences of their behaviour. This information helps to sustain or modify goals or efforts to achieve those goals (Parker et al., 2010). The skill “self-imagery” allows us to better monitor, compare and regulate current and desired states. This increases the feeling of self-control, which is an important resource for keeping detached concern (Decety et al., 2014). The skill “self-talk” (i.e., positive self-talk) is important for staying optimistic and increases the feeling of self-control (Decety et al., 2014; Dolbier et al., 2001). Finally, the skill “deep relaxed breathing” creates awareness of breathing. This awareness of breathing helps to see what is going on in one’s mind concerning thoughts, concepts, and emotions, without

labelling them as “good” or “bad” (Karssiens et al., 2014), and as such helps to regulate emotions, which is key for keeping detached concern.

Thus, using the six emotional self-leadership skills (transfer stage 2) may help to regulate the emotional reaction to a situation (Nesbit, 2012) and as such support the process of finding the right dose between empathic concern for the client and detachment for oneself, resulting in a balanced detached concern (transfer stage 3). Hence, we test the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3.

The use of the six emotional self-leadership skills is positively related to keeping detached concern.

Table 3.1

Overview of the Six Emotional Self-Leadership Skills

| Emotional self-leadership skill | Description of the skill |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Self-goal setting | Establishing goals that are aimed at the fulfilment of personal goals or organisational goals (Marques-Quinteiro & Curral, 2012). |
| Self-observation | Behaviour observation and reflection with regard to the effectiveness of own performance in relation to the task, the team and the organisation (Marques-Quinteiro & Curral, 2012). |
| Evaluation of values and beliefs | “Through a process of self-analysis, individuals may identify, confront, and replace dysfunctional beliefs and assumptions with more rational ones” (Houghton & Neck, 2002, p. 674) |
| Self-imagery | Cognitive simulate how tasks will be performed and create a mental image of the desired outcomes (Neck & Houghton, 2006). |
| Self-talk | What we covertly “tell ourselves”, either mentally or out loud (Neck & Manz, 2016). The self-talk works as a distractor (i.e., get one’s mind off a negative event or emotion). |
| Deep relaxed breathing | Concentrating on exhaling as much air as possible at the beginning of the breath. This causes the lungs to automatically take in more air on the in breath, which has a calming affect resulting from the intake of more oxygen (Manz et al., 2016). |

The Relation Between Using Emotional Self-Leadership Skills and Dealing with a Heavy Workload

Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory (2004) suggests that individuals who experience positive affect are more likely to adopt creative responses to potential challenges in the environment. Previous research alludes to a positive relation between self-leadership training and better dealing with a heavy workload. For example, Goldsby et al. (2020) suggest that self-leadership skills may help to moderate the perceived time pressure of nurses. Consequently, we suggest that using the six emotional self-leadership skills not only holds promise as a direct performance-enhancing intervention but will also help to deal with heavy workload situations (i.e., enable the handling of subjective feelings of work overload). More specifically, the skill "self-goal setting" will help to deal with heavy workload, as a high workload necessitates behaviours such as persisting and resisting temptations to achieve task-related goals (Schmidt & Diestel, 2015). Additionally, professionals who are trained to set goals and reward themselves upon reaching the goals are less likely to have problems dealing with a heavy workload, as they are less likely to feel overwhelmed (Unsworth & Mason, 2012). The skill "self-observation" helps concentration on one's awareness. This kind of awareness is an essential measure to change or exclude ineffective behaviours and focus on what truly has to be done (Shahin & Salehzadeh, 2013). The skill "evaluation of values and beliefs" helps professionals remain flexible to adapt to changing situational demands, such as unexpected stressors that can increase (the feeling of) a heavy workload (Anton et al., 2018). Additionally, addressing the stressful circumstances (the heavy workload situation) in one's mind (the skill "self-imagery") helps to successfully respond to (potential) stressors and deal with the situation (Neck et al., 2013). The skill "self-talk" (i.e., positive self-talk) helps to overcome the feeling of difficulty and the estimate of effort and acts as a resource for effort exertion (Efklides et al., 2006). Finally, the skill "deep relaxed breathing" helps to stay calm in a potentially stressful situation (Manz et al., 2016). Thus, we suggest that by using the six emotional self-leadership skills (transfer stage 2), individuals can better manage the feeling of work overload. This will consequently help them to better deal with a heavy workload (transfer stage 3). Hence, we test the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4.

The use of the six emotional self-leadership skills is positively related to dealing with a heavy workload.

The Mediating Role of Emotional Self-Leadership Skills

Motivation to transfer and supervisor support have been shown to positively affect performance (e.g., Colquitt et al., 2000; Yamkovenko & Holton, 2010). However, both motivation to transfer and supervisor support are found to be related to initial (i.e., short-term) transfer (Axtell et al., 1997; Marx, 1982). Maintenance of transfer results (i.e., long-term transfer) requires applying and maintaining newly learned (self-leadership) skills on the job (Laker, 1990). During the stage of transfer maintenance, a trainee makes a conscious choice to use the skills from the training whenever it is appropriate (Foxon, 1993). This eventually leads to automatic use of these skills. When skills are integrated into job behaviour, transfer occurs in full (Foxon, 1993). Therefore, in line with Laker (1990), we suggest that the effect of motivation to transfer (transfer stage 1) and supervisor support on performance (transfer stage 3) three months post training are fully mediated by the use of self-leadership skills (transfer stage 2). Thus, we expect that motivation to transfer and supervisor support behaviours increases the use of emotional self-leadership skills. This use of emotional self-leadership skills, in turn, is related to better (long-term) performance (i.e., keeping detached concern and dealing with a heavy workload). Hence, we test the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 5.

The use of the six emotional self-leadership skills mediates the relationship between (a) motivation to transfer, (b) appraisal supervisor support and (c) emotional supervisor support and keeping detached concern.

Hypothesis 6.

The use of the six emotional self-leadership skills mediates the relationship between (a) motivation to transfer, (b) appraisal supervisor support and (c) emotional supervisor support and dealing with a heavy workload.

Figure 3.1
Conceptual Model

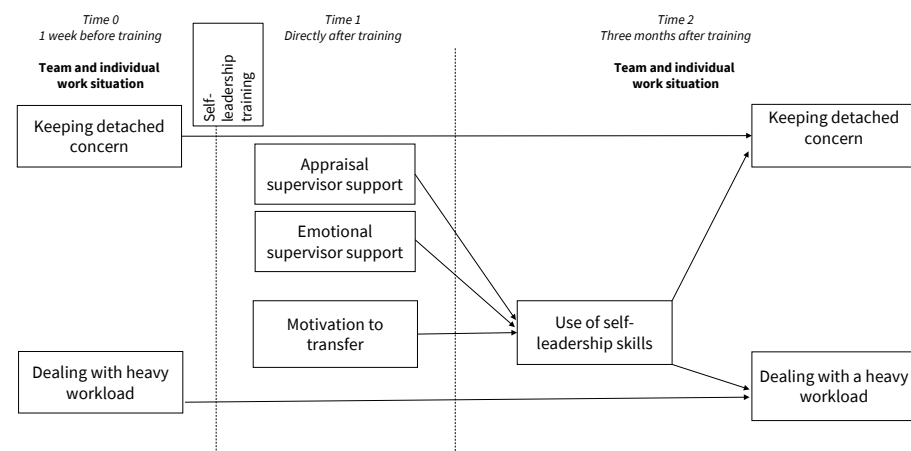


Figure 3.1 depicts the overall hypothesised model. We tested our transfer model in a teamwork situation and an individual work situation. We expect transfer outcomes to occur in both situations. However, testing transfer outcomes in two different situations enables us to establish in what way the specific work situation affects the transfer outcomes.

3.2 Methods

Participants and Procedure

Our sample consisted of approximately 2,000 crime scene investigators working for different departments of the Dutch police who signed up for self-leadership training between July 2016 and June 2017. Participation in the training was mandatory for all police professionals as part of the “Strengthening Professional Resilience” programme of the Dutch police. An overview of possible training dates and locations was presented by the training provider. Professionals could choose when to follow the training by subscribing to one of the dates available for the training. After the management agreed to participate in the study, professionals who signed up for the training during the study period were informed about the research and were asked to participate. The participants’ responses were anonymous and voluntary, and we encouraged them to respond by sending out a reminder email one week after the initial invitation.

After closing the questionnaire, 1,152 participants had completed the T0 questionnaire, 789 participants had completed the T1 questionnaire, and 433 had completed the T2 questionnaire. In total, 155 respondents completed the survey at all three points in time. From discussions with the quality manager of the training, we found that three reasons may explain the low response rate. First, links to the online questionnaire were sent out via e-mail. Therefore, answering the questionnaires competed with other more urgent tasks of the trainees. Second, the link to the online questionnaire did not work if trainees were using telework facilities (e.g., working from home). Although instructions were provided on how to copy the link into their own browser, this may have prevented trainees from completing the questionnaire. Third, it is uncommon for trainees to receive more than one questionnaire on the same training. Usually, questionnaires are completed directly after training. This may explain at least partly why the response rates declined at T2.

Low return rates are less likely to be biased when respondent characteristics do not differ from those of nonrespondents (Krosnick, 1999). As information on the overall population of crime scene investigators could not be obtained, we compared the subgroup of respondents who answered all three questionnaires ($N = 155$) with the subgroup that answered only T1 or T1 and T0 ($N = 789$). An independent t-test showed no significant differences between the group that completed all three questionnaires and the group that only completed the T1 or T1 and T0 questionnaires in terms of gender ($t(942) = 1.34, p = .18$), age ($t(942) = -.91, p = .37$) and organisational tenure ($t(942) = -.66, p = .51$). In the final sample of 155 respondents, 62.7% were male, and the average age was 49.80 years ($SD = 9.13$; range = 24-66 years). These respondents had worked for a relatively long time for the Dutch police ($M = 24.28$; $SD = 12.18$; range = 0-46 years).

As the social context may influence the transfer process (Barnett & Ceci, 2002), we specified an individual work situation and a teamwork situation to test our model. For this purpose, we identified the most critical team and individual situation in the work of crime fighters in two expert sessions with a total of approximately 20 staff members from the Netherlands Police Agency and the National Criminal Intelligence Department. A work situation was defined as critical if performance was crucial for overall job success. The most critical teamwork situation (“work situation 1”) that was identified was called “cooperation with other disciplines”. During the expert sessions, participants mentioned that the different

focuses, aims, and working methods of disciplines often make it difficult and stressful to perform in the best way in this work situation. Additionally, Huisman et al. (2016) mentioned that “the increasing complexity of crime fighting means that more diverse disciplines are included in the process of solving crimes. Working in multidisciplinary teams and networks will be more important than ever; effective cooperation between very different professionals will be a crucial factor for success” (p. 45). The most critical individual work situation (“work situation 2”) that was identified was called “making a police report”. An accurate police report is the start of a chain of action in which the public prosecutor and judge(s) decide how to follow up. As such, the quality of the report is important. During the expert sessions, the participants mentioned that time constraints, other work priorities, and system constraints sometimes make it difficult and stressful to generate the best report possible. will be more important than ever; effective cooperation between very different professionals will be a crucial factor for success” (p. 45). The most critical individual work situation (“work situation 2”) that was identified was called “making a police report”. An accurate police report is the start of a chain of action in which the public prosecutor and judge(s) decide how to follow up. As such, the quality of the report is important. During the expert sessions, the participants mentioned that time constraints, other work priorities, and system constraints sometimes make it difficult and stressful to generate the best report possible.

The work situations were used in T0 and T2. Participants were asked if they had been in each work situation in the last three months before they were asked questions about their use of skills and performance in the work situation (i.e., if they had not been in the work situation, they did not answer questions on this situation). From the 155 participants, 98 participants provided ratings for their use of skills and performance (keeping detached concern and handling with a heavy workload) in work situation 1 (the teamwork situation), and 97 participants provided ratings for their use of skills and performance (keeping detached concern and handling with a heavy workload) in work situation 2 (the individual work situation).

The Self-Leadership Training

The two-day self-leadership training included the six strategies as previously described. During the first day of the training, trainees learned how to set self-goals

(behaviour-focused strategy “self-goal setting”) using the SMART method (i.e., formulating specific, measurable, acceptable, realistic and time-bound goals) and how to use such goals in challenging situations. For example, they learned that speaking out loud your goals helps to focus on what you are aiming for and makes it possible for others to help you reach your goal. Next, the constructive thought pattern strategy “evaluation of values and beliefs” was explained and practised using the “action reflection” model. The action-reflection model provides a framework for reflective practice, where a problem in practice is identified and forms the basis of inquiry (e.g., What did I do? What did I experience?), followed by change and further reflection (e.g., What will I do different the next time I am in such a situation?). Then, trainees were taught how to prepare for different scenarios by practising the situation and the behaviours as well as responses to such behaviours in a visualisation task (constructive thought pattern strategy “self-imagery”). Finally, they were taught how to create awareness of breathing using simple tools for monitoring heart rhythm coherence (physiological-focused strategy “deep relaxed breathing”). On the second day of the training, trainees learned and practised how to recognise their focus of attention in different situations and different ways to stay focused and not become distracted by irrelevant information (behavioural-focused strategy “self-observation”), and they learned how to recognise negative thoughts and emotions and how to bend these towards more positive appraisals of stressful event experiences (constructive thought pattern strategy “self-talk”).

The training was led by two professional trainers and conducted during regular work hours. In line with Russ-Eft (2002), the trainees received a pretraining package including information about the relevance of the training as well as some noncompulsory pretraining exercises. At the beginning of the training, an overview was presented of the training content (as an “advance organiser”) to allow trainees to organise and retain material to be learned. Based on Kirwan (2009), the training included a variety of training and learning methods to increase the understanding of the participants and to enable the transfer of the acquired knowledge and skills in different ways. Additionally, the training included a significant amount of time to practice and use examples of desired and undesired applications (Kirwan, 2009).

Measures

Unless otherwise indicated, a five-point response scale was used for all items, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). All scales were pilot-tested by asking internal programme managers to fill in the draft questionnaire and provide feedback; minor revisions in expression and the ordering of items were reflected in the final version of the instrument.

Motivation to transfer (T1) was measured using the four-item subscale for motivation to transfer from the Learning Transfer Inventory System (Holton III et al., 2000). A sample item is “I get excited when I think about trying to use my new learning on the job”. Cronbach’s alpha was .93.

The use of self-leadership skills (T2; work situations 1 and 2) was measured using a self-developed scale of six items, one on each skill from the training (self-goal setting, self-observation, evaluation of values and beliefs, self-imagery, self-talk, deep relaxed breathing). A sample item is “The last time I was in this situation, I have purposely converted obstructing thoughts into positive thoughts”. A 10-point response scale ranging from 1 (not used) to 10 (often used) was used. As the social context (i.e., the specific work situation) may influence the transfer to work process (Barnett & Ceci, 2002), the use of skills was measured separately for each of the two work situations. The validity of this newly developed measure was examined using exploratory factor analysis (principal component method with direct oblimin rotation). One factor with an eigenvalue of > 1 was extracted, explaining 60.4% of the variance for work situation 1 and 68.5% of the variance for work situation 2. All factor loadings were .70 or higher. Cronbach’s alpha was .89 (work situation 1) and .91 (work situation 2). These findings provide support for the validity and reliability of this measure.

Performance (T0 and T2; work situations 1 and 2) was measured by assessing two performance requirements, namely, “keeping detached concern” and “dealing with a heavy workload”. Keeping detached concern was measured with a four-item scale that was developed as part of the Resilience Monitor for crime scene investigators (Delahaij et al., 2014). For our research, we slightly adapted the items. The original scale asks about distance and

emotional involvement with “victims”. Because our participants were not always directly confronted with victims, we changed the word “the victims” to a more general word, “the case and the people involved”. A sample item is “The last time I was in this situation, I kept enough professional distance to the case and to people involved”. Dealing with a heavy workload was measured using a three-item scale based on the raw NASA Task Load Index (Hart & Staveland, 1988). Based on the specific situation of our target group, we selected the items on temporal demand, perceived performance, and effort. A sample item is, “The last time I was in this situation, it took much energy to perform properly”. Cronbach’s alpha for keeping detached concern T0 was .79 (work situation 1) and .91 (work situation 2) and for T2 was .65 (work situation 1) and .78 (work situation 2). For T2 work situation 1, Cronbach’s α is below .70 due to a relatively small group of respondents. However, for the total T2 group ($N = 433$), Cronbach’s α was .81. Cronbach’s alpha for dealing with a heavy workload T0 was .75 (work situation 1) and .85 (work situation 2) and for T2 dealing with a heavy workload .73 (work situation 1) and .86 (work situation 2).

Supervisor support behaviour (T1) was measured by assessing “appraisal supervisor support” and “emotional supervisor support”. Appraisal supervisor support was measured using the three-item subscale from Nijman (2004). A sample item is “My supervisor indicated that s/he would appreciate it if I would use of skills from the training during work”. Emotional supervisor support was measured using the three-item subscale from Nijman (2004). A sample item is “My supervisor indicated that I could consult him/her if I would have difficulties using skills from the training during work”. Cronbach’s alpha for appraisal supervisor support was .89. Cronbach’s alpha for emotional supervisor support was .88

Analysis

Analyses of descriptive statistics, reliabilities, and correlations among the variables were conducted using SPSS 25.0. Confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) in AMOS 25.0 were conducted per scale to assess the factor structure of each measure. Then, the proposed measurement model was tested in AMOS to confirm that the factors were distinct. Two alternative models were tested: a model with appraisal supervisor support and emotional supervisor support loaded on one factor (M1), a model with keeping detached concern and dealing with a heavy workload loading on one factor, and the use of self-leadership skills

loaded on a separate factor (M2). To test our hypotheses, we used structural equation modelling (SEM) with maximum likelihood estimation. The overall χ^2 measure, CFI (comparative fit index), IFI (incremental fit index), TLI (Tucker-Lewis index), SRMR (standardised root mean square residual) and RMSEA (root mean square error of approximation) were used to assess model fit. It is generally suggested that the TLI, IFI, and CFI values should exceed .90 or even .95 for the model to be considered of good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Similarly, a value of .06 or less for RMSEA (Browne & Cudeck, 1992) and a value of .05 or less for SRMR (Hooper et al., 2008) reflects a good fit.

Because we used self-report measures, we took several precautions to ascertain whether common method variance (CMV) may have been an issue in our study following the suggestions of Tehseen et al. (2017). First, we measured our dependent variables at a separate measurement time, three months later. Second, the anonymity of the respondents was assured, and evaluation apprehension was minimised by using nontrackable personal codes (i.e., participants were asked to make personal codes when filling in the first questionnaire). This can minimise method bias at the reporting stage. Third, we pretested each questionnaire to avoid item ambiguity, which is seen as the most common problem in the comprehension stage of response. After retrieving the data, Harman's single-factor test was conducted in SPSS. In an exploratory factor analysis when all the items were loaded on a single factor, the variance accounted for 22.6 percent for work situation 1 and 23.0 percent for work situation 2, which in turn was less than the recommended value of 50 percent (Podsakoff et al., 2012).

3.3 Results

Descriptive statistics, including the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the study variables, can be found in Table 3.2. The use of self-leadership skills and performance ("keeping detached concern" and "dealing with a heavy workload") were measured in the two situations (S1 and S2 in Table 2). The means, standard deviations and correlations are reported per situation. As seen from this table, T1 motivation to transfer was positively correlated with T2 use of self-leadership skills in work situation 1 ($r = .42, p < .01$) and work situation 2 ($r = .28, p < .01$), and T1 appraisal supervisor support was positively correlated with T2 use of self-leadership skills in work situation 2 ($r = .22, p < .05$). T2 detached

concern in work situation 2 was positively correlated with T2 use of self-leadership skills in work situation 2 ($r = .24, p < .05$). T2 detached concern in work situation 1 was positively correlated with T0 detached concern in work situation 1 ($r = .35, p < .01$), and T2 dealing with a heavy workload in work situation 2 was positively correlated with T0 dealing with a heavy workload in work situation 2 ($r = .39, p < .01$).

Confirmative Factor Analysis and Measurement Model

Confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) in AMOS were conducted per scale to assess the factor structure of each measure (see Table 3.3). Appraisal supervisor support, emotional supervisor support and dealing with a heavy workload were modelled by using three indicators, which means that fit indices are not provided for these scales in separate CFAs because the fit would be perfect, irrespective of the pattern of factor loadings (Malhotra & Sharma, 2008). Based on the outcomes of the separate CFAs, we then examined the total measurement model, which included all the study variables (eight variables). We tested the model in each of the two work situations separately. For both work situations, the fit was suboptimal (for work situation 1: $\chi^2 = 665.24, df = 377, TLI = .84, CFI = .87, IFI = .88, RMSEA = .02$; for work situation 2: $\chi^2 = 634.89, df = 377, TLI = .88, CFI = .90, IFI = .91, RMSEA = .02$). All factor loadings were significant, except for the factor loading "The last time I was in this situation, I successfully completed what I had to do", which did not load substantially on dealing with a heavy workload ($\beta = .09, p = .06$) and was therefore removed from further analysis. The factor loading "My supervisor did not check my training participation" loaded negatively on appraisal supervisor support and was therefore removed from further analysis. This resulted in a significantly better model fit (for work situation 1: $\Delta\chi^2 = 160.70, \Delta df = 81, p < .01$; for work situation 2: $\Delta\chi^2 = 182.56, \Delta df = 81, p < .01$; this is the "optimised measurement model" in Table 3.3).

Next, we compared this model with the two alternative measurement models. First, we tested a seven-factor model in which appraisal supervisor support and emotional supervisor support loaded on one factor (M1). This model showed a slightly worse fit than the optimised measurement model (for work situation 1: $\Delta\chi^2 = 16.70, \Delta df = 7, p < .05$; for work situation 2: $\Delta\chi^2 = 16.52, \Delta df = 7, p < .05$). Consequently, we kept appraisal supervisor support and emotional supervisor support as two distinct variables. Second, we tested a

six-factor model in which keeping detached concern (pre- and post-training) and dealing with a heavy workload (pre- and post-training) loaded on one factor and use of self-leadership skills loaded on a separate factor (M3). Again, this model showed a significantly worse fit than the optimised measurement model (for work situation 1: $\Delta\chi^2 = 42.29$, $\Delta df = 7$, $p < .001$; for work situation 2: $\Delta\chi^2 = 85.23$, $\Delta df = 7$, $p < .001$), indicating that the performance measures keeping detached concern and dealing with a heavy workload can be distinguished from each other.

Finally, we tested the hypothesised model, with T2 use of self-leadership skills mediating the relation between T1 motivation to transfer and T2 performance (keeping detached concern and dealing with a heavy workload) and between T1 supervisor behaviour (emotional support and appraisal support) and T2 performance (keeping detached concern and dealing with a heavy workload). Performance T0 (keeping detached concern and dealing with a heavy workload) was included in the model as a covariate. The fit of this model was acceptable (for work situation 1: $\chi^2 = 467.49$, $df = 301$, $TLI = .89$, $CFI = .91$, $IFI = .91$, $RMSEA = .02$; for work situation 2: $\chi^2 = 486.74$, $df = 301$, $TLI = .91$, $CFI = .93$, $IFI = .93$, $RMSEA = .02$).

Table 3.2
Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations Among the Study Variables

| | M | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
|--|------|------|--------|-------|--------|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1 T1 Motivation to transfer | 3.28 | .76 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 T1 Emotional supervisor support | 2.66 | .93 | .15 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3 T1 Appraisal supervisor support | 2.37 | .96 | .22** | .84** | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4 T2 Use of self-leadership skills S1 | 5.56 | 1.54 | .42** | .18 | .19 | | | | | | | | | |
| 5 T2 Use of self-leadership skills S2 | 5.21 | 1.79 | .28** | .25* | .22* | .77** | | | | | | | | |
| 6 T2 Keeping detached concern S1 | 4.02 | .36 | .07 | -.02 | .00 | .20 | .23 | | | | | | | |
| 7 T2 Dealing with a heavy workload S1 | 3.89 | .73 | -.14 | -.25* | -.27** | -.09 | .04 | .38** | | | | | | |
| 8 T2 Keeping detached concern S2 | 4.02 | .47 | -.10 | .04 | -.02 | .16 | .24* | .73** | .57** | | | | | |
| 9 T2 Dealing with a heavy workload S2 | 3.84 | .77 | -.18 | .06 | .07 | .05 | -.08 | -.09 | -.01 | .27** | | | | |
| 10 T0 Keeping detached concern S1 | 4.10 | .41 | -.23** | -.08 | -.13 | .05 | .15 | .35** | .20 | .32** | .09 | | | |
| 11 T0 Dealing with a heavy workload S1 | 3.89 | .70 | -.20* | -.01 | -.07 | -.13 | -.08 | .11 | .15 | .11 | .20 | .27** | | |
| 12 T0 Keeping detached concern S2 | 4.17 | .47 | -.20* | .03 | .05 | .06 | .07 | .18 | .05 | .25* | .13 | .61** | .06 | |
| 13 T0 Dealing with a heavy workload S2 | 3.78 | .83 | -.16 | -.20* | -.13 | -.08 | .04 | .05 | .20 | .28** | .39** | .35** | .31** | .41** |

Note. N = 155. S1 = work situation 1; S2 = work situation 2

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 3.3
Results of Testing the Measurement Models

| | χ^2 | df | CFI | TLI | IFI | SRMR | RMSEA | $\Delta\chi^2/\Delta df$ |
|--|---------------|-----|----------|----------|-----------|---------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Measurement model motivation to transfer T1 | 16.27 | 2 | .99 | .98 | .99 | .01 | | |
| Measurement model use of self-leadership skills T2 – S1/S2 | 37.05/52.40 | 9 | .97/.96 | .94/.93 | .97/.96 | .04/.04 | | |
| Measurement model keeping detached concern T0 – S1/S2 | 6.19/1.08 | 2 | .99/1.00 | .99/1.00 | 1.00/1.00 | .01/.00 | | |
| Measurement model keeping detached concern T2 – S1/S2 | 1.62/8.42 | 2 | 1.00/.98 | 1.00/.95 | 1.00/.98 | .01/.03 | | |
| Total measurement model – S1/S2 | 629.95/634.89 | 377 | .88/.90 | .85/.88 | .89/.91 | .02/.02 | | |
| Optimised measurement model (2 items excluded) – S1/S2 | 469.25/452.33 | 296 | .92/.94 | .89/.92 | .92/.94 | .02/.02 | S1: 160.70/81*** S2: 182.56/81*** | |
| Alternative measurement model M1 – S1/S2 | 485.95/468.85 | 303 | .91/.93 | .89/.92 | .91/.93 | .02/.02 | S1: 16.70/7* S2: 16.52/7* | |
| Alternative measurement model M2 – S1/S2 | 511.54/537.56 | 303 | .90/.90 | .87/.88 | .90/.91 | .02/.02 | S1: 42.29/7*** S2: 85.23/7*** | |
| Hypothesised model – S1/S2 | 467.49/486.74 | 301 | .91/.93 | .89/.91 | .91/.93 | .02/.02 | | |

Note. S1 = work situation 1; S2 = work situation 2

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

Hypothesis Tests

In Hypothesis 1, we expected T1 motivation to transfer to increase T2 use of self-leadership skills after training. As Table 3.4 shows, T1 motivation to transfer was positively related to T2 use of emotional self-leadership skills for work situation 1 ($\beta = .49, p < .001$) and for work situation 2 ($\beta = .22; p < .05$). Thus, Hypothesis 1 can be confirmed.

In Hypothesis 2, we expected (a) T1 appraisal supervisor support and (b) T1 emotional supervisor support to increase T2 use of emotional self-leadership skills after training. T1 appraisal supervisor support was not related to T2 use of self-leadership skills for work situation 1 ($\beta = .13, p = .78$) or for work situation 2 ($\beta = .16; p = .72$). Additionally, Table 3.4 shows that T1 emotional supervisor support was not related to T2 use of self-leadership skills for work situation 1 ($\beta = -.09, p = .85$) or for work situation 2 ($\beta = .05; p = .91$). Thus, Hypotheses 2a and 2b were not confirmed. Consequently, Hypotheses 5b, 5c, 6b and 6c cannot be confirmed since no mediation is possible.

In Hypothesis 3, we expected that T2 use of emotional self-leadership skills would be positively related to T2 keeping detached concern. As Table 3.4 shows, T2 use of emotional self-leadership skills was not related to T2 keeping detached concern for work situation 1 ($\beta = .11, p = .42$). In contrast, T2 use of emotional self-leadership skills in work situation 2 was positively related to T2 keeping detached concern ($\beta = .31, p < .05$). Thus, Hypothesis 3 can be partly confirmed (only for work situation 2, the individual work situation).

In Hypothesis 4, we expected that T2 use of emotional self-leadership skills would be positively related to T2 dealing with a heavy workload. Our findings show that T2 use of emotional self-leadership skills was neither related to T2 dealing with a heavy workload for work situation 1 ($\beta = .08, p = .59$) nor for work situation 2 ($\beta = -.12, p = .28$). Thus, Hypothesis 4 is not confirmed. Consequently, Hypothesis 6a cannot be confirmed since no mediation is possible.

In Hypothesis 5a, we expected that T2 use of emotional self-leadership skills would mediate the impact of T1 motivation to transfer on T2, keeping detached concern. Given the results of Hypothesis 3 that there was no relationship between T2 use of emotional self-leadership skills and T2 keeping detached concern in work situation 1, we proceeded to test this for work situation 2. For work situation 2, the use of skills was related to keeping detached concern (Hypothesis 3). Additionally, the direct relation between T1 motivation to

transfer and T2 keeping detached concern was nonsignificant ($\beta = -.07, p = .57$). This indicates that for work situation 2, T2 use of emotional self-leadership skills fully mediates the relation between T1 motivation to transfer and T2 keeping detached concern. Thus, Hypothesis 5a can be partly confirmed (only for work situation 2, the individual work situation). However, it should be noted that T0 keeping detached concern was positively related to T2 keeping detached concern in work situation 2 ($\beta = .33, p < .01$), indicating that performance after training in work situation 2 can be at least partly explained by performance before training.

Additional analysis showed that the direct relation between T1 appraisal supervisor support and T2 dealing with a heavy workload in situation 1 was significant and negative ($\beta = -1.46, p < .05$), indicating that more appraisal support leads to worse dealing with high workload in a team situation. Furthermore, the direct relation between T1 emotional supervisor support and T2 dealing with a heavy workload in situation 1 was significant and positive ($\beta = 1.23, p < .05$), indicating that more emotional support leads to better dealing with a high workload in the teamwork situation. Figure 3.2 shows the results of the analysis. For simplicity, only significant relations are included.

Table 3.4

Outcome of Structural Equation Modelling

| Predictors | T2 Use of self-leadership skills β^a | T2 Performance β^a | |
|----------------------------------|---|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| | | Keeping detached concern | Dealing with a heavy workload |
| T1 Motivation to transfer | .49***/.22* | .14/-.07 | -.13/-.11 |
| T1 Appraisal supervisor support | .13/.16 | -.69/-.34 | -1.46*/-.37 |
| T1 Emotional supervisor support | -.09/.05 | .69/.24 | 1.23*/.55 |
| T2 Use of self-leadership skills | | .11/.31* | .08/-.12 |
| T0 Keeping detached concern | | .37***/.33** | |
| T0 Dealing with a heavy workload | | | .02/.46*** |
| R ² | .26/.11 | .19/.20 | .26/.25 |

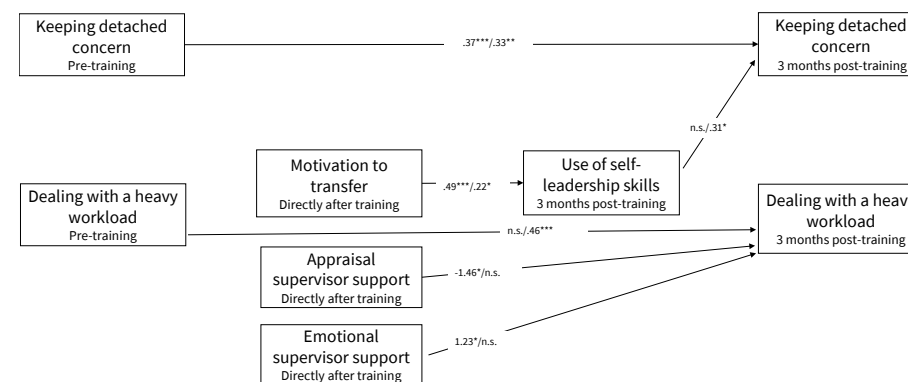
Note. N = 155.

^a Reported for each work situation separately (S1/S2)

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

Figure 3.2

Results of the Analysis



Note. .26**/.22** refer to significant relations for work situation 1/work situation 2, respectively; n.s. refers to not-significant effect.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

3.4 Discussion

The purpose of this study was to address the criterion problem in transfer research that states that it is important to define when or in what situation transfer of newly learned skills should occur. We therefore included two different but highly specific and relevant job situations for our sample of crime fighters: a teamwork situation and an individual work situation. Although we expected that the trained emotional self-leadership skills would be relevant in both contexts, we nevertheless assessed whether this was indeed the case. We furthermore included three steps in the transfer process (i.e., motivation to transfer, use of skills, and performance) to see how and when transfer after a training occurs. Additionally, we included the effect of two types of supervisor support behaviour (i.e., appraisal supervisor support and emotional supervisor support) on initial transfer. The results of our study showed that in both work situations, participants used emotional self-leadership skills three months after the training, and in both work situations, more motivation to transfer led to

more use of skills. However, only in the individual situation was the use of emotional self-leadership skills related to keeping detached concern. The lack of results for the team situation may be explained by contextual factors, such as culture, climate, politics and social interactions (Marin-Garcia & Tomas, 2016), that may be more dominant in the team situation than in the individual situation. Based on the AMO model (Appelbaum et al., 2000), we argued that ability (from the training), motivation to transfer (after training) and use of skills are needed for improving performance. However, contextual factors may affect the optimal and effective use of the skills in a specific context and subsequently the outcomes (Marin-Garcia & Tomas, 2016). Our findings are in line with results from a study by Liu and Smith (2011) who found that individual endeavours to use training content during work in the child welfare sector differed from the use of skills from training in a team. Additionally, in their study on self-leadership and team members' performance, Hauschildt and Konradt (2012) found that the effect of self-leadership on team member proficiency was negatively moderated by collectivism. They suggested that highly collectivistic team members fulfil their team member role better than less collectivistic team members without the need to actively influence their self-regulation, as collectivism has been shown to predict several job performance aspects of team members (Jackson et al., 2006). Thus, in a team context, contextual factors may hinder the use of self-leadership skills (i.e., make it more difficult to use them) or create a situation where employees do not feel the need to use them to perform (e.g., in case of high collectivism) and consequently do not use them.

Contrary to our expectations, supervisor behaviour directly after training (i.e., focused on initial transfer) was not related to the use of emotional self-leadership skills three months post training (i.e., more sustainable use of skills). However, we found support for the impact of supervisor support on performance three months post training. More specifically, our results suggest that emotional supervisor support may positively impact dealing with a heavy workload in the team situation. These findings are in line with previous research suggesting that emotional support provides trainees with a feeling that supervisors care about them and value their contribution to work outcomes. Based on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and perceived organisational support (Eisenberger et al., 1986), several authors have argued that this affective attachment is positively related to individual work outcomes (Golden & Veiga, 2008; Knies & Leisink, 2014) and relieves the effects of work-related stress

(Eschleman, 2011; Suan & Nasurdin, 2016). At the team level, the effect of emotional supervisor support may be even stronger because interactions between team members give rise to the collective perception of supervisor support through repeated cycles of individual interactions and influence (Pohl & Galletta, 2017).

Additionally, our results suggest that appraisal supervisor support after training may negatively impact dealing with a heavy workload in the team situation. Thus, more relational-focused emotional supervisor support has a positive effect on dealing with a heavy workload, and more performance-focused appraisal supervisor support has a negative effect on dealing with a heavy workload. This may be explained by the trainees' attributions of supervisor support (Eschleman, 2011). The high altruistic and low self-serving intent of emotional supervisor support may lead to improved job attitudes (Eschleman, 2011), whereas the behavioural reaction of the supervisor (i.e., appraisal support) may give employees the feeling that they were incompetent or unwanted (Beehr et al., 2010) and consequently may negatively affect performance.

With these findings, we make several important contributions. First, our study demonstrates that it is useful to include motivation to transfer, use of skills and performance as separate steps in the transfer process to obtain a better view of how and why transfer occurs in a specific situation. We found that motivation to transfer alone does not explain the transfer results (i.e., the same level of motivation to transfer led to different levels of use of trained skills for work situations 1 and 2 and motivation to transfer was not directly related to performance), nor is use of trained skills at work (i.e., the use of self-leadership was only related to performance in the individual situation, not in the team situation). Second, our study demonstrates that it is important to be clear about what is expected to change as a function of the training. Many transfer studies measure the use of skill (e.g., Ladyshewsky & Flavell, 2012; Stenling & Tafvelin, 2016) or ask general questions about how the use of skills from the training improved work (e.g., Millar & Stevens, 2012; Simosi, 2012; Xiao, 1996). We expected that the emotional self-leadership skills from the training would lead to increased performance in the individual and team situations. Our study shows that skills may be used less in one situation than in another situation, for example, because they are less needed or more difficult to use. Consequently, performance results may not occur or may take more time to occur. Additionally, the use of skills may lead to less performance in one situation

compared to another because contextual factors may moderate the effect of the use of skills on performance (i.e., although the skills are used, they do not lead to increased performance because of barriers in the context). Our study showed that asking about the use of skills per work situation and asking about specific performance (i.e., keeping detached concern and dealing with a heavy workload) per work situation led to a more nuanced picture of the post-training transfer process. Such a more nuanced picture may help organisations improve transfer and ensure that skills from training are used where they are needed the most. Third, our study shows the importance of differentiating supervisor behaviours during transfer. Our finding underscores previous transfer research asserting that supervisor support is a multidimensional construct and that differential effects can be expected (Govaerts, 2017; Schindler & Burkholder, 2016) based on subordinate attributions of supervisor support. Although supervisor support behaviour is often helpful for transfer, the work context in which the support is provided can result in the support behaviour becoming a stressor rather than a resource for the employee. Consequently, such supervisor support behaviour may negatively impact transfer (Eschleman, 2011).

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

Some study limitations should be acknowledged. First, all of the data were self-reported and may be biased by the perceptions of the respondents, which could have caused underestimation or overestimation of performance results. Terborg et al. (1980) mention several problems that arise when pre- and post-self-report data are used as criteria in, for example, leadership training. The observed differences between pre- and postintervention measures may reflect an unknown amount of true change and an unknown amount of change due to instrumentation. Before the training, the trainees rate their performance based on the performance standards they experience at that moment. If they rate their performance three months post-training, they might provide a lower score for their performance even when it improved because they experienced the performance standard in a different way. Further research could therefore benefit from a larger sample and multiple raters (e.g., peers, supervisors). Additionally, further research should consider including a control group to ensure that the observed changes are due to training rather than other environmental or organisational influences.

Second, in this study, we focused on the impact of motivation to transfer and supervisor support behaviours on transfer. However, other pre- and post-training variables can contribute to transfer. Pretraining factors that are related to motivational states after training and actual transfer include perceptions of the programme (Gegenfurtner et al., 2009) (Gegenfurtner et al., 2009) and motivation to learn (Gegenfurtner & Vauras, 2012; Grossman & Salas, 2011). Post-training factors that are found to be related to transfer include autonomy (Axtell et al., 1997), organisational learning culture (Martin, 2010; Richman-Hirsch, 2001; Tracey et al., 1995) and peer support (Antle et al., 2008; Chiaburu, Van Dam, et al., 2010; Massenberg et al., 2017). Such variables may impact the use of skills as well as performance results. Since our findings indicate that the social context may impact transfer results in a specific situation, further research may benefit from including factors related to this context, such as autonomy, organisational learning culture and peer support. In case transfer will take place in a team context (cf. our first work situation), factors related to the team situation, such as collectivism (Jackson et al., 2006) and team efficacy (Cannon-Bowers et al., 2003), could be included in future research to obtain a better view of the transfer process and factors influencing this collective transfer process.

Third, future research would benefit from a more specific measure of supervisor behaviour to obtain a better understanding of the role of specific supervisor behaviour during transfer. In general, supervisor support can be described as the extent to which supervisors enable or stimulate the use of trained skills during work (Holton III et al., 2000). Many transfer studies use a nonspecific measure for supervisor support (i.e., “Did your supervisor support you on the use of trained skills?” See, for example, the Learning Transfer System Inventory (LTSI) by Holton and colleagues (2005)). In the current study, we used Nijman’s conceptualisation of supervisor support (Nijman, 2004). He distinguished four different types of supervisor support from which we used the two best that were applicable in our specific study: post-training appraisal supervisor support and post-training emotional supervisor support. However, over the past decades, supervisor support during transfer has referred to a range of actions, such as coaching (e.g., Hutchins et al., 2013), discussing application (e.g., Chiaburu et al., 2010), encouragement (e.g., Al-Eisa, Furayyan, & Alhemoud, 2009), providing opportunities to practice (e.g., Facticeau et al., 1995), providing practical support (e.g., Gregoire et al., 1998) and providing rewards (e.g., Velada et al., 2007). For further research, this

would plea for a measure of supervisor support that reflects specific and concrete behaviours of the supervisor. For example, Govaerts (2017) presents a 41-item scale for supervisor support behaviour that consists of nine dimensions: pretraining information, role modelling & facilitation, favourable attitude, request sharing, openness, coaching & feedback, involvement & accountability, work coverage, and training participation. Our measure on emotional supervisor support fits in Govaerts' "openness", focusing on the supervisors' attitude ("being open to new ideas and change, and accept that trainees may make mistakes when they try to apply the training programme in their job" (Govaerts, 2017, p. 120)). Our measure on appraisal supervisor support would fit in Govaerts' measure on "coaching and feedback", referring to "supervisor behaviour regarding coaching employees in applying newly learned competences at work, and providing feedback on the training application and work performance in general" (Govaerts, 2017, p. 120). This new set of supervisor behaviours - Govaerts' publication was not yet available when we started our study - may lead to a better overview of areas in supervision support during transfer that deserve more attention.

Conclusions and Practical Implications

A major gap in the research on the transfer of training is a profound overview of stages in the post-training transfer process as well as a focus on the actual context in which transfer occurs and how it occurs (cf. Baldwin et al., 2017). This study demonstrates that specifying the transfer stages and work situation in which transfer occurs is important to obtain a realistic view of the transfer process. Based on our study, some practical advice can be provided. First, organisations should realise that transfer results may differ per work situation. If they want to check if transfer enrolls in the right direction (i.e., the proper skills are used in the expected situation), organisations should be explicit about what behaviour or performance in what specific work situation should change as a result of the training. Using a nonspecific measure may lead to an overly optimistic view (skills may be used in another, less contributing situation) or even a misleading view (skills are used in a situation where they should not be used; negative transfer; Zubairy et al., 2015) on transfer. Second, motivation to transfer is important to start using skills from the training. Checking directly after training if participants are motivated to transfer skills to the work context may pinpoint a lack of such motivation and enable organisations to add information on content relevance

(Kirwan & Birchall, 2006; Liebermann & Hoffmann, 2008) or provide additional transfer-enhancing interventions (Blume et al., 2010; Sookhai & Budworth, 2010) to increase motivation to transfer. Third, supervisor behaviour is related to transfer (Nijman et al., 2006; Nijman & Gelissen, 2011). Although we did not find support for the effect of different supervisor behaviours on the use of skills, our research suggests that specific supervisor behaviours may be important per transfer stage and per work context (i.e., our study suggests that appraisal supervisor support and emotional supervisor support are related to dealing with a heavy workload in a team situation). Supervisors are often not aware of their role during transfer (Lancaster et al., 2013), making them aware of the effect of their behaviour on learning, and transfer in the organisation can be a first step to improving transfer.

Chapter 4.

The Effect of a Self-Leadership Training on Detached Concern and the Proactivity of Human Service Professionals

This chapter is submitted as: Botke, J. A., & Van Woerkom, M. (2021). *The Effect of a Self-Leadership Training on Detached Concern and the Proactivity of Human Service Professionals*.

Abstract

This study focuses on the effects of self-leadership training on two important performance requirements for human service professionals: detached concern and proactivity. Detached concern is a two-dimensional strategy that prevents human service professionals from becoming too highly involved with their clients at work, including empathic concern as an emotional response towards clients and detachment as an emotional regulator. Proactivity is self-starting and change-oriented behaviour to enhance personal or organisational effectiveness. Based on self-leadership theory, we hypothesized that self-leadership training can enhance detached concern and proactivity. Moreover, based on behavioural plasticity theory, we hypothesized that people who are low in occupational self-efficacy are more susceptible to the external influence of self-leadership training than individuals with higher levels of occupational self-efficacy. We conducted a field experiment with a sample of 223 human service professionals who were either assigned to a training group (n = 94) or a wait-list control group (n = 129). In a 3-month follow-up study, we found that self-leadership training had a positive effect on the level of detached concern and that the intervention was especially effective for participants with low to medium initial levels of pretraining occupational self-efficacy. However, the intervention did not affect the level of proactivity. We conclude that self-leadership training may increase the level of detached concern of human service professionals, particularly when offered to employees who lack confidence in their own abilities.

4.1 Introduction

A main feature of human service jobs is that employees need to interact with internal or external customers (Dollard et al., 2003). However, interacting with customers is not always pleasurable and may lead to psychological strain (Dormann & Zapf, 2004) because factors beyond the control of the human service professional may create situations of ambiguity, conflict, and overload (Bhagat et al., 2010). Detached concern, a two-dimensional strategy integrating empathic concern for clients and detachment as an emotional regulator, prevents human service professionals from becoming too highly involved with their clients (Lampert et al., 2019) and facilitates coping with psychological strain (Zapf, 2002). By displaying detached concern, human service professionals can neutralize the emotional appeal of clients by maintaining an attitude of objectivity and simultaneously showing emotional involvement in which cynical and distant reactions are avoided (Betgem, 2000; Zapf, 2002). Additionally, proactive behaviour, which is self-starting and change-oriented behaviour aimed at enhancing personal or organisational effectiveness (Unsworth & Parker, 2003), may prevent the psychological strain related to interaction with customers (Parker, 2000; Zacher et al., 2019). By being proactive, professionals take control to make things happen rather than watch things happen (Parker et al., 2010), and their initiative in solving problems or making improvements to work procedures can prevent potentially stressful situations with clients.

This study focuses on the effects of self-leadership training on detached concern and proactivity among human service professionals. Self-leadership theory (Manz, 1986, 2015) proposes that people can influence their own thoughts and behaviours by using a set of constructive thought pattern strategies and behaviour-focused strategies (Hauschildt & Konradt, 2012). These strategies may help workers take more control of their thoughts and behaviours in (potentially) stressful situations. Cognitive factors largely determine how external events are perceived (Bandura, 1977) and mediate the relationship between the employee and the environment (Neck et al., 2013). Therefore, self-influencing strategies regarding thoughts and consequent behaviours may help human service professionals better cope with the psychological strain that is associated with client interactions and offer them the tools to show proactive behaviour that may prevent this strain.

The success of self-leadership training may depend not only upon the design and delivery of this training, but also upon individual predispositions as moderating variables (Müller, 2006). In line with behavioural plasticity theory (Brockner, 1988), we argue that people who are low in occupational self-efficacy are more susceptible to the influences of self-leadership training than individuals with higher levels of occupational self-efficacy because they are more uncertain about the appropriateness of their own behaviour. Therefore, we propose that pretraining occupational self-efficacy may moderate the effect of self-leadership training on detached concern and the proactivity of human service professionals in such a way that the training will be more effective for participants with low levels of pretraining occupational self-efficacy than for those with high levels of pretraining occupational self-efficacy.

Our study contributes to the literature by investigating the potential of self-leadership training for improving the performance of human service professionals. Although previous studies indicate the importance of detached concern (e.g., Dormann & Zapf, 2004; Hochschild, 1983) and proactive behaviour (e.g., Lonne, 2003) for human service professionals, research on how to increase detached concern and proactivity among human service professionals is lacking. Although it has been suggested that training could be an effective way to enhance detached concern (Fox, 2006; Lampert et al., 2019) and proactivity (Frese et al., 2007; Kirby et al., 2002), previous studies have tested the effect of training on detached concern only in student samples (e.g., Tseng & Lin, 2016; Underman & Hirshfield, 2016) or in the medical field (e.g., Flutters et al., 2010; Fox, 2006). However, the effect of training tends to differ for student and nonstudent samples (Scandura & Williams, 2000). For work-related behaviours such as detached concern and proactivity, studies based on student samples cannot be generalized to working populations, given the complexity of the situations in which working professionals have to display these behaviours (James & Sonner, 2001).

To the best of our knowledge, only two previous studies have focused on the effect of self-leadership training on proactivity in a work setting. Neck and Manz (1996) measured the effect of the training after 1 month and 2 months, and Stewart et al. (1996) used a 4-week time lapse for their post-training measure. However, these time lapses may capture only the initial transfer of training and the first attempts to try out new skills on the job (Axtell, Maitlis, & Yearta, 1997; Laker, 1990) and may cause undereffects because it takes time before new behaviour manifests (Cheng & Ho, 2001). Applying a three-month time interval for

measuring post-training results provides sufficient time after the training to apply what was learned in different work situations, whereas it is still short enough to identify the training as the main source of behavioural change (Cheng & Ho, 2001).

The Relationship between Self-Leadership Training and Detached Concern

Initially, the literature on dealing with emotionally challenging situations at work focused mainly on learning how to be “not emotional” (Decety et al., 2014; Hafferty, 1988). For example, the literature stressed the importance for medical students to detach their fear, anxiety, and disgust from their decisions regarding patient care and for lawyers to act aggressively in court on behalf of their clients without feeling conflicted about the actual guilt of their clients (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). However, over the years, the focus in the literature has moved from “not feeling” to “a balance between distance and involvement” (Lampert & Glaser, 2018). For example, based on their study of intensive care nurses, Cadge and Hammond (2012) argue that detached concern is important for balancing employees’ concern, as an emotional response in connecting with stakeholders, and detachment as an emotional distance regulator (Lampert et al., 2019; Lampert & Glaser, 2018). Detached concern is a state in which human service professionals blend compassion with emotional distance in client interaction (Lampert et al., 2019). This balancing act between personal involvement and professional distance is essential for the quality of work of professionals in emotionally demanding situations, since underinvolvement may cause cynicism and an indifferent attitude towards the job, whereas overinvolvement may result in emotional exhaustion (Bakker & Heuven, 2006; Cropanzano et al., 2003). The “concern component” of detached concern stresses the importance of empathic concern (Lampert & Glaser, 2018). Such empathic concern includes a cognitive component, or an ability to perceive and decode another’s emotional state; an affective component, or an emotional connection to another’s emotional state; and a behavioural component, or an action taken to demonstrate empathy (Butters, 2010). The “detachment component” stresses the importance of regulating emotional states by keeping a personal boundary between the professional and the client (Lampert et al., 2019). Detachment functions as a powerful protector against emotional exhaustion and helps human service professionals maintain their emotional resources (Lampert et al., 2019; Lampert & Glaser, 2018).

The regulation of emotion requires self-control, which is a limited resource (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). By using self-leadership skills (i.e., behavioural-focused strategies and constructive thought pattern strategies), human service professionals can protect their self-control and prevent them from losing their detached concern. In this study, we focused on the effect of five different self-leadership skills: the constructive thought pattern strategies “self-talk”, “evaluation of assumptions and beliefs” and “self-imagery” and the behavioural-focused strategies “self-goal setting”, and “self-observation”.

Self-talk is what we covertly tell ourselves, either mentally or out loud (Neck & Manz, 2016). By using positive self-talk, employees maintain a constant self-dialogue to enhance positive emotional states and cognitions and to get their mind off negative events or emotions. Positive self-talk contributes to increased self-awareness and better problem solving and emotional control in challenging scenarios (Marques-Quinteiro & Curral, 2012).

Evaluation of assumptions and beliefs involves becoming aware of mental distortions such as extreme thinking (e.g., “I did it all wrong”), overgeneralizations (e.g., “I will never succeed”), and mental filters (e.g., including only your view of the situation) that may lead to feedback distortion and, ultimately, impaired self-regulatory processes (Neck & Houghton, 2006). Becoming aware of these assumptions and beliefs helps eliminate or replace the beliefs and assumptions that form the basis of dysfunctional thought processes (Neck et al., 2013). For example, after becoming aware of an overgeneralization (e.g., “I failed again in addressing the needs of my client, so I am not cut out for this job”), the thought can be replaced by a more functional thought (e.g., “I will learn from this incident and do better next time”).

Self-imagery includes an individual’s capacity to cognitively simulate future task performance and create a mental image of successful performance (Neck & Houghton, 2006). Several studies have confirmed that mentally practising a task enhances performance (Neck et al., 2013); by successfully addressing a stressful situation in their minds, human service professionals will be better able to manage the stressful situation in real life due to increased feelings of self-control (Baker et al., 1985).

Self-goal setting involves creating a deadline for a desired end-state (Boss & Sims, 2008). Rather than having someone else set the goal, the goal is self-assigned and is under the sphere of influence of the goal setter. Setting specific, challenging, but achievable goals

has been found to increase motivation to perform (Locke & Latham, 1990) and may help professionals accomplish difficult but unavoidable tasks (Müller & Niessen, 2018). Self-set goals can be even more effective when used in conjunction with self-cueing strategies (e.g., making to-do lists) and self-rewards (e.g., treating oneself to a walk after completing a difficult task). Self-cueing strategies provide additional motivation towards individual goal attainment (Neck & Houghton, 2006).

Self-observation includes systematic data gathering about one’s own behaviour, for example, by asking for feedback from clients and co-workers, thereby establishing a basis for self-evaluation (Manz & Sims, 1980). If individuals have correct information about their own behaviour and performance levels, they can set more effective and realistic goals for themselves and decide whether their current actions need to be adapted to reach these goals (Marques-Quinteiro et al., 2019; Shahin & Salehzadeh, 2013).

Although some studies have tested the effect of training on detached concern (Fluttert et al., 2010; Fox, 2006; Tseng & Lin, 2016; Underman & Hirshfield, 2016), the effect of self-leadership skill training on detached concern has never been investigated. However, we expect that training the five self-leadership strategies that were mentioned above will facilitate the development of detached concern. Positive self-talk helps professionals regulate their emotions in difficult situations, whereas mental imagery leads to increased feelings of self-control. The evaluation of assumptions and beliefs has a positive effect on self-regulatory feedback processes (Neck & Houghton, 2006) and therefore helps balance emotions and detachment. The use of behavioural-focused strategies such as self-observation and self-goal setting helps professionals address the needs of their clients while maintaining their personal boundaries in the relationship with the client.

To ensure that self-leadership training is effective and successfully transferred to the workplace, specific attention needs to be paid to the design of such training (Russ-Eft, 2002). First, pretraining information, stating the importance of the content of the training for performance, increases learner readiness, which in turn is related to the transfer of training (Holton III et al., 2000). Second, advanced organizers, such as an overview of the training content presented at the start of the training, help trainees organize and retain material to be learned (Russ-Eft, 2002). Third, research shows that discovery learning (i.e., invite trainees to explore and experiment with the new behaviours), and practising skills during

training leads to more transfer than traditional methods of presenting course materials (Russ-Eft, 2002).

In summary, it can be expected that self-leadership training that includes the five self-leadership skills and meets the described design requirements has a positive effect on the level of detached concern of professionals. This leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1.

Employees participating in self-leadership training develop higher levels of detached concern than employees in a control group.

The Relationship between Self-Leadership Training and Proactivity

Self-leadership can also be expected to enhance proactivity. “Being proactive is about making things happen, anticipating and preventing problems, and seizing opportunities” (Parker et al., 2010, p. 827). As such, proactivity is a goal-driven process. Proactive professionals anticipate desired future outcomes (goal generation) and then mobilize and monitor their day-to-day behaviours to attain their goals (goal striving) (Parker et al., 2010).

We expect that the five self-leadership skills will stimulate proactivity. Cognitive focused strategies help professionals develop the courage to be proactive (Sidwell, 2019) and to regulate negative beliefs and emotions, which is positively associated with proactive behaviour within the organisation (Bal et al., 2011). The evaluation of assumptions and beliefs helps them scrutinize dysfunctional beliefs in regard to being proactive (e.g., “I am not entitled/proficient enough to take initiative in solving this problem”). Positive self-talk may help change these beliefs and the related emotions, whereas self-imagery may help visualize a scenario where one is successful by being proactive (Parker et al., 2010). Behavioural-focused strategies enable goal generation and goal striving regarding proactive behaviour by applying self-observation and deciding whether current actions need adaptation to reach the goals. Previous cross-sectional research found a positive association between self-leadership skills and employees’ proactivity. For example, Hauschildt and Konradt (2012) found a positive relationship between self-leadership skills and proactivity directed at the individual task and the team in German companies. Marques-Quinteiro and Curral (2012) found that the self-leadership strategies of employees in three international software companies were positively related to proactive work role performance.

Based on the arguments presented above, we expect that self-leadership training that includes the five self-leadership skills (self-talk, evaluation of assumptions and beliefs, self-imagery, self-goal setting, and self-observation) and meets the described design requirements increases proactivity. This leads to our second hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2.

Employees participating in training on self-leadership develop higher levels of proactivity than employees in a control group.

The Moderating Role of Pretraining Occupational Self-Efficacy

Occupational self-efficacy is “the competence that a person feels concerning the ability to successfully fulfil the tasks involved in his or her job” (Rigotti et al., 2008, p. 239). According to behavioural plasticity theory (Brockner, 1988), people who are low in occupational self-efficacy are more susceptible to the external influence of training than individuals with higher levels of occupational self-efficacy because they are more uncertain about the appropriateness of their own behaviour. Support for the moderating role of pretraining occupational self-efficacy has, for instance, been provided by Van Woerkom and Meyers (2019) and McCormick and Tanguma (2007). Van Woerkom and Meyers explain the moderating effect of pretraining occupational self-efficacy by stating that individuals with high pretraining occupational self-efficacy may already have what it takes to fuel their personal development. McCormick and Tanguma (2007) point out that a ceiling effect may be responsible for the relatively lower increase in performance after training highly self-efficacious individuals. Moores and Chang (2009) point out that overconfidence may be an explanation for the lack of training results of employees with high pretraining self-efficacy. This overconfidence “measured in terms of overestimating one’s initial performance, promotes an unwavering belief in one’s ability” (2009, p. 74), which in turn leads to a lower increase in skills and performance.

Applied to our research, we propose that high pretraining occupational self-efficacy makes trainees less susceptible to the influence of self-leadership training because self-efficacious individuals are more certain about their own behaviour. They may correctly (ceiling effect) or incorrectly (overestimation) assume they do not need training in self-leadership and therefore do not learn from it. In contrast, self-leadership training may give

trainees low in pretraining occupational self-efficacy what they lack, namely, the skills to self-navigate dysfunctional beliefs and emotions, leading to higher levels of detached concern and proactive behaviour. This leads to the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3a.

Trainees' pretraining occupational self-efficacy will moderate the positive effect of self-leadership training on detached concern in such a way that this effect will be stronger for participants with low initial levels of pretraining occupational self-efficacy than for those with high initial levels of pretraining occupational self-efficacy.

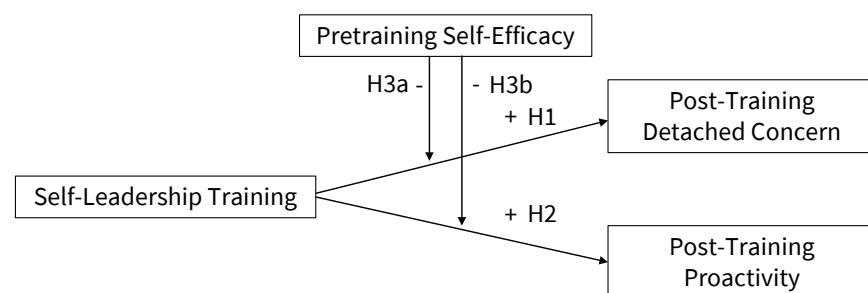
Hypothesis 3b.

Trainees' pretraining occupational self-efficacy will moderate the positive effect of self-leadership training on proactivity in such a way that this effect will be stronger for participants with low levels of pretraining occupational self-efficacy than for those with high initial levels of pretraining occupational self-efficacy.

Figure 4.1 depicts our conceptual model.

Figure 4.1

Conceptual Model



4.2 Methods

Participants and Procedure

The participants were human service professionals working for various departments of the Police Service Centre of the Dutch Police. This service centre provides various kinds of support, such as financial support, administrative support, planning and management, for frontline police officers. The study took place over a period of twelve months in total. Training in self-leadership was mandatory for all participants. However, employees could choose when to take the training by signing up for one of the dates available for the training. The participants who signed up for the training between June 2018 and February 2019 were assigned to the experimental condition. The participants who signed up for the self-leadership training after April 2019 were assigned to a wait-list control group. The participants were not aware that the first group was considered to be the experimental group and the second group was the control group.

After the management of the Dutch police provided approval for the study and the management of the Police Service Centre agreed to participate in the study, the participants (experimental and control group) were invited by the training coordinators to complete two questionnaires. The first questionnaire was distributed one week before the training of the experimental group (T0), and the second questionnaire was distributed three months after the training of the experimental group (T1). The wait-list control group completed both questionnaires before participating in the training. We chose a three-month interval for the post-training measure because this provides sufficient time after the training to encounter opportunities to apply what was learned while at the same time being short enough to identify the training as the main source of behavioural change (Cheng & Ho, 2001). The baseline questionnaire T0 and the follow-up questionnaire T1 were the exact same questionnaires including all study variables; however, demographic variables (age, sex and tenure) were included only in the baseline questionnaire. We collected all the data through online survey software. The participants' responses were anonymous and voluntary, and we encouraged them to respond by sending out a reminder one week after the initial invitation. To warrant the participants' privacy, personal codes were used to link the T0 and T1 questionnaires. All questionnaires were in Dutch.

In total, 500 participants were included in the experimental group, and 500 participants were included in the wait-list control group. In total, 94 participants in the experimental group (18.8%) and 129 participants in the wait-list control group (25.8%) completed both questionnaires. Of the 223 participants who completed both questionnaires, 115 (51.6%) were male. The average age of the participants was 48.7 years ($SD = 9.1$). The average tenure was 14.8 years ($SD = 11.1$). The sex distribution and the average age in our sample were similar to those of the Dutch police force (66% male, average age of 45) (Politie, n.d.). The average tenure in our sample was also similar to the average of the Dutch police force (average tenure of 15 years) (Huijs et al., 2014).

The Self-Leadership Training

Five self-leadership strategies were included in a two-day training. On the first day of the training, trainees were taught how to create a “road map for action” by setting self-initiated goals (self-goal setting) using the SMART method (i.e., formulating specific, measurable, acceptable, realistic and time-bound goals) and how to use such goals in work situations. For example, they were taught that sharing your goals with others helps you focus on what you are aiming for and makes it possible for others to help you achieve your goals (Strauss & Parker, 2018). Next, the constructive thought pattern strategy “evaluating of assumptions and beliefs” was explained and practised using the “action reflection” model. The action reflection model provides a framework for reflective practice by identifying a practical problem and letting this form the basis for inquiry (e.g., “What did I do?” and “What did I experience?”), followed by further reflection on desired change (e.g., “What will I do differently the next time I am in such a situation?”). Finally, trainees were taught how to prepare to develop detached concern or proactive behaviour by practising a scenario in their own work environment in which they experienced emotional overload or had the feeling of being in a suboptimal situation. They were asked to visualize the scenario and to reflect on their behaviours as well as responses to the behaviours (constructive thought pattern strategy “self-imagery”). On the second day of the training, trainees were taught how to recognize and change their focus of attention using Nideffer’s four types of attention (Nideffer, 1976). Nideffer’s attention model suggests that attentional style exists along two dimensions: width and direction. Width ranges from broad to narrow. The direction of attentional

style varies on a continuum from an internal focus to an external focus. The combination of the two dimensions leads to four attention styles (broad-external, broad-internal, narrow-external, narrow-internal (Nideffer, 1976)). Participants practised recognizing their attentional focus and experienced how they could better control their emotions by switching to a different type of concentration (e.g., from broad to narrow or from internal to external; behavioural-focused strategy “self-observation”). Additionally, trainees were taught how to recognize self-hindering thoughts by evaluating experiences, their thoughts about these experiences and their consequent behaviour. After diagnosing self-hindering thoughts, they practised bending negative thoughts about an experience (e.g., “It is too difficult, I will never be able to do it”) towards more positive thoughts (e.g., “I will become better every time I practice and will finally master it”) (constructive thought pattern strategy “self-talk”).

The training was led by two professional trainers and provided during regular work hours. In line with Russ-Eft (2002) and Holton III, Bates, Noe, and Ruona (2000), the trainees received a pretraining package including information about the relevance of the training as well as some noncompulsory pretraining exercises. At the beginning of the training, an overview of the training content (as an “advance organizer”) was presented to allow trainees to organize and retain material to be learned. The content of the training was taught by using guided discovery methods (e.g., modelling by one of the trainers and learning how to use the strategies step by step, including self-monitoring of responses) and practice (group discussion or a role play on how to use the strategy in work situations).

Measures

Detached concern was measured with a four-item scale that was developed as part of the Resilience Monitor for crime scene investigators (Delahaij et al., 2014). For our research, we slightly adapted the items for use within the Police Service Centre. Since all participants worked in (multidisciplinary) teams, we adapted the items to fit the team context. Additionally, because the participants of our study were not directly confronted with victims, we changed the word “victims” to a more general “the case and the people involved”. The four items of the scale were “[The last time I worked in a team], I kept enough professional distance to the case and to people involved”, “I was not too emotionally involved in the case or people involved”, “I could empathize with the people involved” and “I did not

get carried away by the situation". The items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) confirmed that all four items loaded on one component (T0 $\chi^2 = 15.45$, $df = 2$; comparative fit index (CFI) = .98, Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) = .95, standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = .03, T1 $\chi^2 = 11.15$, $df = 2$; CFI = .98, TLI = .95, SRMR = .03). Cronbach's alpha for T0 was .78 and for T1 .81.

Proactivity was measured using the "Team Member Proactivity" scale of Griffin et al. (2007), which included the following three items: "[The last time I worked in a team], I made proposals to make our team more effective", "I developed new and improved ways of working for the team to perform better", and "I improved the way the team works". The items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). Cronbach's alpha was .88 for T0 and was .91 for T1. Since proactivity was measured with three items, we could not conduct a CFA because the fit would be perfect irrespective of the pattern of factor loadings (Malhotra & Sharma, 2008).

Pretraining occupational self-efficacy was measured with the six-item version of the occupational self-efficacy scale by Rigotti et al. (2008). We adapted the scale by adding the team context. A sample item is "[The last time I worked in a team], I could handle my work, whatever happened". The items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). A CFA confirmed that all six items loaded on one component ($\chi^2 = 32.98$, $df = 9$; CFI = .97, TLI = .96, SRMR = .03). Cronbach's alpha was .84.

Based on the outcomes of the separate CFAs, we tested the measurement model, which included all three study variables (pretraining occupational self-efficacy, post-training detached concern and post-training proactivity). The fit of this model was adequate ($\chi^2 = 88.97$, $df = 62$; TLI = .97; CFI = .99, SRMR = .04, see Table 4.1). All factor loadings were significant, with loadings ranging between .50 and .94. Next, we compared this with the fit of four alternative models. First, we tested a two-factor model in which detached concern and proactivity loaded on one factor (M1). This model showed a significantly worse fit than the hypothesized measurement model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 400.00$, $\Delta df = 2$, $p < .001$). Second, we examined a two-factor model in which detached concern and occupational self-efficacy loaded on one factor and proactivity loaded on the other factor (M2). This model also showed a

significantly worse fit than the hypothesized measurement model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 245.45$, $\Delta df = 2$, $p < .001$). Third, we tested a two-factor model in which proactivity and occupational self-efficacy loaded on one factor and detached concern loaded on the other factor (M3). Again, this model showed a significantly worse fit than the hypothesized measurement model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 427.68$, $\Delta df = 2$, $p < .001$). Finally, we tested a one-factor model in which occupational self-efficacy, detached concern and proactivity all loaded on one factor (M4). Additionally, this model showed a significantly worse fit than the hypothesized measurement model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 658.47$, $\Delta df = 3$, $p < .001$), indicating that all variables (i.e., detached concern, proactivity and occupational self-efficacy) were distinct.

Table 4.1

Results of Confirmatory Factor Analyses

| | χ^2 | df | CFI | TLI | SRMR | $\Delta\chi^2/\Delta df$ |
|--|----------|------|-----|-----|------|--------------------------|
| Total measurement model (3 factors) | 88.97 | 62 | .98 | .97 | .04 | |
| Alternative model 1 (2 factors) ^a | 488.97 | 64 | .67 | .59 | .12 | 400/2*** |
| Alternative model 2 (2 factors) ^b | 334.42 | 64 | .79 | .74 | .12 | 245.45/2*** |
| Alternative model 3 (2 factors) ^c | 516.65 | 64 | .64 | .57 | .14 | 427.68/2*** |
| Alternative model 4 (1 factor) ^d | 747.44 | 65 | .46 | .36 | .17 | 658.47/3*** |

Note. $n = 233$.

^a detached concern and proactivity loading on one factor

^b detached concern and occupational self-efficacy loading on one factor

^c proactivity and occupational self-efficacy loading on one factor

^d occupational self-efficacy, detached concern and proactivity loading one factor

*** $p < .001$

Analysis

An independent sample t-test was conducted to investigate whether the experimental group and the control group were comparable in terms of their pretraining levels of detached concern, proactivity and pretraining occupational self-efficacy, as well as in terms of their sex, age, and tenure. The results showed no significant difference between the experimental group and the control group regarding pretraining detached concern [$t(221) = 1.240, p < .216$], pretraining proactivity [$t(221) = -1.383, p < .168$], and pretraining occupational self-efficacy [$t(221) = .399, p < .690$]. We also found no significant differences between the experimental group and the control group regarding age [$t(221) = -.049, p < .961$] and sex [$t(221) = 1.226, p < .221$]. The results showed a significant difference between the experimental group ($M = 17.0, SD = 11.3$) and the control group ($M = 13.3, SD = 10.8$) for organisational tenure [$t(221) = -2.464, p < .014$]. The average organisational tenure of the experimental group was 17.0 years ($SD = 11.34$), whereas the average organisational tenure of the control group was 13.3 years ($SD = 10.77$). Therefore, we decided to control for organisational tenure in our analyses.

Analyses of descriptive statistics, reliabilities, and correlations among the variables were conducted using SPSS 25.0. To test our hypotheses, we used AMOS 25.0 to perform structural equation modelling (SEM) with maximum likelihood estimation. The overall χ^2 measure, CFI, TLI, SRMR and RMSEA (root mean square error of approximation) were used to assess model fit. It is generally suggested that the TLI and CFI values should exceed .90 or even .95 for the model to be considered to have a good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Similarly, a value of .06 or less for RMSEA (Browne & Cudeck, 1992) and a value of .05 or less for SRMR (Hooper et al., 2008) reflects a good fit. In all analyses, we controlled for the T0 values of detached concern and proactivity, implying that regression coefficients can be interpreted as predictors of changes in the dependent variables.

4.3 Results

Table 4.2 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the study variables. As seen from this table, there were no significant correlations between training participation and detached concern at T1 or between training participation and proactivity at T1. Detached concern at T0 was positively correlated with occupational self-efficacy at T0 ($r = .68, p < .01$) and detached concern at T1 ($r = .40, p < .01$). Proactivity at T0 was positively correlated with occupational self-efficacy at T0 ($r = .45, p < .01$) and proactivity at T1 ($r = .53, p < .01$). Occupational self-efficacy at T0 was positively correlated with detached concern at T1 ($r = .31, p < .05$) and proactivity at T1 ($r = .21, p < .05$). Detached concern at T1 was positively correlated with proactivity at T0 ($r = .18, p < .01$) and proactivity at T1 ($r = .53, p < .01$). Proactivity at T1 was positively correlated with detached concern at T0 ($r = .21, p < .01$) and detached concern at T1 ($r = .27, p < .01$).

Table 4.2

Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations Among the Study Variables

| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|---------------------------------|----------|-----------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|--------|-------|
| 1.Condition | - | - | | | | | | | | |
| 2.Occupational self-efficacy T0 | 3.91 | .52 | -.03 | | | | | | | |
| 3.Detached concern T0 | 3.76 | .55 | -.08 | .68** | | | | | | |
| 4.Proactivity T0 | 3.57 | .77 | .09 | .45** | .35** | | | | | |
| 5.Detached concern T1 | 3.82 | .52 | .13 | .31* | .40** | .18** | | | | |
| 6.Proactivity T1 | 3.50 | .71 | -.01 | .21** | .21** | .53** | .27** | | | |
| 7.Sex | .48 | .50 | -.08 | -.03 | -.09 | .04 | .02 | .06 | | |
| 8.Age | 48.73 | 9.11 | .00 | .01 | .10 | .05 | .03 | .04 | -.22** | |
| 9.Tenure | 14.84 | 11.14 | .16* | .09 | .03 | .05 | .00 | .00 | -.11 | .50** |

Note. condition (0 = wait-list control group, 1 = experimental group), sex (0 = male, 1 = female).

The control variables tenure and age were measured in years.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Testing the Hypothesized Model

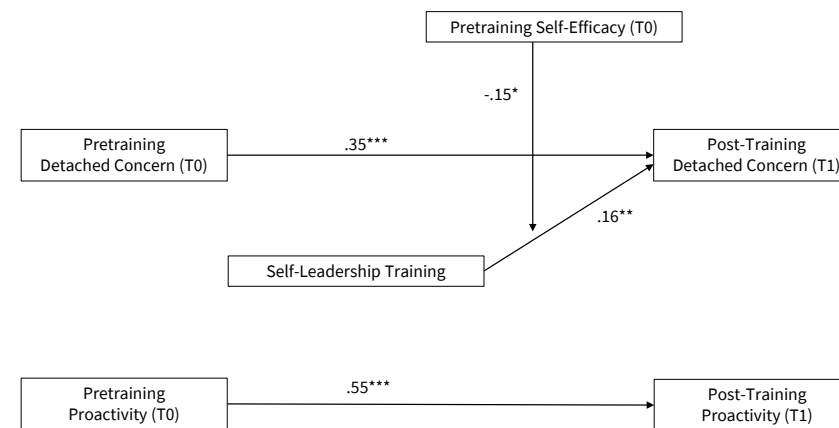
We tested the hypothesized model, with pretraining occupational self-efficacy moderating the positive effect of training participation on detached concern (T1) and proactivity (T1). Tenure, detached concern at T0 and proactivity at T0 were included as control variables. The fit of this model was good ($\chi^2 = 2.05$, $df = 4$, $TLI = 1.00$, $CFI = 1.00$, $SRMR = .01$, $RMSEA = .02$). Our findings indicate that training participation had a positive effect on detached concern at T1 ($\beta = .16$, $p < .01$). This means that Hypothesis 1, referring to the positive effect of self-leadership training on detached concern, is supported. Our findings also indicate that training participation did not have a positive effect on proactivity ($\beta = -.06$, $p = .30$). This means that Hypothesis 2, referring to the positive effect of self-leadership training on proactivity, is not supported. Our findings show that the conditional effect of occupational self-efficacy at T0 on the relation between participation and detached concern at T1 was significant ($\beta = -.15$, $p < .05$), thereby supporting Hypothesis 3a. The conditional effect of occupational self-efficacy at T0 on the relation between participation and proactivity at T1 was not significant ($\beta = -.08$, $p = .15$), thereby not providing support for Hypothesis 3b. Tenure was not related to detached concern at T1 ($\beta = .00$, $p = .95$) or proactivity at T1 ($\beta = -.02$, $p = .76$). Figure 4.2 shows the results of the analyses. For simplicity, only significant relations are included.

To further investigate the interaction between participation in self-leadership training and pretraining occupational self-efficacy, we plotted it using the procedure of Dawson (2014). Figure 4.3 provides an overview of the interaction effect of occupational self-efficacy at T0 and training participation on detached concern at T1. A simple slope analysis (Aiken & West, 1991) revealed that the relation between the training and detached concern at T1 was significant only for the participants with low (1 SD below the mean; $b = .33$, $t(217) = 3.62$, $p < .01$) to average levels of occupational self-efficacy at T0 ($b = .17$, $t(217) = 2.62$, $p < .01$). For the participants with high levels of occupational self-efficacy at T0 (1 SD above the mean), there was no significant relation between participation and detached concern at T1 ($b = .01$, $t(217) = .12$, $p = .90$). Applying the Johnson–Neyman technique (Bauer & Curran, 2005) revealed that the effect of the training on detached concern was significant only for participants who scored lower than 4.03 on occupational self-efficacy T0 ($b = .13$, $t(217) = 1.97$, $p = .05$). This (i.e., scoring lower than 4.03 on occupational self-efficacy T0) included 71.75% of the

participants. As occupational self-efficacy at T0 decreased, the effect of participation on detached concern at T1 became stronger, with the strongest effect at the lowest level of occupational self-efficacy at T0, $b = .79$, $t(217) = 2.99$, $p < .01$.

Figure 4.2

Results of the Analysis

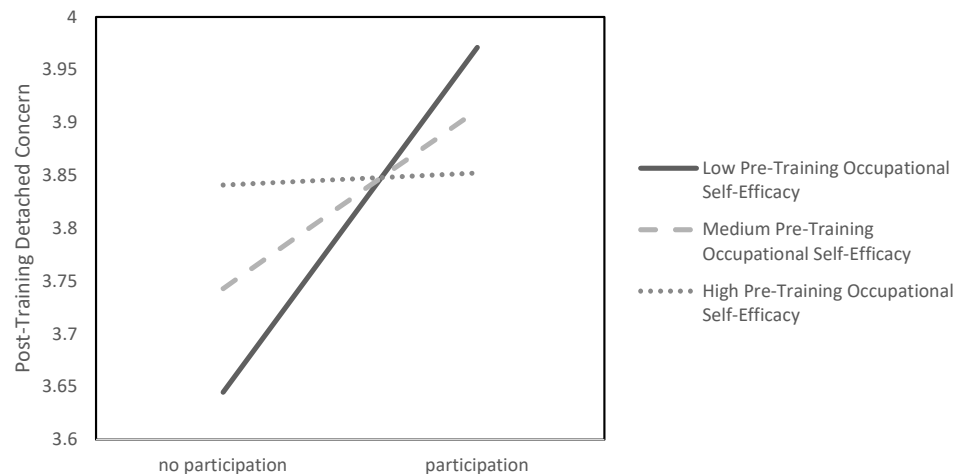


Note. $N = 223$.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

Figure 4.3

Plot of the Interaction Effect of Pretraining Occupational Self-Efficacy on the Relationship between Training Participation and Post-training Detached Concern



4.4 Discussion

This study set out to explore the effects of self-leadership training on the detached concern and proactivity of human service professionals. We tested the effect of two-day self-leadership training on detached concern and proactivity in a field experiment and investigated the moderating effect of pretraining occupational self-efficacy. Our results suggest that participating in the training on self-leadership had a positive effect on detached concern. This is in line with previous studies that suggest that self-leadership skills can help people regulate their emotions in challenging situations (Demerouti et al., 2005; Lampert & Glaser, 2018). This self-regulation is an important element of detached concern (Dollard et al., 2003). Unsworth and Mason (2012) showed that self-leadership training decreases the strain of professionals in several public and private organisations via increases in occupational self-efficacy and positive affect. Additionally, Manz (2015) suggested that self-leadership skills equip professionals in making authentic choices, for instance, regarding detaching themselves from emotionally demanding situations while at the same time maintaining an appropriate amount of concern for the situation and those involved. Making authentic

choices helps develop feelings of self-identity (Underman & Hirshfield, 2016), which in turn enhances self-acceptance and the ability to tolerate ambivalent emotional states (Horowitz, 2012).

Our results add to previous research that investigates self-leadership training as a tool to increase performance in organisations. Whereas previous studies mostly focused on the effect on extra-role performance, such as adaptive behaviour (Marques-Quinteiro et al., 2019) and increased occupational self-efficacy (Lucke & Furtner, 2015), the results of our study show that self-leadership training can also increase in-role performance, since detached concern is a core element of the task performance of human service professionals (Dormann & Zapf, 2004; Hochschild, 1983).

Our results show that the effect of the training on detached concern was moderated by pretraining occupational self-efficacy; the lower the pretraining occupational self-efficacy was, the stronger the effect of the training on detached concern. Although several previous studies found this negative moderating effect of pretraining occupational self-efficacy on the transfer of training (e.g., Quesada-Pallarès & Gegenfurtner, 2015; Saks, 1995; Velada, Caetano, Michel, Lyons, & Kavanagh, 2007), other studies found a positive moderating role of pretraining occupational self-efficacy (Ford et al., 1992). The positive moderating role of pretraining occupational self-efficacy may be explained by goal setting theory (Latham & Locke, 1991). According to this theory, trainees with high pretraining occupational self-efficacy set more challenging goals regarding the transfer of training, which in turn leads to higher performance outcomes than those among trainees with low pretraining occupational self-efficacy. Thus, pretraining occupational self-efficacy can have a positive or a negative moderating effect on transfer. Pan et al. (2011) refer to this phenomenon as the “dual moderating effect of occupational self-efficacy”. Additionally, Al-Eisa et al. (2009) found that the effect of occupational self-efficacy on the transfer of training depends on motivation to learn. High occupational self-efficacy combined with a high motivation to learn (“I feel competent and curious”) will have a positive moderating effect; high occupational self-efficacy combined with a low motivation to learn will have a negative moderating effect (“I feel competent and therefore do not need to learn anything new”). Future research could further investigate a potential three-way interaction between occupational self-efficacy, motivation to learn and transfer.

Unexpectedly, self-leadership training did not have an effect on proactivity, and pretraining occupational self-efficacy did not moderate this effect. In our study, we focused on proactive behaviour within the team context. However, Belschak and Den Hartog (2010) found that individual proactive behaviour within a team context is strongly related to team commitment. This could mean that in a situation with low team commitment, trainees may not show proactive behaviour, even when they are capable of it. Additionally, Hornung and Rousseau (2007) found that a lack of task autonomy may result in low levels of proactive behaviour, even when employees are capable of showing this behaviour, because task autonomy determines the opportunities for personal initiatives. Further research should therefore investigate the moderating roles of team commitment and autonomy in the relation between self-leadership training and proactivity. Finally, in contrast to detached concern, which can be seen as an “adaptive” behaviour (i.e., coping with a current situation without having to change it), proactivity requires that professionals engage in motivated actions (i.e., using self-leadership skills) regarding changing work situations, which may take more time to realize. Therefore, future researchers should consider using a longer time span between the training and the measurement of proactivity, as the effect of the training may take more time to develop.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite its quasi-experimental design, which can be seen as a strength, this study has five major limitations that should be noted. A first limitation concerns the allocation of participants to the experimental (training) group and the control (wait-list) group. In randomized controlled trials, participants are randomly allocated to either an intervention or a control group to ensure that any differences between the two groups can be attributed to the intervention rather than to any individual differences at baseline. For practical reasons, we used a quasi-experimental design in which the participants could self-enrol in either the training group or the wait-list control group by choosing their preferred moment to participate in the training. However, the participants were not aware that the first group was the experimental group and the second group was the control group. Additionally, we found no preintervention differences between the training and wait-list control groups in age, sex or pretraining levels of detached concern and proactivity. Although there was a slight

difference in organisational tenure between the training group and the wait-list control group, we controlled all our analyses for this variable. Therefore, it is unlikely that our results are influenced by individual differences at baseline.

A second limitation concerns the fact that all our measures were slightly adapted versions of the original scale. Based on suggestions from previous transfer research to be specific about the situations in which trainees should use the newly acquired skills (Ford, 1997; Gegenfurtner, 2011), we decided to focus on performance in a work situation that was relevant to all participants (i.e., working in a team) and therefore slightly adapted the items to fit the team context. This may have influenced the validity of the scales. However, confirmative factor analyses and reliability analysis did not show any issues with the validity of the scales.

A third limitation pertains to the fact that all measures were based on self-ratings. However, since detached concern and occupational self-efficacy are psychological states of individuals, which are difficult for others to observe, self-ratings can be assumed to be appropriate measures that are more reflective of reality than supervisor ratings or observations by others (Lampert et al., 2019). Additionally, since the measure of proactivity (Griffin et al., 2007) concerns concrete behaviours rather than an overall judgement of job performance, it is less susceptible to leniency bias (Heidemeier & Moser, 2009). Additionally, previous research shows that self-ratings of proactivity are similar to other ratings (e.g., supervisors, peers) (Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010; Seibert et al., 1999).

A fourth limitation is related to the fact that the self-leadership training in our study was mandatory. Some research findings suggest that compulsory training is not as effective as voluntary training. For example, Curado et al. (2015) showed that participants who were voluntarily enrolled in a training program had a higher motivation to transfer than participants who were mandatorily enrolled. This motivation to transfer has been found to be a positive predictor of actual transfer (e.g., Axtell et al., 1997). However, other studies suggest that compulsory training can be as effective as or even more effective than voluntary training. For example, Tsai and Tai (2003) found that bankers assigned to financial law training had higher training motivation than those who chose to participate on a voluntary basis. Patrick et al. (2012) suggest that when mandatory assignment to training is perceived as a measure to improve poor performance, trainees may react negatively, leading to

reduced training motivation. However, when mandatory training is viewed as a positive job- or career-advancing activity, trainees are likely to perceive training outcomes to be of greater importance to both career and organisational goals, leading to increased training motivation. Mathieu et al. (1993) suggest that the influence of training enrolment, imposed or voluntary, on trainee motivation depends upon the message transmitted by supervisors regarding the role of training. From discussions with the trainers, we know that some training groups were more motivated to participate than others depending on the communication of the supervisor about the relevance of the training. Further research should therefore try to include the perceived relevance of the training.

A final limitation of this study is the lack of a manipulation check or measure of how well the trainees had actually learned the emotional self-leadership skills as presented during the training. Even though it would have been useful to conduct a manipulation check to ascertain whether the training was successful in increasing the skills, we refrained from doing so because such a measure may act as an intervention that initiates new processes that would otherwise not occur (Hauser et al., 2018).

Practical Implications

This study adds to the understanding of the effectiveness of self-leadership training in increasing the performance of human service professionals. Our study showed that such training can improve detached concern but not the proactivity of human service professionals. More specifically, our findings show that self-leadership training can increase the level of detached concern of professionals with average to low scores on pretraining occupational self-efficacy. By showing that self-leadership training is particularly effective for workers with average and low pretraining occupational self-efficacy, this study suggests that training costs may be saved by screening participants on pretraining occupational self-efficacy. Based on the results of our study, we cannot recommend practitioners who would like to increase the proactivity of their participants in a team context to use the self-leadership training programme used in this study. Although we cannot support it with the results of our own study, it is probably wise to first investigate the opportunities for proactivity in the workplace and the commitment to the team. These factors may influence the motivation to transfer the training to the team context and need to be dealt with before delivering self-leadership training.

Chapter 5.

Discussion

5.1 Introduction

Because the soft skills of employees are increasingly important for organisations to be successful, organisations spend a large amount of money on soft skills training to enable their employees to develop such skills. However, for training to be effective, skills from the training should be effectively used during work. Specifically, for soft skills training, such training-to-work transfer can be difficult to realise due to unclarity about what successful transfer means, how specific and when it should be measured, and lack of information on how barriers to success are related to different transfer outcomes. In an attempt to address such issues, this dissertation aimed to provide clarity on the post-training transfer of soft skills training in such a way that results from transfer research can be used by companies to ensure successful transfer to work of such trainings. To that end, a stepwise approach of post-training transfer, specific measures of transfer outcomes and stage-related success conditions were suggested and tested. In the following, the main findings for each of the research questions are discussed (Section 5.2). Next, theoretical implications and contributions are presented (Section 5.3), followed by implications for practice (Section 5.4), the limitations of this dissertation (Section 5.5), suggestions for further research (Section 5.6) and conclusions (Section 5.7). Table 5.2 at the end of this chapter presents an overview.

5.2 Main Findings

The general research question that guides the dissertation research was: *How can the successful work transfer of soft skills training be ensured?* More specifically, this dissertation wishes to answer four subquestions: (1) What is a successful transfer of soft skills? (2) What is the effect of adding context to the transfer outcomes? (3) When should the transfer of soft skills be measured? and (4) How are the barriers to success related to different transfer outcomes? In this section, the results of the research questions are presented. At the end of this section, the answers to the general research questions are presented.

RQ 1. What is a successful transfer of soft skills?

Different perceptions of successful transfer lead to unclarity about when a transfer is successful. Chapters 1 and 2 revealed that empirical studies usually mix two main criteria to measure the transfer of training: the use of the new skills (gained from the training) and

workplace performance (caused by the effective use of the newly learned skill). Successful transfer may refer to either successful use of skills from the training or improved performance after training. In this dissertation, the transfer of training refers to the use of skills from training during work and to the consequences of the effective use, that is, of (changed) work behaviours leading to improved individual and/or organisational performance. Thus, our focus is on both the use of skills and the resulting change in performance. Consequently, we study maintenance transfer (i.e., beyond the initial transfer), as we expect that transferring skills from training to work performance requires applying and maintaining newly learned skills on the job over time.

Additionally, the results from the studies presented in Chapters 2 and 3 reveal that motivation to transfer is important to start using skills and that using skills is important for long-term performance improvement as a result of training. Thus, the post-training transfer process can be seen as a stepwise, staged process. First, trainees have to be motivated to use new skills (transfer stage 1), and then they may start using and practising the skills (transfer stage 2), which consequently may turn into sustainable new behaviour that facilitates performance (transfer stage 3). In the empirical study presented in Chapter 2, we could not confirm the relationship between the use of skills and performance for all our performance measures. However, we found evidence that the use of skills mediated the relation between motivation to transfer and keeping detached concern, suggesting the stepwise process of post-training transfer.

Furthermore, the results of the empirical studies presented in Chapters 3 and 4 show that using multiple outcome measures leads to a more nuanced picture of the transfer process. Some expected positive outcomes of the training could be confirmed, while others could not (yet). Few previous studies include multiple specific measures of transfer outcomes. For example, while measuring the performance results after training in ethical skills among office professionals, Frisque and Kolb (2008) used an outcome measure that included questions about two dimensions of ethical behaviour (identifying and handling ethical dilemmas) but combined them in one outcomes measure (instead of measuring if training was related to one of the dimensions). Similarly, in a study on the effect of employee attitudes and beliefs about training on transfer, Facticeau et al. (1995) used questions about productivity, absenteeism, turnover and morale but combined all items into one scale to measure perceived training transfer.

Regarding organisational outcomes of transfer (i.e., operational and financial outcomes), the study in Chapter 2 suggests that training leads to organisational-level outcomes to the extent that it results in the skills, behaviours, and performance necessary to achieve desired organisational outcomes. However, the number of confounding factors in the relation between soft skills training and organisational performance (e.g., global, national or local economic or sectoral developments and the specific situation of the company within these developments) will make it difficult or even impossible to establish a direct relationship between soft skills training and organisational-level outcomes. HRM models, such as Van Veldhoven's bath tub model (Van Veldhoven, 2012) and Paauwe and Farndale's contextual SHRM framework (Paauwe & Farndale, 2017), support this indirect relation between training and increased organisational performance.

In sum, a transfer of training is successful if skills from the training are effectively used in such a way that they lead to improved performance. Additionally, motivation to transfer is important to start using skills. Consequently, I argue that the post-training transfer process is a stepwise process that includes three different kinds of consecutive outcomes of transfer: an intentional outcome (motivation to transfer), an initial use outcome (try new skills during work) and an effective use outcome (individual performance). Using this stepwise approach to study transfer can help to see how successful training-to-work transfer unfolds (i.e., each step should be successful for a successful transfer). The more performance measures that are included, the more nuanced information on the transfer process will become available.

RQ2. What is the effect of adding context to the transfer outcomes?

There is a lack of agreement on how specific transfer should be measured, and consequently, transfer measures differ from very general non-context-specific measures (e.g., I have used the skills from the training during work) to very context-specific measures (e.g., the skills from the training increased my self-efficacy when working in a team). Again, this may lead to different perceptions about when transfer is successful because excluding the context (i.e., have you used the skills anywhere?) may more easily lead to successful transfer than a context-specific measure (i.e., have you used the skills in a specific situation?). Specifically, for soft skills, this may be important because soft skills are considered to

be more “open” than hard skills (i.e., there is more choice as to what and how to apply trained principles and concepts to the job; Blume et al., 2010). Consequently, there may be more diverse, or even unforeseen, invalid or unacceptable (negative transfer; Zubairy et al., 2015) ways to apply the trained skills during work.

The results of the studies presented in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 reveal that the more specific transfer outcomes are measured, the more detailed information unfolds about how and when transfer-to-work of soft skills training is successful. Furthermore, Chapters 3 and 4 reveal that context matters in studying transfer results. The more context-specific the outcome measure, the more detailed information unfolds on situations where transfer is successful. Leaving out the context where transfer should occur may lead to an overly optimistic view on transfer and a missed opportunity to improve transfer. To illustrate, if the use of trained skills is measured in general, the results only show whether trainees have used the skills from the training at any moment during their work. However, this may not be where the effective use of skills is crucial, most beneficial or needs improvement. Specifically, Chapter 3 shows that the performance increase after soft skills training is different for an individual compared to a team situation. These findings suggest that within a team, it may be more difficult to try out new behaviours compared to an individual situation due to the influence of, for example, team commitment (Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010). Additionally, Chapter 3 suggests that proactive behaviour may take more time to change in a team context. Consequently, I argue that for soft skill training, it is important not only to be specific about what kind of performance is expected but also in what context improved performance as a result of the training should occur, since leaving out such context may lead to non-realistic or even wrong ideas about the success of transfer.

RQ3. When should the transfer of soft skills be measured?

Referring to when transfer outcomes should be measured, it is suggested that transfer (i.e., use of new skills and increased performance as a result of such use of skills) should be measured at least three months post-training to allow sufficient time after the training to apply what was learned while at the same time being short enough to identify the training as the main source of behavioural change (Cheng & Ho, 2001). However, the literature review in Chapter 2 revealed that more than 50% of the studies take a shorter

time lapse to measure transfer outcomes. Such short-term measures will show initial transfer, referring to trainees’ attempts to apply the learning in the work environment (Laker, 1990). Eventually, this may lead to a maintenance stage (long-term transfer) when the trainee makes a conscious choice to use the skills whenever their use is appropriate. Transfer maintenance refers to “the application of the learning to the job over a period of time, so that job performance is permanently enhanced” (Foxon, 1993, p. 134). Initial transfer is suggested to be a predictor of long-term transfer (Axtell et al., 1997; Foxon, 1993), but antecedents may differ from antecedents of long-term transfer. For example, the content relevance of a training is found to be important for initial transfer but not for long-term transfer (Axtell et al., 1997), and the work environment is found to be more important for long-term transfer than for initial transfer (Axtell et al., 1997). Additionally, initial attempts to use the skills from the training may be discontinued for both personal (e.g., lack of self-confidence) or organisational (e.g., lack of autonomy) reasons (Foxon, 1993).

Thus, a short-term measure of transfer outcomes may not fully take into account barriers to sustainable transfer results and show transfer results that are too optimistic. Consequently, I argue that to measure performance increases after soft skills training, trainees should at least be allowed to use new skills for three months after training. Chapter 4 suggests that some behaviours (e.g., proactive behaviour) may need more time to practice before they occur. In line with Gegenfurtner (2013), I therefore suggest including several longitudinal measures per study to improve the assessment of transfer and to examine how transfer outcomes develop over time.

Additionally, based on Foxon (1993), I suggest including a measure on motivation to transfer shortly after the training to check the end-of-course motivation of the trainee to apply any aspects of the learning in the work. If such end-of-course motivation is lacking, then transfer will be limited (Quesada-Pallarès & Gegenfurtner, 2015). An additional longer-term measure of motivation to transfer can be added to measure how motivation to transfer develops over time. Quesada-Pallarès and Gegenfurtner refer to this “long-term motivation to transfer” as transfer commitment and suggest that it may be affected by initial transfer attempts (i.e., initial motivation to transfer leads to initial use; the initial use affects transfer commitment).

RQ4. How are the barriers to success related to different transfer outcomes?

Following arguments and results as presented above, transfer outcomes of soft skills training include motivation to transfer, use of the soft skills during work and the change of performance as a result of using the soft skills. It is important not only to be specific about what kind of performance is expected but also in what context improved performance as a result of the training should occur, since leaving out such context may lead to non-realistic or even wrong ideas about the success of transfer. Based on the results of the studies presented in Chapters 2, 3 and 4, I argue that barriers to successful transfer may be (1) transfer stage related, (2) work context related, or (3) trainee related (see Figure 5.1).

Referring to transfer stage-related barriers, the first lack of motivation to transfer may be a barrier to using skills during work (Chapters 2 and 3). If there is no motivation or intention to use the skills, the transfer process will not start. The trainee is not willing or intending to use the new skills. Second, lack of use of the skills from the training during work may be a barrier for sustainable new behaviour. Third, trainees need to use new skills over time, and consequently, lack of time to practice and incorporate skills during work may be a barrier for successful transfer. Additionally, Chapter 4 suggests that some new behaviours (in our case, proactive behaviour) may need more time to develop and establish, and even a measure three months post-training may not yet show increased performance.

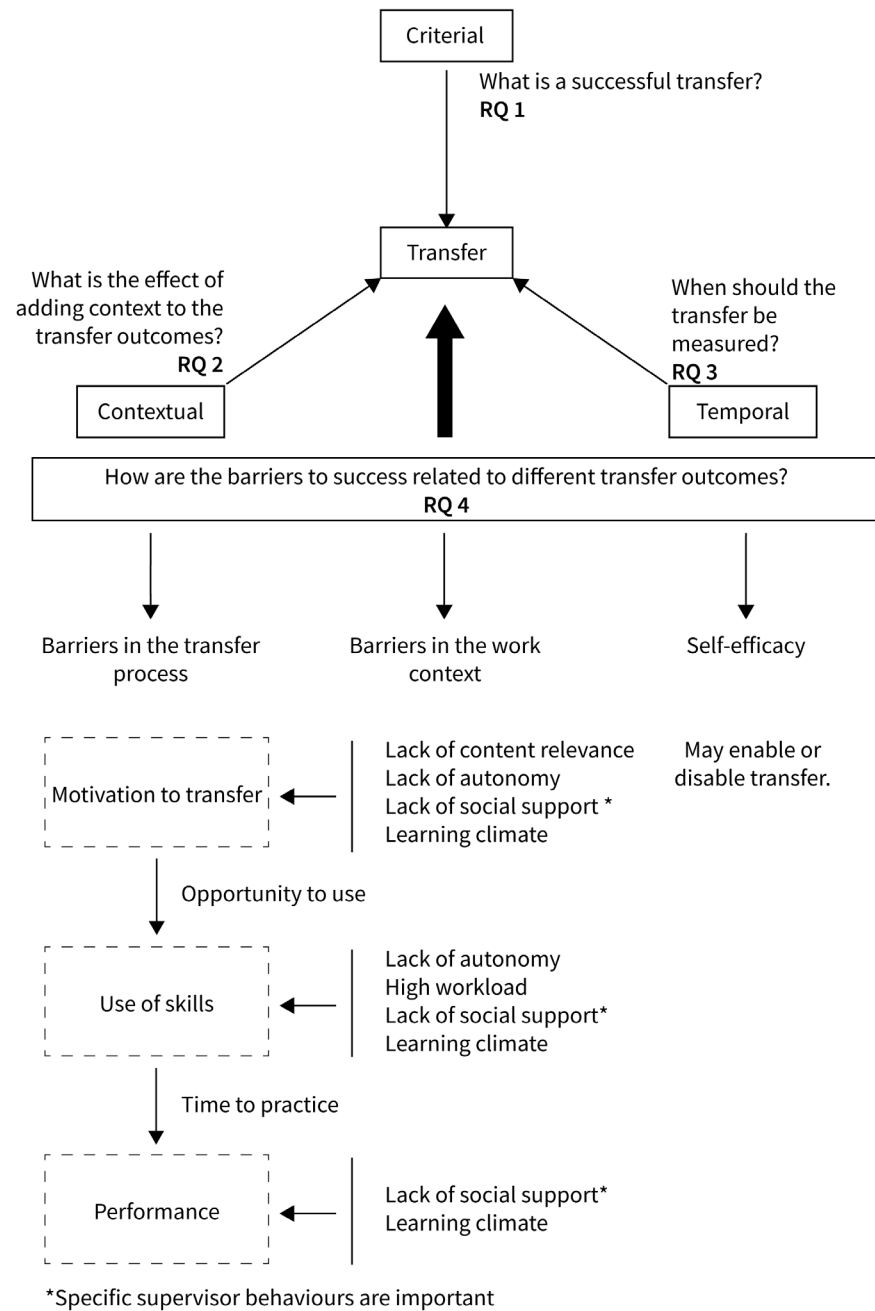
Referring to barriers in the work context, Chapter 2 showed that limited motivation to transfer, use of skills and performance may be caused by the influence of social support (peers, subordinates and supervisors) as well as by the type learning culture of the organisation (facilitating or appreciating learning culture). Additionally, a lack of motivation to transfer after soft skills training may occur due to a lack of perceived content relevance of the training or a lack of perceived autonomy, and a lack of use may be caused by a lack of autonomy or a workload that is too high. A main actor during post-training transfer is the supervisor because the supervisor may be in the position to lower barriers of transfer, such as providing the proper context to practice new skills, influencing workload and autonomy (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) and ensuring a learning-supportive work climate (Nikolova et al., 2014). Additionally, employees view the supervisor as a personal extension of the organisation (Eisenberger et al., 1986). As Chapters 2 and 3 show, specific behaviours of the supervisor are important per transfer stage. For example, encouragement by the supervisor

and discussing application are important during the first transfer stage (motivation to transfer), and informal reinforcement is important during all three transfer stages (Chapter 2). The results from the empirical study in Chapter 3 suggest that emotional supervisor support and appraisal supervisor support influence performance (i.e., they seem to influence how trainees were dealing with a heavy workload after the training).

Referring to trainees, several studies have mentioned the importance of high trainee self-efficacy for transfer. Consequently, based on goal setting theory (Latham & Locke, 1991), high pretraining self-efficacy is often seen as an enabler of transfer, arguing that trainees with higher pretraining self-efficacy will set higher transfer goals, which will in turn lead to higher performance outcomes compared to trainees with low pretraining self-efficacy (Latham & Locke, 1991). However, the empirical study in Chapter 4 reveals that trainees' pretraining occupational self-efficacy moderates the positive effect of self-leadership training on detached concern in such a way that this effect is stronger for participants with low initial levels of pretraining occupational self-efficacy than for those with high initial levels of pretraining occupational self-efficacy. This positive moderating effect of low pretraining occupational self-efficacy can be explained by behavioural plasticity theory (Brockner, 1988). According to behavioural plasticity theory, people who are low in self-efficacy are more susceptible to the external influence of training than individuals with higher levels of self-efficacy because they are more uncertain about the appropriateness of their own behaviour. Thus, self-efficacy can both enable and disable transfer. Figure 5.1 summarises the three categories of barriers to the successful transfer of soft skills.

Figure 5.1

Barriers to Success Related to Different Transfer Outcomes



The integration of the answers to the four subquestions leads to an answer to the general research question for this dissertation:

How can the successful work transfer of soft skills training be ensured?

Successful transfer refers to the use of skills from training during work and to the consequences of the effective use, that is, of (changed) work behaviours leading to improved individual performance. Transfer results after soft skills training unfold in a stepwise, staged process that starts with being motivated to transfer, followed by using new skills. This use of skills may consequently turn into improved performance. During the transfer process, trainees incorporate the new behaviour step-by-step in their work. This dissertation found that since the open character of soft skills may lead to many different types of outcomes in many different contexts (even unwanted transfer outcomes, for example because the skills are used incorrectly, leading to decrease in performance) being specific to the type of performance, the context and timeframe in which this performance should occur and measure it accordingly is a first step in establishing insights on successful transfer. In each transfer step, barriers to transfer may exist. Therefore, a second step to ensure successful transfer is disabling or minimising such barriers to success. This dissertation found that barriers can be in the transfer process (i.e., lack of motivation, lack of (opportunity to) use or lack of enough time to practice), in the work context (job relevance, workload, autonomy, social support, learning climate) or related to the trainees (i.e., their self-efficacy may both hinder or enable transfer). The role of the supervisor is crucial during transfer. Employees view the supervisor as a personal extension of the organisation, and it is unrealistic to expect transfer if a supervisor is not acknowledging and supporting the steps in the post-training transfer process.

5.3 Theoretical Implications and Contributions

This dissertation makes several valuable contributions to the literature on the transfer of training. The results highlight the relevance of integrating insights from the transfer literature, HR models and literature on workplace learning in trying to explain and improve training-to-work transfer of soft skills training. Specifically, this dissertation adds to the knowledge on (1) the role of motivation to transfer in studying the transfer process, (2) combining a performance and a learning approach to transfer, (3) the importance of the work context and (4) enablers and disablers of soft skills training transfer to work. The following subsections briefly elaborate on each of these contributions.

The Role of Motivation to Transfer in Studying the Transfer Process

This dissertation is original since the literature review (Chapter 2) reveals that no previous studies on the transfer-to-work of soft skills training included all three stages (a motivational, a behavioural and a performance stage) of the post-training transfer process. The review study in Chapter 2 shows that it is relevant to distinguish between the three transfer stages because of their different antecedents. Additionally, the empirical study in Chapter 3 shows that it is relevant to distinguish between the stages because the results per stage may depend on the performance context. This finding suggests that the Ability Motivation Opportunity framework (Appelbaum et al., 2000) is relevant to understanding the post-training transfer process. In a similar vein, Van Veldhoven's bath tub model (Van Veldhoven, 2012) and Paauwe and Farndale's contextual SHRM framework (Paauwe & Farndale, 2017) help to explain the indirect relation between training and increased organisational performance. Hence, an important suggestion for future research on the transfer process is to study the full process (i.e., the intention to use the skills from the training, the use of the skills in the workplace and the consequences of the effective use of the skills) and consider the relation between training and organisation performance as an indirect relation mediated by individual performance and influenced by confounding factors, such as social, economic or organisation developments.

Combining a Performance and a Learning Approach to Transfer

This dissertation is original because it combines the performance-based view on transfer from the transfer literature (e.g., Kazbour et al., 2013) with a learning-based view from the literature on workplace learning (e.g., Billett, 2020; Eraut, 2004; Tynjälä, 2008). Applying a learning-based view, post-training transfer is a way of informal or incidental learning at the workplace following formal learning (during the training). Informal learning refers to learning outside a formal training setting (off-work) but can be planned (e.g., supervision or coaching session; Marsick & Watkins, 2015). Incidental learning refers to unplanned learning that takes place as a side effect of other activities (e.g., work; Marsick & Watkins, 2015). A main difference between formal learning in training and informal and incidental learning during work is that the focus during formal learning (training) is mainly on learning, whereas the focus during informal and incidental learning during work is mainly on performance. Combining a performance and a learning approach to transfer implies that a measure at one point in time will only reflect transfer results at that moment in time. Such transfer outcomes may be too optimistic (initial use of skills may stop because of personal or organisational barriers) or not fully developed (more time needed to practice and embed skills in daily work). Consequently, this emphasizes the need for longitudinal studies to see how behaviour and performance (as a result of soft skills training) change over time. In both empirical studies, we used a time lapse of three months to measure transfer outcomes. Although three months is widely seen as a minimum time transfer to occur, smaller time lapses are often used for practical reasons (i.e., response rates are often low for a three-month post-training measure). Hence, an important suggestion for consumers based on future research on the transfer process is to include the temporal dimension and consequently measure the development of transfer over time. From a practical point of view, combining a performance and a learning approach to transfer and use previous research about how people learn at work (e.g., Billett, 2020; Eraut, 2004; Tynjälä, 2008) may help organisations (and the supervisor as the main representative of the organisation) to increase opportunities to use skills from the training during work and thus stimulate transfer.

Importance of the Work Context

This dissertation is original since it focuses on the transfer of specific soft skills training in specific work situations. Although the importance of soft skills for organisations is widely recognised (Cimatti, 2016; Singh Dubey et al., 2021), very limited studies on transfer investigate specific training (i.e., for practical reasons, broad groups of trainings are often included in a study), and even fewer studies focus on specific soft skills training (Botke et al., 2018). Additionally, this dissertation shows that not including the work context in studying transfer may lead to non-realistic or even incorrect ideas about the success of the transfer-to-work of soft skills training. Including the work context stresses the need to use field studies investigate specific training (i.e., for practical reasons, broad groups of trainings are often included in a study), and even fewer studies focus on specific soft skills training (Botke et al., 2018). Additionally, this dissertation shows that not including the work context in studying transfer may lead to non-realistic or even incorrect ideas about the success of the transfer-to-work of soft skills training. Including the work context stresses the need to use field studies for transfer research because field studies that take place in the natural environment of the subject of the study rather than in a laboratory environment and may involve observations, experiments, and interactions with participants (Tosun-Misirli et al., 2014). For practical reasons, many transfer studies stick to cross-sectional research and/or use student samples. However, cross-sectional research will not show any causal relation between the training and transfer outcomes and ignores the important temporal dimension of transfer. Additionally, student samples can often not be generalised to working populations, given the complexity of the situations in which working professionals show transfer outcomes (James & Sonner, 2001; Scandura & Williams, 2000). Hence, an important suggestion for consumer-based future research on the transfer is to study the transfer process in specific work settings with the use of field studies. This may take extra effort (e.g., more difficult to gather data) and time (e.g., longer period of study) but will provide more realistic information on the transfer process and results. From a practical point of view, organisations should realise that investing time and effort in transfer pays off in the sense that they will obtain more practical details about when and how transfer works (instead of a “good feeling” based on too optimistic or misleading transfer measures).

Enablers and Disablers of Transfer-to-Work of Soft Skills Training

This dissertation is original because it addresses enablers and disablers of transfer per transfer stage. Chapter 2 shows that the impact of work factors (i.e., content validity, autonomy, workload, social support and learning climate) are different per transfer stage (i.e., different for motivation to transfer, use of skills and performance, see Figure 5.1). Additionally, this research is original since it addresses the role of specific behaviours of the supervisor during the transfer process (Chapters 2 and 3). The role of specific support behaviours during work (Jacobson, 2009; Thoits, 1985), as well as the temporal dimension of such support behaviour (i.e., the timing of the support; Jacobson, 2009), have been confirmed in previous research. It is unrealistic to expect transfer if a supervisor is not acknowledging and supporting the steps in the post-training transfer process (i.e., recognising and supporting motivation to transfer, use of skills and performance results). Additionally, effective support “may depend upon the degree of “fit” between reassurances needed and those offered” (Thoits, 1985, p. 62). Furthermore, the timing of supervisor support behaviour is important; the same support behaviour may be seen as helpful by the trainee if provided at the right time and as unhelpful if provided at the wrong time (Jacobson, 2009).

Finally, this research is original since it addresses the “dual moderating effect of self-efficacy” (Pan et al., 2011), meaning high self-efficacy can both be an enabler and a disabler of transfer. Research by Al-Eisa et al. (2009) suggests that the effect of self-efficacy on transfer may be moderated by motivation to learn. Future research could further investigate a potential three-way interaction between self-efficacy, motivation to learn and transfer.

5.4 Practical Implications

This dissertation has several important implications for practice. First, I argue that obtaining a realistic view on transfer is a prerequisite for assuring successful transfer. Thus, a first set of suggestions refers to obtaining such a realistic picture of the transfer process. Second, there are suggestions for organisations regarding how to improve transfer by removing barriers. Table 5.1 provides an overview of practical implications.

Table 5.1

Practical Implications of this Research

How to ensure successful transfer-to-work of soft skills training in two steps

| | |
|---------------|---|
| <i>Step 1</i> | <p><i>Obtain a realistic picture of the transfer process and outcomes</i></p> <p>1.1 What is a successful transfer?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are there multiple positive outcomes? - Any negative (unwanted) outcomes? - Add as many details as needed on criteria and context <p>1.2 Measure transfer outcomes accordingly</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Three months or more post-training - Initial transfer differs from maintenance transfer - Multiple measures over time may show how transfer develops over time - The study design (cross-sectional or multi-wave; experimental) influences the interpretation of the results - Include a measure on motivation to transfer to get a picture of the full process. |
| <i>Step 2</i> | <p><i>Optimise transfer by removing barriers</i></p> <p>2.1 Barriers in the transfer process</p> <p>2.2 Barriers in the work situation or the trainee</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - content relevance, workload, autonomy, social support or learning culture may influence transfer - the (lack of) behaviour of the supervisor may influence transfer - too low and too high self-efficacy of the trainee may hinder transfer <p>2.3 Trainees may be immunised for barriers by using transfer enhancing interventions like goal setting and relapse prevention</p> |

Step 1. Obtain a realistic picture of the transfer process and outcomes

Referring to the transfer process, a first suggestion to ensure successful transfer is to be specific about what successful transfer is. What kind of performance is expected as a result of soft-skills training? Due to the open character of soft skills, multiple transfer outcomes may occur. Consequently, the expected transfer outcomes may be multidimensional

(multiple positive outcomes), and multiple outcomes may need to be included in measuring transfer. The more specific the transfer measure, the more realistic the view on the transfer process and the more input an organisation will get on how to optimise transfer (i.e., vague or general measures may show too optimistic transfer results, because skills are not used in the (most) proper way).

A second suggestion to ensure successful transfer is to use a measure that fits the purpose and practical situation of the training evaluation. Organisations should be aware that transfer takes time. Participants need to try out and practice the skills before sustainable new behaviour will occur. For the use of skills or performance measures, a three-month time lap between training and measurement is suggested. Measuring these aspects within less than three months will show initial transfer attempts but is unlikely to show maintenance transfer. Multiple longitudinal measures may show how transfer outcomes develop over time and will contribute to more details on the maintenance of transfer. Adding a measure on how motivated trainees are to use skills from the training during work directly (max. one week) after training shows not only the full transfer process (i.e., intention to use, actual use and effect of use) but also provides the opportunity to intervene shortly after the training (e.g., by using transfer-enhancing interventions) if motivation to transfer is low.

Step 2. Optimise transfer by removing barriers

This dissertation leads to several suggestions regarding how to improve transfer outcomes. First, organisations should be aware that transfer is a stepwise process. Therefore, if organisations want to ensure successful transfer of soft skills training to the work, they should check if there is motivation to transfer and (opportunity to) use before addressing performance outcomes. Second, organisations should be aware that transfer stages are influenced by work factors. Work factors can be related to the work itself (content relevance, autonomy, workload), the social support of the trainee and the learning culture of the organisation and may differ per transfer stage. Regarding the influence of the social context, the studies in Chapters 2 and 3 suggest that the supervisor plays an important role during transfer and that different supervisor behaviours are important per stage. Thus, if transfer measures (step 1) show that transfer stays behind in one of the stages (i.e., lack of motivation, lack of use, lack of performance), they can check if the previously described work

factors are disabling transfer and mitigate such barriers by improving the work environment. Additionally, raising awareness of the effect of specific supervisor support behaviours on transfer (e.g., during leadership programmes) may improve transfer. Furthermore, organisations should be aware that self-efficacy may both enable or disable transfer. Checking the self-efficacy of trainees before the training may help to provide training for those trainees that benefit the most from learning new skills. Since too high self-efficacy may be a barrier for transfer (overestimation of performance), checking if employees have a realistic idea about their pretraining level of performance may also benefit transfer. Third, to immunise trainees for the effect of barriers, organisations may want to introduce transfer-enhancing interventions, such as goal setting (i.e., set goals with regard to the implementation of the new skills) or relapse prevention (i.e., ask the trainee to consider transfer barriers and help them to develop a plan for overcoming such barriers).

5.5 Limitations

This dissertation has several strengths and limitations. The strengths of this dissertation are the specific focus on the transfer of soft skills, the integration of transfer literature, HR models and insight on workplace learning to explain the post-training transfer process and outcomes as well as the inclusion of two multi-wave field studies that measure transfer in a specific (corporate) work context. Despite these strengths, several limitations should be noted. A first limitation is tied to the empirical and geographical scope of this dissertation. The focus of the field studies was on professionals working for the Dutch police force. This sectoral homogeneity allows us to account for spurious relationships that typically emerge in studies with broader samples (Van der Hoek et al., 2018). Nevertheless, we acknowledge that our findings may not be generalisable to other organisations or other countries. Although some of our findings concerning the transfer of soft skills training are in line with those observed in other contexts (Demerouti et al., 2005; Lampert & Glaser, 2018; Unsworth & Mason, 2012), Dulin and Dulin (2020) found that the specific culture within the US police influences the transfer of training. More specifically, they found that the subculture dimensions “innovation” (i.e., promotion of change, excitement and machismo within the work unit) and “bureaucratic” (i.e., emphasis placed by the work unit on hierarchical lines of authority) were strongly related to motivation to learn and apply new skills from training.

A second limitation is that two of the three studies presented in this dissertation are based on survey data, and as a consequence, common method bias may have occurred (Podsakoff et al., 2003). However, self-reported data also have advantages and are well suited to study employees’ perceptions, behavioural intentions or perceived job changes (Spector, 1994), especially when other data sources are absent. Moreover, self-reported data minimise disturbances in the field while giving a good indication of the associations between the different variables under study, especially in longitudinal studies (Spector, 1994). This is important, given the difficulty of obtaining information and cooperation from respondents in companies for multi-wave research. Additionally, we took appropriate precautions in the survey design and during data analysis to mitigate some concerns regarding common method bias (i.e., by promising anonymity, separating predictors and outcomes in the questionnaire). However, in their meta-analysis on transfer predictors, Blume and colleagues (2010) found that reported relationships between predictors of transfer and transfer outcomes were significantly affected by the source of transfer measurement (i.e., stronger relationships were found in the case of self versus other reports). Therefore, future research could consider using a combination of different data sources (e.g., supervisor ratings, observational data, key performance indicators) or combining qualitative and quantitative data to further explore the relations between predictors and outcomes on transfer.

A third limitation is that we did not include the (quality of the) delivery of the training in our study. From previous studies, we know that not only the work environment and trainee characteristics influence transfer but also the training design and delivery (see, for example, Burke & Hutchins, 2007). In the training under study, all trainers were trained to provide the training and had basic competences (i.e., content knowledge and basic teaching skills) for providing the training. The training was well designed (i.e., objectives were explained, content included examples and exercises, learning aids were provided, trainees could practice and received feedback from trainer; Salas et al., 2012). However, the training was provided by many trainers, which may have influenced transfer outcomes via additional individual content knowledge or individual delivery styles (Harris et al., 2014).

5.6 Future Research

Overall, this dissertation contributes to the research on the transfer of soft skills training in a corporate setting by providing clarity on the post-training transfer process as well as on barriers to the training-to-work transfer of soft skills training. Some important suggestions for future transfer research that have already been addressed in Section 5.3 include the use of all transfer stages when studying transfer, the use of specific context-related longitudinal outcome measures when studying transfer and the need to further explore the dual moderating role of self-efficacy. Despite these important contributions, it is clear that we still have work ahead of us, since this dissertation was unable to cover the full transfer process. Based on the findings of the studies presented in this dissertation, I will make five specific suggestions for future research:

1. Further examine specific types of motivation that are important for transfer

This dissertation identified the importance of motivation for transfer, as it seems to be relevant for the success of the transfer process. However, in this dissertation, motivation for transfer was captured at a general level (i.e., “the individuals’ desire to transfer the acquired knowledge during the training towards their working practice”, e.g., Burke & Hutchins, 2008), whereas some research suggests that motivation to transfer is multidimensional and that specific types of motivation are important for transfer. For example, based on self-determination theory, expectancy theory, and the theory of planned behaviour, Gegenfurtner (2013) conceptualises motivation to transfer in three dimensions: autonomous motivation to transfer, controlled motivation to transfer, and intention to transfer and finds that intention to transfer mediates the relation between autonomous motivation to transfer and transfer behaviours. Similarly, De Jong et al. (2020) studied the transfer of judicial training and found that a personal sense of autonomy and feasibility appraisal (as elements of a multidimensional model of motivation) positively predicted positive cognitive valence, which in turn predicted intention to transfer. Additionally, Seiberling and Kauffeld (2017) suggest that not only motivation to transfer but also volition to transfer (i.e., the capability of maintaining attention and effort towards a set goal) plays a role during transfer. They suggest that motivation and volition support the realization of training goals as two diverse systems. “The role

of the motivational system is to develop intentions to act, whereas volition to transfer system provides a postdecisional, self-regulatory process that energizes the maintenance and enactment of intended actions” (Seiberling & Kauffeld, 2017, p. 811). Furthermore, several studies (Lee et al., 2014; Simosi, 2012; Volet, 2013) confirmed the importance of motivation to learn for transfer and suggested that motivation to learn is an important mediator in the transfer process. However, there are different ideas regarding how and when this mediation occurs (i.e., between antecedents of transfer and transfer outcomes or between transfer stages). Thus, future research could further elaborate on the role of motivation during the transfer of soft skills.

2. Further examine the antecedents that shape transfer in a team context

Referring to the importance of the work context (i.e., the situation in which transfer should occur), the current dissertation research suggests that transfer may be more difficult in a team situation than in an individual situation. Due to team factors, trainees may not show new behaviour, even when they are capable of it. Such team factors may include team climate (Smith-Jentsch et al., 2001), team commitment (Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010) or (the perception of) autonomy within a team (Hornung & Rousseau, 2007). However, previous research suggests that the team context may also benefit transfer. For example, Van Woerkom and Van Engen (2009) suggest that relationship conflicts within a team may hinder learning, whereas task conflicts may stimulate learning. Additionally, Parboteeah et al. (2015) found that team creativity and team external cooperation were positively related to individual learning in a team. Thus, the team context may enable or disable learning (i.e., by providing a safe space for trying out new behaviour). While some research has been performed on team transfer, most of these studies focused on team training (e.g., Ford et al., 2018; Massenberg et al., 2015) and team behaviour (e.g., Ford et al., 2018), leaving unstudied how the team context influences individual transfer behaviour a team situation. Thus, a suggestion for further research is to delve into the antecedents that shape transfer in a team, such as team climate, team autonomy, and team creativity.

3. Further elaboration on the impact of the competences of the trainer on the transfer of soft skills

Because the studies in this dissertation purposively focused on post-training transfer, another potential area that future research can explore is what happened during the training. Previous research mentioned the importance of trainers for the transfer of training. Such research has focused on the subject knowledge of trainers (Russ-Eft et al., 2010), the quality of teaching skills (Russ-Eft et al., 2010), how trainers develop transfer literacy (Hutchins et al., 2010), trainer expressiveness and lecture organisation (Towler & Dipboye, 2001), or trainers' expectations for transfer (Freitas & Silva, 2017; Henry et al., 2020). However, how such antecedents might be related to steps in the post-training transfer process (i.e., motivation to transfer, use of skills and increased performance) remains unclear. Thus, further research could elaborate on this relationship between competences of the trainer and transfer stages. Additionally, a recent study by Wisshak and Hochholdingner (2020) suggests that soft skills trainings require a higher level of learner activation and consequently require greater management of group activities and dynamics compared to hard skills. Thus, further research could additionally explore how trainer-related antecedents may be different for the transfer of soft skills than for the transfer of hard skills.

4. Stimulate the development of qualitative and mixed designs to study the transfer of soft skills

Along methodological lines, prospective research could stimulate the development of qualitative and mixed designs, which may be useful to comprehend how and why transfer occurs as a path to better understand training transfer (Baldwin et al., 2017) and may help to overcome the predominant survey-oriented quantitative focus of transfer research (e.g., Botke et al., 2018). Additionally, such qualitative research may uncover factors of transfer that may be of importance for transfer in a specific situation but were not previously identified.

5. Further explore the two-way transfer process

Referring to the learning approach of transfer, most current transfer models consider transfer to be a one-sided transition (i.e., learning something in training and applying this during

work). In such models, there is no transfer from work to training or from application back to learning (Vermeulen & Admiraal, 2009). Although some studies suggest that learning can be a transfer outcome (Ford et al., 2019; Yelon et al., 2014), the question remains whether the transfer process also works the other way around, i.e., does increased performance lead to new learning goals and consequently to increased motivation to transfer the skills from the training or even to a request for a new training? Research on this backward process has only taken place in a school context (Akkerman & Bakker, 2012; Vermeulen, 2002; Vermeulen & Admiraal, 2009), leaving unstudied if and how the two-way transfer process works in a corporate context.

5.7 Conclusion

Overall, this dissertation aimed to unravel the post-training transfer process of soft skills training and to provide clarity on what organisations can do to increase the transfer to work of such trainings. Transfer is successful if skills from the training are effectively used during work, leading to improved performance. The use of skills requires the motivation to do so as well as the opportunities to use and practice skills over time. Defining successful transfer requires not only being specific about what the performance outcomes should be (criterion) when trainees should show this performance (temporal dimension) but also in what situation trainees should show such performance (context dimension). The more specific and context-related the measures are, the more realistic the view on the transfer process and the more information will be available to improve transfer. Barriers may lay in the initiation and sustainability of the transfer process, in the work environment (with a crucial role for the supervisor) or in the trainee.

This dissertation makes several contributions to the research on the transfer of soft skills. First, this dissertation stresses the importance of studying the full transfer process (i.e., including motivation to transfer in studying the outcomes of transfer). Next, this dissertation shows that combining a performance-based view and a learning-based view on transfer helps to explain how transfer outcomes develop over time. Moreover, this research addresses the importance of the work environment for transfer and the crucial role of the supervisor for transfer. Finally, this research shows the importance of studying the transfer of soft skills in the specific context where transfer should occur and consequently pleads for multi-wave field studies to obtain a realistic view of how and when the transfer of soft skills occurs.

This dissertation has its origins in finding a way to improve the understanding of the transfer of soft skills training to work and provide clarity on how barriers of success are related to the different outcomes during the post-training transfer process. As always, one hopes that one’s dissertation will make a difference. Hopefully, the results of this dissertation will lead to changes in the way companies use transfer outcomes to optimise learning and performance after soft skills training and will inspire researchers and professionals to spend more theoretical and practical attention to transfer research in a corporate setting.

Table 5.2
Overview of the Dissertation

| Research question | Main findings | Theoretical implications | Practical implications | Avenues for future research |
|--|--|--|---|---|
| RQ1. <i>What is a successful transfer of soft skills?</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Transfer is successful if the soft skills from the training are effectively used during work, leading to increased performance. - Transfer is a stepwise process in which motivation to transfer lead to use of skills and use of skills leads to performance. - Using multiple specific performance measures are important (Chapters 3 and 4). - Relation between training and organisational outcomes is indirect rather than direct (Chapter 2). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Studying the full transfer process (i.e., motivation, use and performance) helps to explain post-training transfer (integration of Appelbaum’s AMO-model with transfer literature). - Van Veldhoven’s bath tub model helps to understand the indirect relation between training and organisational performance. | <p>Organisations should be aware that transfer is a stepwise process and should check motivation to transfer and use of skills before addressing performance outcomes.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We need to examine: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - how different dimensions of motivation are important for transfer. - if there is a reversed transfer process (i.e., if performance also increase use and motivation to transfer). |
| RQ2. <i>What is the effect of adding context to the transfer outcomes?</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Being specific about and adding context to the transfer outcomes lead to a more realistic view on the transfer process. - Transfer in a team context may differ from transfer in an individual work situation (Chapters 3 and 4) due to team factors that intervene with organisational factors. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Context matters: trainees should use the skills in the proper context. Therefore, student samples or non-context related measures may not reflect realistic transfer outcomes; longitudinal field studies in a corporate context are needed. | <p>Organisation should be aware that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - context influences transfer outcomes. - due to the open character of soft skills, multiple transfer outcomes may occur. - transfer can also be negative <p>Consequently, they should be specific about what transfer outcomes they are aiming for in what context and measure accordingly to get a realistic view on transfer outcomes.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We need: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to further examine team factors that shape transfer. - more qualitative and mixed design studies to further explore enablers and disablers of transfer. |

Table 5.2 (Continued)

| Research question | Main findings | Theoretical implications | Practical implications | Avenues for future research |
|---|---|---|---|--|
| RQ3. <i>When should the transfer of soft skills be measured?</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Performance measure of three months post-training is suggested (Chapter 2); however, some behavioural changes may take longer to occur (Chapter 4). - Measure on motivation to transfer is suggested directly after the training - Longitudinal measures may help to see how transfer develops over time - Initial transfer may show too optimistic results | <p>Combining a performance view and a learning view on transfer helps to explain how transfer outcomes develop over time (integration of literature on workplace learning with transfer literature)</p> | <p>Organisations should be aware that transfer takes time and take a time lapse of at least three months before measuring transfer outcomes. Shorter time lapse may not fully reflect transfer outcomes. Longitudinal measures may help to see how transfer develops over time</p> | |
| RQ4. <i>How are the barriers to success related to different transfer outcomes?</i> | <p>Barriers to success may be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Transfer stage-related; performance requires use and motivation to transfer (Chapters 2 and 3). - In the work context and lay in the work itself, social support during transfer and the learning culture in the organisation (Chapter 2). - Related to supervisor behaviour; both type and timing of supervisor support is important (Chapter 3). - Trainee-related: self-efficacy may enable or disable transfer (Chapter 4). | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organisations should be aware that each transfer stage has its own antecedents. Such antecedents can be preceding stages, work factors or related to the trainee (self-efficacy). - Both type and timing of supervisor support is important for transfer. Raising awareness of the crucial role of the supervisor benefits transfer. | <p>We need to examine the role of the trainer during transfer.</p> |

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Summary English

Introduction

The impact of training cannot be realised unless employees are both willing and able to use the skills they gain from the training on the job (Jiang, Lepak, Han, et al., 2012). This so-called “transfer of training” is generally defined as the long-term effective use of skills developed in training (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Blume et al., 2019). Specifically, for soft skills training, such training-to-work transfer can be difficult to realise due to unclarity about what successful transfer means, how specific and when it should be measured, and lack of information on how barriers to success are related to different transfer outcomes. These gaps in the research mean that the results of the previous research in a corporate context are difficult to apply to improve the transfer. This situation results in the following general research question for this dissertation: *How can the successful work transfer of soft skills training be ensured?* More specifically, this dissertation aims to answer four subquestions: (1) What is a successful transfer of soft skills? (2) What is the effect of adding context to the transfer outcomes? (3) When should the transfer of soft skills be measured? and (4) How are the barriers to success related to different transfer outcomes?

Overview of Main Results per Research Question

RQ 1. What is a successful transfer of soft skills?

Chapter 1 of the dissertation shows that many conceptualisations exist of transfer. Some studies talk about the transfer “in general”, while others use more specific definitions of the transfer (e.g., near, far, vertical, horizontal, low-road, or high-road transfer), focussing on different but sometimes overlapping aspects of the post-training transfer. In this dissertation, successful training-to-work transfer of soft skills training refers to the use of skills from training during work and to the consequences of the effective use, that is, of (changed) work behaviours leading to improved individual performance. Consequently, we study maintenance transfer (i.e., beyond the initial transfer), as we expect that transferring skills from training to work performance requires applying and maintaining newly learned skills on the job over time.

The results from the literature review in Chapter 2 and the empirical study in Chapter 3 reveal that motivation to transfer is important to start using skills and that using skills is important for long-term performance improvement as a result of training. Furthermore,

the results from the empirical studies presented in Chapters 3 and 4 show that using multiple outcome measures leads to a more nuanced picture of the transfer process. Regarding organisational outcomes of transfer (i.e., operational and financial outcomes), the study in Chapter 2 suggests that training leads to organisational-level outcomes to the extent that it results in the skills, behaviours, and performance necessary to achieve desired organisational outcomes.

Consequently, I argue that the post-training transfer process is a stepwise process that includes three different kinds of consecutive outcomes of transfer: an intentional outcome (motivation to transfer), an initial use outcome (try new skills during work) and an effective use outcome (individual performance). The stepwise approach helps to see how successful training-to-work transfer unfolds (i.e., each step should be successful for a successful transfer). The more performance measures that are included, the more nuanced information on the transfer process will become available.

RQ2. What is the effect of adding context to the transfer outcomes?

There is a lack of agreement on how specific transfer should be measured, and consequently, transfer measures differ from very general non-context-specific measures (e.g., I have used the skills from the training during work) to very context-specific measures (e.g., the skills from the training increased my self-efficacy when working in a team). Again, this may lead to different perceptions about when transfer is successful because excluding the context (i.e., have you used the skills anywhere?) may more easily lead to successful transfer than a context-specific measure (i.e., have you used the skills in a specific situation?). Specifically, for soft skills, this may be important because soft skills are considered to be more “open” than hard skills (i.e., there is more choice as to what and how to apply trained principles and concepts to the job; Blume et al., 2010). Consequently, there may be more diverse, or even unforeseen, invalid or unacceptable (negative transfer; Zubairy et al., 2015) ways to apply the trained skills during work.

The results of the studies presented in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 reveal that the more specific transfer outcomes are measured, the more detailed information unfolds about how and when transfer-to-work of soft skills training is successful. Furthermore, Chapters 3 and 4 reveal that context matters in studying transfer results. The more context-specific the out-

come measure, the more detailed information unfolds on the situations where transfer is successful. Consequently, I argue that for soft skill training, it is important not only to be specific about what kind of performance is expected but also in what context improved performance as a result of the training should occur, since leaving out such context may lead to non-realistic (too optimistic) or even wrong ideas about the success of transfer and a missed opportunity to improve transfer.

RQ3. When should the transfer of soft skills be measured?

Referring to when transfer outcomes should be measured, it is suggested that transfer (i.e., use of new skills and the effect of such use on performance; transfer stage 2 and 3) should be measured at least three months post-training to allow sufficient time after the training to apply what was learned while at the same time being short enough to identify the training as the main source of behavioural change (Cheng & Ho, 2001). However, the literature review in Chapter 2 revealed that more than 50% of the studies take a shorter time lapse to measure transfer outcomes. Such short-term measures of transfer outcomes may not fully take into account barriers to sustainable transfer results and show transfer results that are too optimistic. Consequently, I argue that to measure performance increases after soft skills training, trainees should at least be allowed to use new skills for three months after training. As the empirical study in Chapter 4 suggests, some behaviours may need more time to practice before they occur. In line with Gegenfurtner (2013), I therefore suggest including several longitudinal measures per study to improve the assessment of transfer and to examine how transfer outcomes develop over time. Additionally, I suggest to include a measure on motivation to transfer (transfer stage 1) shortly after the training to check the end-of-course motivation of the trainee to apply any aspects of the learning in the work.

RQ4. How are the barriers to success related to different transfer outcomes?

Based on the results from the studies presented in Chapters 2, 3 and 4, I argue that barriers to successful transfer may be (1) transfer stage related, (2) work context related, or (3) trainee related. Referring to transfer stage-related barriers, the first lack of motivation to transfer may be a barrier to using skills during work (Chapters 2 and 3). If there is no motivation or intention to use the skills, the transfer process will not start. Second, lack of use

of the skills from the training during work may be a barrier for sustainable new behaviour. Third, trainees need to use new skills over time, and consequently, lack of time to practice and incorporate skills during work may be a barrier for successful transfer. Referring to barriers in the work context, the review study presented in Chapter 2 shows that job relevance, workload, autonomy, social support and learning culture are work factors that influence the transfer of soft skills. The impact of these work factors differs per transfer stage. A main actor during post-training transfer is the supervisor because the supervisor may be in the position to lower barriers of transfer, such as providing the proper context to practice new skills, influencing workload and autonomy (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) and ensuring a learning-supportive work climate (Nikolova et al., 2014). Chapters 2 and 3 show that specific behaviours of the supervisor are important per transfer stage.

Referring to trainees, several studies mention the importance of high trainee self efficacy for transfer. However, the empirical study in Chapter 4 reveals that trainees' pre-training occupational self-efficacy moderates the positive effect of self-leadership training on detached concern in such a way that this effect is stronger for participants with low initial levels of pretraining occupational self-efficacy than for those with high initial levels of pretraining occupational self-efficacy. This positive moderating effect of low pretraining occupational self-efficacy can be explained by behavioural plasticity theory (Brockner, 1988). Thus, self-efficacy can both enable and disable transfer.

Discussion and Conclusion

This dissertation demonstrates that to ensure successful transfer of soft skills (i.e., use of skills from the training over time, leading to improved performance), transfer should be seen as a stepwise, staged process that starts with being motivated to transfer. This dissertation found that since the open character of soft skills may lead to many different types of outcomes in many different contexts (even unwanted transfer outcomes), being specific to the type of performance, the context and timeframe in which this performance should occur and measure it accordingly is important in establishing insights on successful transfer. In each transfer step, specific barriers to transfer may exist. Therefore, a second step to ensure successful transfer is disabling or minimising such barriers to success.

Theoretical Implications

This dissertation makes several valuable contributions to the literature on the transfer of training. First, this dissertation is original since the literature review on the transfer of soft skills training (Chapter 2) showed that no previous studies included all three stages (motivation, use, and performance) of the post-training transfer process. Chapter 2 shows that it is relevant to distinguish between the three transfer stages because of their different antecedents, and Chapter 3 shows that it is relevant to distinguish between the stages because the results per stage may depend on the performance context. This suggests that the AMO framework is applicable to transfer research and can help in understanding post-training transfer. In a similar vein, Van Veldhoven's bath tub model (Van Veldhoven, 2012) and Paauwe and Farndale's contextual SHRM framework (Paauwe & Farndale, 2017) help to explain the indirect relation between training and increased organisational performance.

Second, this dissertation is original because it combines the performance-based view on transfer from the transfer literature (e.g., Kazbour et al., 2013) with a learning-based view from the literature on workplace learning (e.g., Billett, 2020; Eraut, 2004; Tynjälä, 2008). Applying a learning-based view, post-training transfer is a way of informal or incidental learning at the workplace following formal learning (during the training). Combining a performance and a learning approach to transfer implies that a measure at one point in time will only reflect transfer results at that moment in time. This dissertation adds knowledge by using longitudinal field studies. This allows us to follow change (as a result of soft skills training) over time. In both field studies, we used a time lapse of three months to measure transfer outcomes. Although three months is widely seen as a minimum time transfer to occur, smaller time lapses are often used for practical reasons (i.e., response rates are often low for a three-month post-training measure).

Third, this dissertation is original since it focuses on specific soft skills trainings and studies how these trainings lead to different performance results per work situation. This dissertation shows that not including the work context in studying transfer may lead to non-realistic or even wrong ideas about the success of the transfer-to-work of soft skills training. Including the work context stresses the need to use field studies for transfer research.

Fourth, this dissertation is original because it addresses enablers and disablers of transfer per transfer stage. The literature review in Chapter 2 shows that the impact of work factors (i.e., content validity, autonomy, workload, social support and learning climate) may differ per transfer stage (i.e., different for motivation to transfer, use of skills and performance). Additionally, this research is original since it addresses the role of specific behaviours of the supervisor during the transfer process (Chapters 2 and 3). The role of specific support behaviours during work (Jacobson, 2009; Thoits, 1985), as well as the temporal dimension of such support behaviour (i.e., the timing of the support; Jacobson, 2009), have been confirmed in previous research. It is unrealistic to expect transfer to occur when a supervisor is not acknowledging and supporting the steps in the post-training transfer process (i.e., recognising and supporting motivation to transfer, use of skills and performance results). Finally, this research is original since it addresses the “dual moderating effect of self-efficacy” (Pan et al., 2011), meaning high self-efficacy can both be an enabler and a disabler of transfer.

Practical Implications

This dissertation has several practical implications. First, organisations should be aware that transfer is a stepwise process. Therefore, if organisations want to ensure successful transfer to the work of soft skills training, they should check if there is motivation to transfer and (opportunity to) use before addressing performance outcomes. Second, organisations should be aware that transfer stages are influenced by work factors. Work factors can be related to the work itself (content relevance, autonomy, workload), the social support of the trainee and the learning culture of the organisation and may differ per transfer stage. Regarding the influence of the social context, organisations should be aware that the supervisor plays an important role during transfer and that different supervisor behaviours are important per stage. Consequently, raising awareness of the effect of specific supervisor support behaviours on transfer (e.g., during leadership programmes) may improve transfer. Finally, organisations should be aware that high self-efficacy may enable or disable transfer. Checking the self-efficacy of trainees before the training may help to provide training for those trainees that benefit the most from learning new skills. To immunise trainees for the effect of barriers, organisations may want to introduce transfer-enhancing interventions, such as goal setting or relapse prevention.

Samenvatting Nederlands

Introductie

Training heeft alleen effect als werknemers zowel bereid, als in staat zijn om de vaardigheden die ze tijdens de training opdoen te gebruiken (Jiang, Lepak, Han, et al., 2012). Deze zogenaamde *transfer van training* wordt over het algemeen gedefinieerd als het effectieve gebruik op de lange termijn van vaardigheden die in training zijn ontwikkeld (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Blume et al., 2019). Met name voor *soft skills*-training kan een dergelijke transfer van training-naar-werk moeilijk te realiseren zijn vanwege onduidelijkheid over wat succesvolle transfer betekent, hoe specifiek en wanneer deze moet worden gemeten, en gebrek aan informatie over hoe belemmeringen voor succes verband houden met verschillende transferresultaten. Door deze onduidelijkheden bieden resultaten van eerder onderzoek weinig aanknopingspunten om transfer in een bedrijfscontext te verbeteren. Dit leidt tot de volgende algemene onderzoeksvraag voor dit proefschrift: *Hoe kan de succesvolle transfer van soft skills training worden gegarandeerd?* Meer specifiek beoogt dit proefschrift vier deelvragen te beantwoorden: (1) Wat is een succesvolle transfer van soft skills? (2) Wat is het effect van het toevoegen van context aan de transferuitkomsten? (3) Wanneer moet transfer van soft skills worden gemeten? en (4) Hoe zijn belemmeringen voor succes gerelateerd aan verschillende transferresultaten?

Overzicht van de Belangrijkste Resultaten per Onderzoeksvraag

RQ 1. Wat is een succesvolle transfer van soft skills?

Hoofdstuk 1 van het proefschrift laat zien dat er veel conceptualisaties bestaan van het begrip transfer. Sommige studies spreken over de transfer “in het algemeen”, terwijl andere studies meer specifieke definities van transfer gebruiken (bijvoorbeeld *near transfer*, *far transfer*, *vertical transfer*, *horizontal transfer*, *low-road*, or *high-road transfer*), waarbij de nadruk ligt op verschillende en soms overlappende aspecten van post-training transfer. In dit proefschrift verwijst succesvolle training-naar-werk transfer van soft skills-training naar het gebruik van vaardigheden uit training tijdens het werk en naar de gevolgen van dat effectieve gebruik. Dus: naar (veranderd) werkgedrag dat uiteindelijk leidt tot verbeterde individuele prestaties. We bestuderen duurzame transfer (dus niet alleen het initiële gebruik van de vaardigheden direct na de training), omdat we verwachten dat transfer van training-naar-werk vereist dat nieuw geleerde vaardigheden gedurende een bepaalde periode tijdens het werk moeten worden toegepast en ingeoeffend voordat individuele prestatieverbetering optreedt.

De resultaten van het literatuuronderzoek in Hoofdstuk 2 en de empirische studie in Hoofdstuk 3 laten zien dat motivatie voor transfer belangrijk is om vaardigheden uit de training te gaan gebruiken en dat het gebruiken van vaardigheden belangrijk is voor prestatieverbetering op de lange termijn. Bovendien laten de resultaten van de empirische studies in Hoofdstukken 3 en 4 zien dat het gebruik van meerdere transferuitkomsten leidt tot een meer genuanceerd beeld van het transferproces (ten opzichte van het gebruik van het meten van slechts één type prestatie). Met betrekking tot het effect van een transfer op organisatorische (operationele en financiële) resultaten, suggereert de studie in Hoofdstuk 2 dat training leidt tot resultaten op organisatieniveau in de zin dat het resulteert in de vaardigheden, het gedrag en de prestaties die nodig zijn om de gewenste organisatieresultaten te bereiken.

Op basis van het bovenstaande stel ik dat het post-training transferproces een stapsgewijs proces is dat drie verschillende soorten opeenvolgende transferresultaten omvat: een intentioneel resultaat (motivatie voor transfer), een initieel gebruikresultaat (nieuwe vaardigheden uitproberen tijdens het werk) en een “effectief gebruik” resultaat (individuele prestatie). De stapsgewijze benadering helpt om te zien hoe succesvolle transfer van training-naar-werk verloopt en geeft aan dat succes in een voorgaande stap voorwaardelijk is voor een volgende stap. Daarnaast geldt dat hoe meer prestatiemetingen worden meegenomen, hoe genuanceerder het beeld is dat over het transferproces ontstaat.

RQ2. Wat is het effect van het toevoegen van context aan transferresultaten?

Er is geen overeenstemming over hoe specifiek transfer moet worden gemeten, en daarom variëren transfermetingen van zeer algemene niet-contextspecifieke meting (met vragen als “Ik heb de vaardigheden uit de training tijdens het werk gebruikt”) tot zeer contextspecifieke meting (met stellingen als “de vaardigheden uit de training verhoogden mijn zelfeffectiviteit bij het werken in een team”). Dit kan leiden tot verschillende percepties over wanneer transfer succesvol is, omdat het uitsluiten van de context (Heb je de vaardigheden *ergens* gebruikt?) vaak sneller leidt tot een positief beeld van de transfer dan het meten van transfer in een *bepaalde situatie*. Specifiek voor soft skills kan dit belangrijk zijn, omdat soft skills als meer “open” worden beschouwd dan *hard skills*. Dat wil zeggen, medewerkers hebben bij het toepassen van soft skills in de regel meer opties ten aanzien van het toepassen van de vaardigheden en het is niet altijd evident hoe de soft skills op de juiste wijze moeten

worden toegepast (Blume et al., 2010). Dit leidt er echter toe dat de nieuwe soft skills ook op onvoorziene, of onaanvaardbare (negatieve transfer; Zubairy et al., 2015) manieren kunnen worden gebruikt.

De resultaten van de studies gepresenteerd in de Hoofdstukken 2, 3 en 4 laten zien dat hoe meer specifieke transferuitkomsten worden gemeten, hoe meer gedetailleerde informatie zich ontvouwt over hoe en wanneer transfer-naar-werk van soft skills training succesvol is. Verder laten de Hoofdstukken 3 en 4 zien dat context van belang is bij het bestuderen van transferresultaten. Hoe contextspecifieker de transfer wordt gemeten, hoe meer gedetailleerde informatie zich ontvouwt over de situaties waarin transfer succesvol is. Daarom stel ik dat het voor soft skill-training niet alleen belangrijk is om specifiek te zijn over wat voor soort prestatie wordt verwacht, maar ook in welke context verbeterde prestaties als gevolg van de training moeten plaatsvinden, aangezien het weglaten van een dergelijke context kan leiden tot niet-realistische (te optimistische) of zelfs verkeerde ideeën over het succes van transfer en een gemiste kans om transfer te verbeteren.

RQ3. Wanneer moet de transfer van soft skills worden gemeten?

Ik pleit ervoor om transfer (het gebruik van nieuwe vaardigheden en het effect van dergelijk gebruik op de prestaties; transferfase 2 en 3) ten minste drie maanden na de training te meten. Zo is er voldoende tijd om het geleerde toe te passen en is de periode tegelijkertijd kort genoeg om de training te identificeren als de belangrijkste bron van gedragsverandering (Cheng & Ho, 2001). Uit het literatuuronderzoek in Hoofdstuk 2 bleek echter dat meer dan 50% van de onderzoeken een kortere tijdsperiode nemen om transferuitkomsten te meten. Dergelijke korte-termijn metingen van transfer houden mogelijk niet volledig rekening met belemmeringen voor duurzame transfer en laten transferresultaten zien die te optimistisch zijn. Daarom stel ik dat om prestatieverbeteringen na soft skills-training te meten, medewerkers nieuwe vaardigheden ten minste drie maanden na de training moeten kunnen gebruiken. Zoals de empirische studie in Hoofdstuk 4 suggereert, kan het zijn dat het voor bepaald gedrag nodig is om de vaardigheden langer te oefenen voordat duurzame prestatieverbetering optreedt. In lijn met Gegenfurtner (2013) stel ik daarom voor om verschillende longitudinale meetpunten per studie op te nemen om de beoordeling van transfer te verbeteren en om te onderzoeken hoe transferuitkomsten zich in de loop van de tijd ontwikkelen.

Daarnaast stel ik voor om kort na de training de motivatie voor transfer te meten (transferfase 1) om te checken of de cursist überhaupt van plan is om het geleerde tijdens het werk toe te passen.

RQ4. Hoe zijn belemmeringen voor succes gerelateerd aan verschillende transferresultaten?

Gebaseerd op de resultaten van de studies gepresenteerd in Hoofdstukken 2, 3 en 4, beargumenteer ik dat belemmeringen voor een succesvolle transfer gerelateerd kunnen zijn aan (1) het transferproces, (2) de werkcontext of (3) de medewerker. Wat betreft transferproces-gerelateerde barrières kan ten eerste een gebrek aan motivatie voor transfer een belemmering zijn voor het gebruik van vaardigheden tijdens het werk (hoofdstukken 2 en 3). Als er geen motivatie of intentie is om de vaardigheden te gebruiken, zal het transferproces niet starten. Ten tweede kan een gebrek aan gebruik van de vaardigheden uit de training tijdens het werk een barrière vormen voor het tot stand komen van duurzaam nieuw gedrag. Ten derde moeten medewerkers nieuwe vaardigheden gedurende een bepaalde tijd gebruiken. Een gebrek aan tijd om te oefenen en vaardigheden tijdens het werk toe te passen kan dus ook een belemmering vormen voor een succesvolle transfer.

Ten aanzien van belemmeringen voor transfer in de werkcontext, laat de reviewstudie gepresenteerd in Hoofdstuk 2 zien dat inhoudelijke relevantie van de training, werkdruk, autonomie, sociale steun en leercultuur werkfactoren zijn die de transfer van soft skills beïnvloeden. De invloed van deze werkfactoren verschilt per transferfase. Een hoofdrol tijdens transfer is weggelegd voor leidinggevend, omdat zij in de positie kunnen zijn om de barrières voor transfer te verlagen, zoals het bieden van de juiste context om nieuwe vaardigheden te oefenen, het beïnvloeden van de werkdruk en autonomie (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) en het zorgen voor een leervriendelijk werkklimaat (Nikolova et al., 2014). Hoofdstukken 2 en 3 laten zien dat specifieke gedragingen van de leidinggevende per transferfase van belang zijn.

Ten aanzien van de invloed van persoonlijke eigenschappen van de medewerkers op transfer vermelden verschillende onderzoeken het belang van een hoge *self-efficacy* (vertrouwen in eigen kunnen) voor transfer. De empirische studie in hoofdstuk 4 laat echter zien dat de beroepsmatige self-efficacy van medewerkers het positieve effect van zelfleider-

schapstraining op professionele betrokkenheid op een zodanige manier modereert, dat dit effect sterker is voor deelnemers met lage beroepsmatige self-efficacy voorafgaand aan de training, dan voor degenen met een hoge initiële beroepsmatige self-efficacy voorafgaand aan de training. Dit positieve modererende effect van een lage beroepsmatige self-efficacy voorafgaand aan de training kan worden verklaard door *behavioural plasticity theory* (Brockner, 1988). Self-efficacy kan dus zowel transfer bevorderen als belemmeren.

Discussie en Conclusie

Dit proefschrift laat zien dat om voor een succesvolle transfer van soft skills (dus voor prestatieverbetering door het duurzame gebruik van vaardigheden uit de training), transfer moet worden gezien als een stapsgewijs, gefaseerd proces dat begint met gemotiveerd zijn voor transfer. Dit proefschrift toont aan dat, om een duidelijk beeld te krijgen van transfer, het belangrijk is om specifiek te zijn om het type prestatie en de context en de tijdsperiode waarin de prestatie geleverd moet worden, omdat het open karakter van soft skills kan leiden tot veel verschillende soorten uitkomsten (zelfs ongewenste) in veel verschillende contexten. In elke transferfase kunnen er specifieke belemmeringen voor transfer zijn. Daarom is een tweede stap om een succesvolle transfer te garanderen het uitschakelen of minimaliseren van dergelijke belemmeringen voor succes.

Theoretische Implicaties

Dit proefschrift levert een aantal waardevolle bijdragen aan de literatuur over transfer van training. Ten eerste is dit proefschrift origineel, omdat uit de literatuurstudie over de transfer van soft skills-training (Hoofdstuk 2) bleek dat geen eerdere studie alle drie fasen (motivatie, gebruik van vaardigheden en prestatie) van het post-training transferproces omvat. Hoofdstuk 2 laat zien dat het relevant is om onderscheid te maken tussen de drie transferfasen vanwege hun verschillende beïnvloeders. Hoofdstuk 3 laat zien dat het relevant is om onderscheid te maken tussen de fasen omdat de resultaten per fase afhankelijk kunnen zijn van de prestatiecontext. Deze fasegewijze benadering suggereert dat het AMO-raamwerk van toepassing is op transferonderzoek en kan helpen bij het begrijpen van post-training transfer. Op dezelfde manier helpen het badkuipmodel van Van Veldhoven (Van Veldhoven, 2012) en het contextuele SHRM-raamwerk van Paauwe en Farndale (Paauwe & Farndale, 2017) om de indirecte relatie tussen training en verbeterde organisatieprestaties te verklaren.

Ten tweede is dit proefschrift origineel, omdat het de prestatiegerichte visie op transfer uit de transferliteratuur (zie bijvoorbeeld Kazbour et al., 2013) combineert met een op leren gerichte visie uit de literatuur over werkplekleren (zie bijvoorbeeld Billett, 2020; Eraut, 2004; Tynjälä, 2008). Vanuit een op leren gerichte visie gezien is post-training transfer een vorm van informeel of incidenteel leren op de werkplek als vervolg op het formeel leren tijdens de training. Het combineren van een prestatiegerichte en een leergerichte benadering van transfer impliceert dat een transferuitkomst op een bepaald moment alleen het resultaat op dat moment weerspiegelt (want: de training is beëindigt, maar het leren hoeft daarmee niet te stoppen). Dit proefschrift voegt kennis toe door gebruik te maken van longitudinale veldstudies. Hierdoor kunnen we veranderingen (als gevolg van soft skills training) in de tijd volgen. In beide veldstudies werkten we met een transfermeting drie maanden na de training. Hoewel drie maanden algemeen wordt gezien als een minimale tijd om tot transferresultaten te komen, worden om praktische redenen vaak kleinere tijdintervallen gebruikt, omdat responspercentages bij een meting drie maanden na de training vaak erg laag zijn.

Ten derde is dit proefschrift origineel, omdat het zich richt op specifieke soft skills-trainingen en onderzoekt hoe deze trainingen leiden tot verschillende prestatieresultaten per werksituatie. Dit proefschrift laat zien dat het niet betrekken van de werkcontext bij het bestuderen van transfer kan leiden tot onrealistische of zelfs verkeerde ideeën over het succes van de transfer van training-naar-werk. Het meenemen van de werkcontext benadrukt de noodzaak om bij transferonderzoek veldstudies (in een bedrijfsmatige context) te doen.

Ten vierde is dit proefschrift origineel, omdat het per transferfase ingaat op factoren die transfer bevorderen en belemmeren voor transfer. Het literatuuronderzoek in Hoofdstuk 2 laat zien dat de impact van werkfactoren (inhoudelijke relevantie van de training, autonomie, werkdruk, sociale steun en leerklimaat) kan verschillen per transferfase (motivatie voor transfer, gebruik van vaardigheden en prestaties). Bovendien is dit onderzoek origineel, omdat het de rol van specifiek gedrag van de supervisor tijdens het transferproces behandelt (Hoofdstukken 2 en 3). De rol van specifiek ondersteunend gedrag van de leidinggevende (Jacobson, 2009; Thoits, 1985), evenals de rol van timing van dergelijk gedrag (Jacobson, 2009), zijn in eerder onderzoek bevestigd. Het is onrealistisch om te verwachten dat transfer plaatsvindt wanneer een leidinggevende de stappen in het post-training transfer

proces (motivatie, gebruik van vaardigheden en prestatie) niet erkent en ondersteunt. Ten slotte is dit onderzoek origineel omdat het zich richt op het “dubbele modererende effect van self-efficacy” (Pan et al., 2011), wat inhoudt dat een hoge self-efficacy zowel transfer kan bevorderen als belemmeren.

Praktische Implicaties

Dit proefschrift heeft een aantal praktische implicaties. Ten eerste moeten organisaties zich ervan bewust zijn dat transfer een stapsgewijs proces is. Daarom moeten organisaties voor een succesvolle transfer naar het werk van soft skills-training controleren of er motivatie is voor transfer en (mogelijkheid om) de vaardigheden uit een training te gebruiken voordat ze naar prestatieresultaten kijken. Ten tweede moeten organisaties zich ervan bewust zijn dat de transferfasen worden beïnvloed door werkfactoren. Werkfactoren kunnen te maken hebben met het werk zelf (inhoudelijke relevantie van de training, autonomie, werkdruk), de sociale ondersteuning van de medewerker en de leercultuur van de organisatie en kunnen per transferfase verschillen. Ten aanzien van de invloed van de sociale context dienen organisaties zich ervan bewust te zijn dat de leidinggevende een belangrijke rol speelt bij transfer en dat per fase ander leidinggevend gedrag van belang kan zijn. Aandacht schenken aan het effect van specifiek ondersteuningsgedrag van de leidinggevende op transfer (bijvoorbeeld tijdens leiderschapsprogramma's) kan transfer verbeteren. Ten slotte moeten organisaties zich ervan bewust zijn dat een hoge self-efficacy transfer kan bevorderen of belemmeren. Het checken van de self-efficacy van medewerkers vóór de training kan helpen om training te geven aan die werknemers die het meest profiteren van het leren van nieuwe vaardigheden. Om medewerkers te immuniseren voor mogelijke transferbelemmeringen, kunnen organisaties transfer-bevorderende interventies introduceren, zoals het stellen van doelen of aandacht schenken aan terugvalpreventie.

Appendices

Measures used for data collection

Appendix 1. Measures used in Study 2 (Chapter 3)**Motivation to transfer (Holton III et al., 2000)**

1. This training will increase my personal productivity.
2. When I leave this training, I cannot wait to get back to work to try what I learned.
3. I believe this training will help me do my current job.
4. I get excited when I think about using my new skills and knowledge in my job.

Appraisal supervisor support (Nijman, 2004)

1. My supervisor showed his/her appreciation of my (successful) participation in the training
2. My supervisor indicated that s/he would appreciate it if I would use skills from the training during work.
3. My supervisor checked my training participation [R].

Emotional supervisor support (Nijman, 2004)

1. My supervisor indicated his/her confidence in my successful learning from the training.
2. My supervisor indicated his/her confidence in my successful application of the skills from the training.
3. My supervisor indicated that I could consult him/her if I would have difficulties using skills from the training during work.

Use of self-leadership skills

[The last time I was in this situation],

1. ... I have set realistic short and long term goals.
2. ... I used my senses to create a simulation of an event in my mind.
3. ... I have actively and selectively focused my attention.
4. ... have I used my energy consciously.
5. ... I have purposely converted obstructive thoughts into positive thoughts.
6. ... have I reflected on my own actions.

Keeping detached concern (Delahajj et al., 2014)

[The last time I was in this situation],

1. ... I kept enough professional distance to the case and to people involved
2. ... I was not too emotionally involved in the case or people involved

3. ... I could empathize with the people involved
4. ... I did not get carried away by the situation

Dealing with a heavy workload (based on Hart & Staveland, 1988)

[The last time I was in this situation],

1. ... my individual performance was successful.
2. ... it took much energy to perform properly [R].
3. ... performance was stressful [R].

For this study, we measured use of skills and performance in two different work situations.

The following text was used to introduce the work situations.

The next questions are about the use of these skills from the training during your work. We will describe two different work situations where you may want to apply the skills from the training. Please think about the last time you were in this situation when answering the questions. If you have not been in this situation, you can move to the next section of the questionnaire.

Work situation 1: Working with colleagues from other disciplines

As a crime scene investigator, you co-operate with colleagues from other disciplines inside and outside the police. It is often a challenge to use the capacities and competences available in such a way that the criminal investigation is optimal.

Work situation 2: Making a police report

In a criminal investigation, the police report can be used as evidence in a criminal case. The police report states facts and circumstances that have been observed or experienced. Despite time pressure and dependence on others, a police report must meet the legal requirements and therefore be as complete/transparent as possible. Making a good police report can therefore be a challenge.

Appendix 2. Measures used in Study 3 (Chapter 4)

Detached Concern (Delahaij et al., 2014)

[The last time I worked in a team],

1. ... I kept enough professional distance to the case and to people involved.
2. ... I was not too emotionally involved in the case or people involved.
3. ... I could empathize with the people involved.
4. ... I did not get carried away by the situation.

Proactivity (Griffin et al., 2007)

[The last time I worked in a team],

1. ... I suggested ways to make our work unit more effective.
2. ... I developed new and improved methods to help our work unit perform better.
3. ... I improved the way our work unit does things.

Occupational Self-Efficacy (Rigotti et al., 2008)

[The last time I worked in a team],

1. ... I remained calm when facing difficulties in my job because I can rely on my abilities.
2. ... when I was confronted with a problem, I could find several solutions.
3. ... I could handle my work, whatever happened.
4. ... my past experiences in my job have prepared me well for my occupational future.
5. ... I met the goals that I set for myself in my job.
6. ... I felt prepared for most of the demands in my job.

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UNDERSTANDING THE TRANSFER-TO-WORK OF SOFT SKILLS TRAINING

With soft skills of employees becoming increasingly important for their successful performance, organisations spend a large amount of money on employee soft skills training. However, it often remains unclear to what extent such training is effective. This dissertation shows that transfer-to-work after a soft skills training unfolds in a stepwise, staged process, that starts with being motivated to transfer, followed by using the new skills. This use of skills may consequently turn into improved performance. In each transfer step, barriers to transfer may exist. Additionally, the current research found that being specific about the type, context and timeframe of performance is pivotal in gaining insight into successful transfer, because the open character of soft skills may lead to many different types of outcomes in many different contexts (even unwanted transfer outcomes).

About the author

Jolanda Botke was born on 2nd September, 1967 in Leeuwarden, the Netherlands. After studying Educational Technology at Twente University she started working as an Educational Consultant at CINOP where she worked for 14 years. She then started her own business, Pelikaan Performance Advies BV in 2004. As a self-employed professional, Jolanda Botke has worked for many educational and training organisations. In 2014, she started her PhD-project on transfer of training at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Department of Management and Organization. She presented her research at international conferences, including the Academy of Management annual meeting and the EARLI-SIG14 Conference for Research on Learning and Instruction. She currently works as a lecturer at Tilburg University, Department of Human Resource Studies and as a self-employed educational consultant.

