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How does training improve customer service quality? The roles of transfer of training and job satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the roles of transfer of training and job satisfaction in the relationship between training and customer service quality. The data were collected from 230 employees and their supervisors and analyzed using structural equation modeling. The results show that training indirectly influences customer service quality through the mediation of transfer of training and job satisfaction. Moreover, training directly and indirectly affects transfer of training through the mediation of job satisfaction, which in turn partially mediates the relationship between transfer of training and customer service quality. Furthermore, perceived organizational support (POS) moderates the relationship between training and transfer of training. This study extends social exchange theory, norm of reciprocity, and goal setting theory. Practical implications and future research directions are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Organizations invest in employee training with the expectation that training will enable employees to perform better and more efficiently, thus improving the organization's productivity (Nielsen, Randall, & Christensen, 2010; Sahinidis & Bouris, 2008). However, the literature on the effect of training on individual and organizational performance is equivocal (Tharenou, Saks, & Moore, 2007). There is a strong argument that training is of little use to organizations if the knowledge and skills learned are not transferred to job performance (Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Holton). As a result, the past several decades have witnessed increasing academic interest in interventions of transfer of training (e.g., Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Nielsen et al., 2010; Roberson, Kulik, & Pepper, 2009). Transfer of training refers to using the knowledge and skills acquired from training in the workplace (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Blume, Ford, Baldwin, & Huang, 2009; Holton, Bates, & Ruona, 2000). However, the literature about the relationship between training and transfer of training is also ambiguous. Specifically, there is empirical evidence that approximately 40% of trainees fail to transfer knowledge and skills immediately after training and that

70% fail to transfer one year after the training (Saks, 2002). Further, the effect of transfer of training on employee work performance (e.g., in customer service quality) has not been clearly ascertained because of a lack of research. Consequently, knowledge on the genuine relationships among training, transfer of training, and employee work outcomes is limited. Greater research is necessary to gain better understanding of the roles of training and organizational support in eliciting improved employee work performance and thus improved organizational productivity.

The ambiguity in the literature results from the lack of comprehensive analysis of the underlying mechanism linking training, transfer of training, and employee work performance. Past studies have focused on exploring the relationships of these variables "in pairs". Further, prior research on factors that influence the effect of training on transfer of training has focused on learner characteristics, such as learning ability, self-motivation and personality, and the organizational climate in relation to transfer of training (Burke & Hutchins, 2007). The roles of employees' perceptions of and reactions to the organization, such as perceived organizational support (POS) and job satisfaction, have been largely neglected in research.

These limitations constitute important gaps in the training literature. Therefore, researchers have issued calls for studies to develop a better understanding of the relationships among training, transfer of training, and employee work performance

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(Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Pineda, 2010; Tharenou et al., 2007). To address this gap, the current study explores the relationships among training, transfer of training, and customer service quality, as well as the underlying mechanisms for the relationships. As presented in Fig. 1, our conceptual model is underpinned by social exchange theory, norm of reciprocity theory and goal setting theory. We propose that job satisfaction is a mediator in the relationships between training and transfer of training, and training and customer service quality, as well as between transfer of training and customer service quality. The model also suggests that POS moderates the relationship between training and transfer of training.

2. Theoretical background and hypothesis development

2.1. Social exchange, norm of reciprocity and goal setting theories

Social exchange theory posits that all human relationships develop on the basis of subjective cost–benefit analyses and comparisons of alternatives in the process of negotiated exchanges between parties (Blau, 1964). Social exchanges are principally about trust rather than legal obligations (Standford, 2008). Social exchange relationships establish and evolve between employees and the organization when employees perceive a high level of organizational support. POS in turn engenders positive employee consequences, such as positive employee attitudes and work behavior (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). The norm of reciprocity states that people tend to respond to each other in kind (i.e., returning favors for favors and hatred for hatred) by assessing consequences and the causes of the actions of other people (Gouldner, 1960; Homans, 1961). It is not necessary for the proportions and nature of the favors to be equal. That is, a small favor can result in a larger return favor and one person's generosity can lead to other people's loyalty (Falk & Fischbacher, 2006). Based on the social exchange and norm of reciprocity theories, we suggest that when employees perceive a high level of organizational support, including training opportunities and general support, they tend to repay the organization through effective work practices. For example, employees that receive adequate training will be more likely to apply the learned knowledge and skills on the job, which in turn leads to better work performance, including better customer service.

Employees attend training programs with the goal of acquiring new knowledge and skills to perform better at work. Goal setting theory holds that once a goal is set and accepted by a person, logically, the person will work toward achieving the goal (Locke, 1968). Therefore, goal setting is positively related to work performance (Locke, Shaw, Saari, & Latham, 1981). From the perspective

of goal setting theory, it would be logical to argue that after the training is completed, the trainee will be motivated to transfer the new knowledge and skills on the job to achieve the preset goal. Consequently, the trainee's work performance will be improved. Using this logic, we argue that transfer of training mediates the relationship between training and improved customer service quality.

2.2. Effects of training on customer service quality: mediation of transfer of training

Customer service quality describes the extent to which service is delivered to match customer expectations (Lewis & Booms, 1983). To date, research on the effects of training on customer service quality is sparse. In fact, training in prior studies has often been explored with other practices related to human-resources management (Chand & Katou, 2007; Hung, 2006; Schneider & Bowen, 1993; Zerbe, Dobni, & Harel, 1998). However, the findings of the limited published research on the effects of training on customer service quality are contentious. There is empirical evidence that training is positively related to customer service quality. For example, examining the Indian hotel industry, Chand and Katou (2007) found that provision of training has a stronger correlation with service quality than other human resource practices such as recruitment and selection, appraisal, and reward. This positive correlation was also found in the US banking and health industries (Schneider & Bowen, 1993). The rationale behind this correlation is that training improves employee competence because of upgraded knowledge, skills, and abilities in relation to products and services, communications, complaints handling, and managing difficult customers (Keltner, 1995; Tsai & Tang, 2008). Customer service-focused training also helps develop the organizational service climate, which is positively related to customer service quality (Gracia, Cifre, & Grau, 2010; Johnson, 1996; Schneider, White, & Paul, 1998). However, other studies have found that training is not associated with customer service quality (e.g., Zerbe et al., 1998) and can even detract from service quality (Hung, 2006).

The inconsistent research findings seem to result from the missing mechanisms through which training influences customer service quality. We argue that transfer of training is one of the mediators through which training influences customer service quality. Employees learn new knowledge and skills that are essential to providing high-quality customer service through training. To better communicate and build better relationships with customers, as goal setting theory would suggest, trainees transfer the new knowledge and skills to service to customers. There is some empirical support for a similar argument. For example,

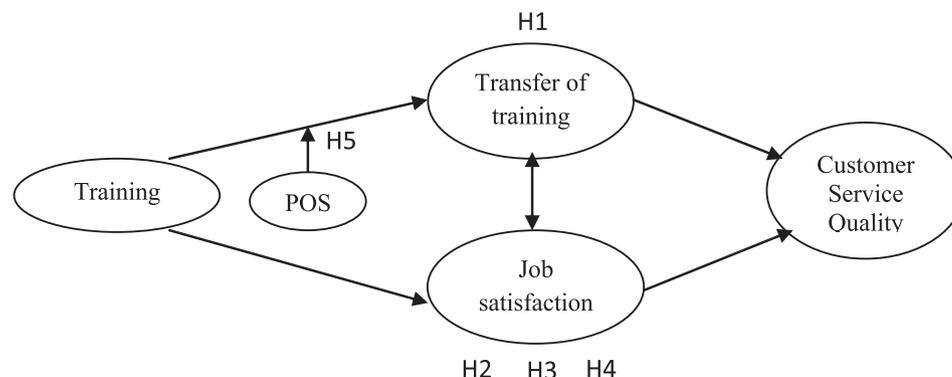


Fig. 1. Conceptual model.

training delivers positive outcomes when employees have transferred the learned knowledge and skills to their jobs (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009; Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Tharenou et al., 2007) and have “maintained [the learned knowledge and skills] over a period of time on the job” (Baldwin & Ford, 1988, p. 63). Hence, transfer of training is an important underlying process that enables training to affect employee work performance (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009; Leberman, McDonald, & Doyle, 2006; Nielsen et al., 2010; Pineda, 2010). A meta-analysis by Colquitt, LePine, and NOE (2000) revealed that transfer of training generally explains up to 35% of variance in job performance. In consideration of these discussions, we develop the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1. *Training indirectly influences customer service quality through the mediation of transfer of training.*

2.3. Effects of training on customer service quality: mediation of job satisfaction

Job satisfaction refers to an employee's overall experience of their job (Cranny, Smith, & Stone, 1992). Receiving job training is one organizational antecedent to employee job satisfaction (Allen & van der Velden, 2001; Rowden & Conine, 2005). A positive correlation between job satisfaction and receiving training has been found in various professions and industries, such as in drivers in the gambling industry (Gu, Sen, & Ricardo, 2009) and in senior executive managers in computing, and in the life science, medicine, securities, banking, and media industries (Liao & Teng, 2010), as well as in physicians in the health care sector (Chodirker, Rothman, Imrie, & Rohlehr, 2004) and in lower level managers in manufacturing industries (Sahinidis & Bouris, 2008).

A meta-analysis by Judge, Thoresen, Bono, and Patton (2001) revealed a positive correlation between job satisfaction and employee outcomes, such as productivity and customer service quality. Research also demonstrates that job satisfaction has a strong positive relationship with OCB (Organ & Ryan, 1995), and the correlation with employee job performance becomes stronger when jobs are complex (Judge et al., 2001). Customer service is complex and may go beyond the descriptions of the job role and falls within both task performance and OCB. Hence, customer service quality is likely to be positively related to job satisfaction (Arnett et al., 2002; Malhotra & Mukherjee, 2004). Empirical research conducted in the hotel (Kim, Tavitiyaman, & Kim, 2009), retail (Yee, Yeung, & Cheng, 2008), restaurant (Gazzoli, Hancer, & Park, 2010), and banking (Malhotra & Mukherjee, 2004) sectors has found that quality of customer service is positively related to job satisfaction. These findings suggest that job satisfaction mediates the relationship between training and customer service quality. Therefore, we develop the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2. *Training indirectly influences customer service quality through the mediation of job satisfaction.*

2.4. Effect of training on transfer of training: mediation of job satisfaction

Employees have been found to consider training opportunities an important form of organizational support, and to be related positively to job satisfaction (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Based on the social exchange and norm of reciprocity theories, employees that are provided with training opportunities experience greater levels of job satisfaction and are motivated to reciprocate organizational support by exhibiting more positive work behaviors, for example, by transferring training on the job to perform better and

contribute more effectively to the organization. Empirical studies have found positive correlations between employee job satisfaction and willingness to transfer learned skills and knowledge (Egan, Yang, & Bartlett, 2004; Gumuseli & Ergin, 2002; Kontoghiorghes, 2002), and between job satisfaction and the effectiveness of transfer of training in different occupations in various sectors (Lim & Morris, 2006; Yamnill & McLean, 2001). The findings in the literature discussed here demonstrate that training is more likely to influence transfer of training through the mediation of job satisfaction. Considering the direct relationship between training and transfer of training, which has been established in the training literature (e.g., Ford, Smith, Weissbein, Gully, & Salas, 1998; Marler, Liang, & Dulebohn, 2006; Tziner, Fisher, Senior, & Weisberg, 2007), we develop the following partial-mediation hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3. *Training indirectly influences transfer of training through the mediation of job satisfaction.*

2.5. Effect of transfer of training on customer service quality: mediation of job satisfaction

Goal setting theory holds that employees experience a high level of job satisfaction when the goal of transferring learned knowledge and skills on the job is achieved. Once a goal is achieved, employees are more likely to subsequently set and achieve a higher goal (i.e., improved performance). Empirical evidence supports that employees are more satisfied if they successfully transfer training outcomes to work (Allen & van der Velden, 2001; Pineda, 2010; Stranda & Bosco-Ruggiero, 2011). For example, Stranda and Bosco-Ruggiero (2011) found that employees that participated in two interventions of transfer of training, including mentoring and clinical consultation programs, were more satisfied with their jobs. As extensive literature suggests, job satisfaction in turn has a positive effect on customer service quality (Gazzoli et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2009; Malhotra & Mukherjee, 2004; Yee et al., 2008). These findings suggest that job satisfaction functions as a mediator between transfer of training and quality of customer service. This idea leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4. *Transfer of training indirectly influences customer service quality through the mediation of job satisfaction.*

2.6. The moderating role of POS

POS refers to the degree to which employees perceive that their organization values their contributions and cares about the quality of their work life (Eisenberger, Huntington, Huntington, & Sowa, 1986). A great deal of attention in training research has been paid to organizational support with specific reference to transfer of training, such as technological support (Burke & Hutchins, 2007; McManus & Rossett, 2006), providing opportunities for transfer (Devos, Dumay, Bonami, Bates, & Holton, 2007), and recognizing and rewarding transfer of training (Frash, Antun, Kline, & Almanza, 2010; Kontoghiorghes, 2001). The transfer of training-specific organizational support helps develop an organizational transfer of the training climate, which encourages and motivates employees to transfer the new knowledge and skills to the job (Cromwell & Kolb, 2004; Sturges, Conway, & Liefoghe, 2010). This argument is supported by empirical evidence demonstrating that organizational support increases the effectiveness of transfer of training (Burke & Baldwin, 1999; Kontoghiorghes, 2001; Lim & Morris, 2006; Mathieu, Tannenbaum, & Salas, 1992; Tracey, Tannenbaum, & Kavanagh, 1995).

Social exchange theory and the norm of reciprocity (Blau, 1964;

Gouldner, 1960; Homans, 1961) suggest that employees tend to reciprocate POS by performing better or even exhibiting extra-role behavior in the workplace (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Similarly, it can be suggested that when employees perceive a high level of organizational support, they tend to reciprocate this support by willingly transferring newly acquired knowledge and skills to their work to ensure they contribute more to the organization. Therefore, when there is a high level of POS, trainees are more willing to transfer their new knowledge and skills to work. This indicates that POS moderates the relationship between training and transfer of training. Therefore, we develop the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5. *POS moderates the relationship between training and transfer of training; such that the effect of training on transfer of training is stronger when POS is high.*

3. Methodology

3.1. Sampling and data collection

The data for this study were collected from employees and their supervisors in ten business organizations in Southern China. The ten businesses comprised hotels (2), clothing (2), electronics (2), telecommunications (1), automobile (1), and shoe (1) and toy (1) manufacturers. Hotel A, Electronics A and Automobile A are joint-venture enterprises. Telecommunications A is a state-owned enterprise and the other participating businesses are privately owned. Nine hundred and forty-six employees who had attended a range of training programs organized by their respective companies between June 2009 and December 2010 were identified by the human-resources departments of the participating firms. Questionnaires and cover letters explaining the purpose of the research, procedures of data collection, and confidentiality matters were distributed to trainees via internal mail by their human-resources departments between June and July 2011. To reduce CMV the data were collected from multiple sources. Each employee received two questionnaires: one for the employee and one for their immediate supervisor. Employees answered the questions about training, POS and job satisfaction. Supervisors provided the information about transfer of training and customer service quality. Codes were used to match supervisors and employees. Collection boxes were provided in the participating firms where the researcher paid visits frequently to collect completed questionnaires and answer any queries. Two hundred and fifty-six employee–supervisor pairs returned the completed questionnaires, yielding a 27.1% response rate. Two hundred and thirty questionnaires were matched and usable.

Age-wise, 18.5% of the respondents were from 18 to 29 years of age, 42.1% of respondents were from 30 to 39 years of age, 23.4% were from 40 to 49 years of age, and 16% were 50 years or older. For gender, 63.1% of respondents were male and 36.9% female. For level of education, 11.4% of respondents had completed primary school only, 53.3% had completed high school, 12.8% had a diploma, 21.3% had a bachelor's degree and 1.2% had completed a postgraduate degree. For job position, 68.8% were non-management employees and 31.2% were managers. For length of service in the current organization, 21.2% had worked for less than one year, 36.3% between one and three years, 34.5% between three and five years, and 8% had more than five years of experience with their current employers.

3.2. Measures

Appendix A provides the items for all scales. Seven-point Likert-type scales were used, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree for all variables other than the control variables.

The questionnaires were developed in English and translated to Mandarin following a standard back-translation process.

3.2.1. Training

The existing literature (e.g., Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Holton et al., 1997) suggests that for training to have a positive effect on customer service quality, training must be effective to ensure that trainees are able to transfer the learned knowledge and skills to the job. Therefore, it is important to consider both training opportunities and training effectiveness in exploring the effects of training. To ensure this, we measured training using one item related to training opportunities (adequacy) (Marler et al., 2006) and three items adapted from Curry (1997) related to training effectiveness. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.85.

3.2.2. Transfer of training

Transfer of training was measured using a six-item scale adapted from by Xiao (1996). Cronbach's alpha for this factor was 0.83.

3.2.3. POS

POS was measured using five items from Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, and Lynch (1997) short version of the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support and the following three support items specific to transfer of training: technological support (Burke & Hutchins, 2007; McManus & Rossett, 2006), providing opportunities for transfer (Devos et al., 2007), and recognizing and rewarding transfer of training (Frash et al., 2010; Kontoghiorghes, 2001). The use of short-version scales is acceptable if the original scale is one dimensional and has high internal reliability (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.80.

3.2.4. Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction was measured using a three-item scale adapted from Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins, and Klesh (1979). Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.67.

3.2.5. Customer service quality

Customer service quality was measured by 14 items adapted from Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988). The original scale has five dimensions. Given that tangibility is related to service sites (Gracia et al., 2010; Jiang, Klein, & Carr, 2002), it was not relevant to our study. We added a second order factor to represent the four dimensions including reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. CFA using AMOS 20 revealed that the second order factor model had a reasonable fit to the data: $\chi^2(131) = 386.23$, CFI = 0.94, NNFI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.083, $p < 0.001$. Cronbach's alpha for the second order factor was 0.83.

3.2.6. Control variables

Research argues that education level and position rather than other learner characteristics influences training outcomes, transfer of training, and work performance (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Blume et al., 2009; Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Sackett, Gruys, & Ellingson, 1998). Hence, we controlled for education, which was coded: 1 = primary school, 2 = high school, 3 = diploma, 4 = bachelor, and 5 = postgraduate. Position was also controlled for and it was coded: 1 = non-managerial employee and 2 = managerial employee.

4. Results

We adopted Joreskog and Yang's (1996) approach which is effective for analysing moderating effects in structured equation modelling (SEM) (Williams, Vandenberg, & Edwards, 2009). This approach includes parameters representing means of manifest and

latent variables and intercepts for measurement in SEM. According to Joreskog and Yang (1996), only one product variable is necessary to be parsimonious, and several constraints must be imposed to test the significance of the interaction effects. We used the mean-centered observed variable “Training 2”, which has the largest factor loading from “training” and “POS 3” from “POS” to create the interaction latent variable. Means, standard deviations, and interrelations of the study variables are presented in Table 1.

We conducted CFAs on the measurement model to test the discriminant validity of the scales (Kline, 2005) using maximum likelihood as the procedure for estimation. The six-factor model had a good fit to the data: $\chi^2(645) = 931.12$, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.95, NNFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.045, SRMR = 0.046. All factor loadings were positive and exceeded 0.51. The six-factor model fit better than the other models, including the five-factor model: $\chi^2(650) = 1309.91$, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.88, NNFI = 0.88, RMSEA = 0.067, SRMR = 0.059, and the one-factor model $\chi^2(665) = 3580.56$, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.50, NNFI = 0.48, RMSEA = 0.13, SRMR = 0.14. We then tested our hypotheses with the six-factor model.

4.1. Hypotheses test

To test the hypotheses, we adopted MacKinnon, Lockwood, and Hoffman's (2002) procedure to compare the proposed partial-mediation model against the nested full-mediation and non-mediation models. The selection of rival models was based on the literature (e.g., Browne & Cudeck, 1993; MacCallum, 1986). The proposed model had an acceptable fit to the data, and was therefore considered the base model: $\chi^2(616) = 965.74$, $p < 0.001$, RMR = 0.052, CFI = 0.95, NNFI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.050. To test Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2, we first fitted a partial-mediation model (Model 1) by adding a direct path between training and customer service quality. The model showed a worse fit than the base model: $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 26.14$, $p < 0.001$. The coefficient of the newly added path between training and customer service quality was non-significant: $\gamma = -0.08$, $p = 0.24$. The partial-mediation model was therefore rejected. We then fit the non-mediation model by removing the path involving transfer of training and customer service quality and the path involving job satisfaction and customer service quality (Model 2). The model had a worse fit to the data than the base model: $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 71.16$, $p < 0.001$. The coefficient of the path between effective training and customer service quality became significant ($\gamma = 0.13$, $p < 0.01$). The non-mediation model was therefore rejected.

We then fit the models with only one mediator between training and customer service quality. In Model 3 transfer of training was the only mediator between training and customer service quality. Model 3 had worse fit indicators than the base model: $\Delta\chi^2(5) = 77.12$, $p < 0.001$. Model 4 with job satisfaction as the only mediator between training and customer service quality had a worse fit than the base model: $\Delta\chi^2(5) = 169.12$, $p < 0.001$. The

two one-mediator models were thus rejected. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 were confirmed.

To test Hypothesis 3, we fit the full-mediation model (Model 5) between training and transfer of training by removing the path between training and transfer of training and the path between the interaction term and transfer of training. The model had a worse fit: $\Delta\chi^2(4) = 20.96$, $p < 0.001$. The full mediation of job satisfaction between training and transfer of training model was therefore not retained. Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported. We then tested Hypothesis 4 by fitting the model with no mediation of job satisfaction (Model 6) between training and transfer of training. The model fit the data worse than the base model: $\Delta\chi^2(4) = 67.45$, $p < 0.001$. Hence, this model was not accepted. As a result, the base model fit the data the best and was accepted. All hypotheses, including Hypothesis 5 were supported. Comparisons of the nested rival models are presented in Table 2.

We performed one-tailed Sobel tests to explore the strength of the indirect effects in the three mediation relationships. The results demonstrated significance in the indirect effects of transfer of training in the relationship between training and customer service quality ($z = 1.66$, $p < 0.05$), job satisfaction in the relationship between training and transfer of training ($z = 1.76$, $p < 0.05$), and job satisfaction in the relationship between transfer of training and customer service quality ($z = 1.85$, $p < 0.05$). The indirect effects were tested with confidence intervals using coefficients estimated from 1000 bootstrap samples (Shrout & Bolger, 2002). The moderating effects are plotted in Fig. 2 by considering the strength of the relationship between training and transfer of training at the low level of POS (one standard deviation below the mean) ($\gamma = 0.09$, $p = 0.14$) and the high level of POS (one standard deviation above the mean) respectively ($\gamma = 0.38$, $p < 0.01$). This result indicates that high POS enhances the effect of training on transfer of training. Completely standardized structural coefficients for the theoretical model are presented in Fig. 3.

5. Discussion

Most prior studies have explored the relationships between training, transfer of training, and work performance in pairs. Such studies do not enable researchers to understand how these variables interact with one another in the analysis of an entire system. The current research addresses this limitation by testing a model of the relationships among training, transfer of training, and customer service quality, as well as the underlying mechanism. The findings of the research are threefold: First, there is no direct relationship between training and customer service quality; rather, training indirectly affects customer service quality through the mediation of transfer of training and job satisfaction. This finding demonstrates the importance of transfer of training as a bridging force in the relationship between training and employee consequence. It lends support to the literature on the positive relationships between training and transfer of training (e.g., Ford et al., 1998; Marler et al.,

Table 1
Means, standard deviations and correlations among variables.

Items	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Position	1.16	0.17						
2 Education	3.9	0.57	−0.04*					
3 Training	6.04	0.59	0.05	−0.24*				
4 POS	5.34	0.72	−0.07*	−0.05	0.32**			
5 Transfer of training	5.90	0.64	0.09	0.26*	0.23**	0.23**		
6 Job satisfaction	5.79	0.90	−0.04	0.16	0.34**	0.47**	0.19*	
7 Customer service quality	5.54	0.66	0.08	0.35**	−0.03	0.10	0.15*	0.38**

Note: N = 224; ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$; position was coded: 1 = non-managerial employee, 2 = managerial employee; POS, perceived organizational support.

Table 2
Comparisons of rival models.

Model	χ^2/df	P	CFI	NNFI	RMR	RMSEA
Model base—the hypothesized model	965.74/616	<0.001	0.95	0.94	0.052	0.050
Model 1: partial mediation of job satisfaction and transfer of training on training and customer service quality	991.88/615	<0.001	0.95	0.94	0.062	0.051
Model 2: no mediation of job satisfaction and transfer of training on training and customer service quality	1036.90/617	<0.001	0.94	0.93	0.097	0.12
Model 3: transfer of training as the only mediator between training and customer service quality	1042.86/611	<0.001	0.92	0.91	0.093	0.14
Model 4: job satisfaction as the only mediator between training and customer service quality	1134.86/611	<0.001	0.84	0.84	0.10	0.20
Model 5: full mediation of job satisfaction on training and transfer of training	986.70/612	<0.001	0.94	0.94	0.095	0.19
Model 6: no mediation of job satisfaction on training and transfer of training	1033.19/612	<0.001	0.93	0.92	0.093	0.18

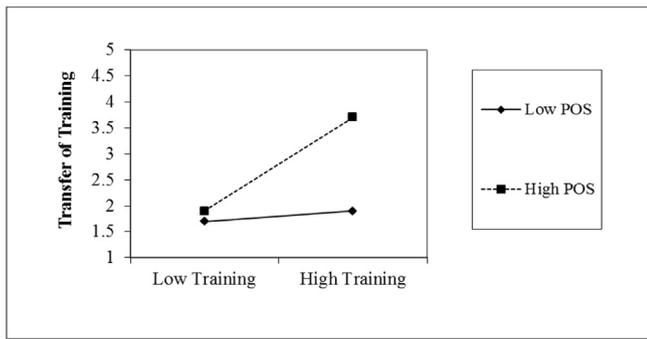


Fig. 2. Moderating effect of POS on relationship between training and transfer of training.

2006; Tziner et al., 2007), and between transfer of training and employee work attitudes and performance (Burke & Hutchins, 2008; Colquitt et al., 2000).

Second, training directly and indirectly influences transfer of training through the mediation of job satisfaction, which also partially mediates the relationship between transfer of training and customer service quality. This finding suggests that there is a significant positive relationship between job satisfaction and transfer of training. Therefore, training, transfer of training, and job satisfaction are interconnected and work collectively to influence customer service quality. These findings agree with the literature arguing that provision of adequate training is important to job satisfaction, which subsequently leads to better employee work outcomes (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Confirming the roles of transfer of training and job satisfaction in bridging training and customer service quality advances our understanding of the mechanism underlying the relationship between training and customer service quality. More specifically, training influences

customer service quality via a transactional process (i.e., skill changes through transfer of training) and a motivational process (i.e., job satisfaction). The existing literature suggests that training is of little value to organizations unless it is transferred to work performance (e.g. Holton et al., 1997). However, the current study suggests that while transfer of training is important in improving individual work performance, training influences work performance through the mediation of job satisfaction. Therefore, training and transfer of training are important in improving employee work performance.

Fourth, POS moderates the relationship between training and transfer of training; such that when the level of POS is high the training–transfer of training relationship becomes stronger. POS elicits employee transfer of training behavior because those who have received organizational support are more likely to repay their employer's support by transferring the learned knowledge and skills to work, and utilizing the new knowledge to improve customer service quality. The current study therefore contributes to the literature (e.g., Lim & Morris, 2006) and social exchange theory and the norm of reciprocity theory (Blau, 1964; Gouldner, 1960; Homans, 1961), which posit that employees that perceive a high level of organizational support tend to perform better and do more for the organization. This finding enables better understanding of the conditions under which employees are more likely to transfer new knowledge and skills.

5.1. Practical implications

This research has significant practical implications for management and for employees. First, the research suggests that both training and transfer of training are vital in improving customer service quality. This means it is important for organizations to provide training to employees and to help employees transfer new knowledge and skills. When training is provided, organizations

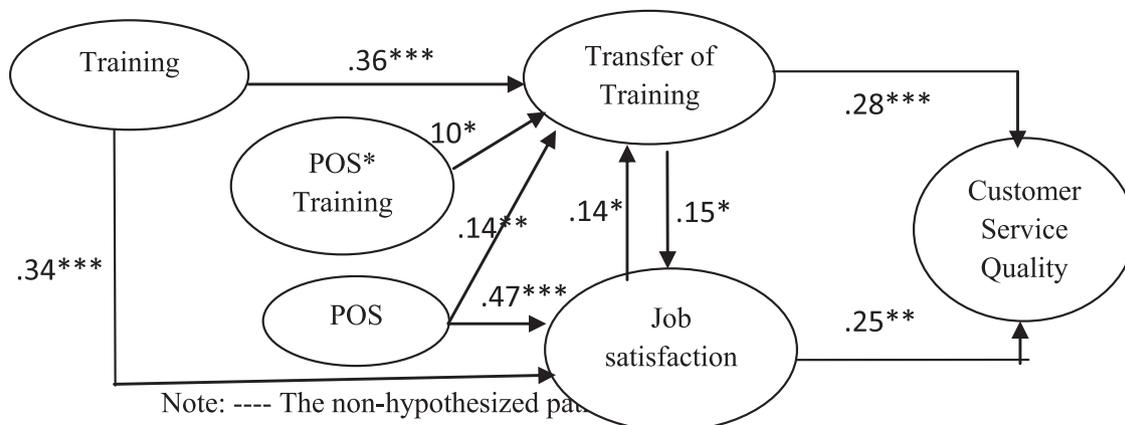


Fig. 3. Completely standardized structural coefficients for the theoretical model.

should ensure that training is effective. The training literature suggests that analysis, qualified trainers, well-designed training programs, effective training execution, and training auditing are essential for improving training effectiveness (Sahinidis & Bouris, 2008). More importantly, organizations should provide customer service related training to improve customer service quality. To facilitate transfer of training, organizations should provide employees with transfer of training opportunities and support. Moreover, this study suggests that POS embedded in organizational policies that value employees' contribution and ensure care of their wellbeing (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) is positively related to transfer of training and job satisfaction. Hence, organizations that aim to improve customer service quality should provide employees with adequate organizational support, such as work–life balance, employee development, and a safe work environment.

5.2. Limitations and future research directions

This research has several limitations that should be addressed in future studies. First, the data of this study comprise a convenience sample emanating from a limited number of enterprises in regional China. Therefore, the representativeness of the data is limited. We suggest that future studies include trainee participants from a wide range of sectors, and ideally from employees with cross-cultural backgrounds to enhance the representativeness of the sample. Second, given that the main purpose of this study is to test the relationships among training, transfer of training, and customer service quality, and the underlying mechanisms, some customary antecedents to and outcomes of transfer of training and customer service quality were excluded from the conceptual model. For example, trainee personality characteristics, perceived utility of training, job constraints (Bates, Holton, Seyler, & Carvalho, 2000; Bates & Khasawneh, 2005; Blume et al., 2009; Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Cheng & Hampson, 2008; Grossman & Salas, 2011; Holladay and Quiñones, 2003; Lim & Johnson, 2002; Marsick & Watkins, 2003; May & Kahnweiler, 2000), and co-worker support (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009) may influence the relationships being tested. Moreover, this study explores the effect of general training on customer service quality. The strength of the effect of customer service–focused training on customer service quality would be different from that of general training. Therefore, future research should consider using the measure specifically for customer service–focused training when exploring the training–customer service quality relationship. This study uses cross-sectional data, which makes it impossible to explore the causal relationships of the study variables. Future studies may consider conducting longitudinal research to gain better understanding of the effects of training and transfer of training on employee work performance. Further, this research is conducted at the individual level and does not consider contextual effects, such as organizational transfer of training climate. Neither does the research explore the collective effects of training and transfer of training on group performance. We suggest that future research conduct multilevel research by exploring the contextual effects on training and transfer of training and the collective effects of training and transfer of training on organizational performance.

6. Conclusion

Inconclusive findings in past research on the effects of training and transfer of training suggest that there is an urgent need to re-examine how training and transfer of training influence employee work performance. This study finds that job satisfaction is an important mediating mechanism among the relationships of

training, transfer of training and employee work performance. A high level of POS enhances the effect of training on transfer of training. Considering these findings, organizations endeavoring to improve customer service quality must ensure that adequate training is provided and must help transfer learned knowledge and skills and provide organizational support to employees. These training-related strategies will facilitate better transfer of training and increase employee job satisfaction, resulting in better customer service quality.

Appendix A. Scales and factor loadings

Training

1. My company provides adequate training opportunities to employees (.73).
2. Training is designed and conducted to substantially increase employee knowledge on the topic and develop new skills (.65).
3. Training is designed and conducted to influence my attitudes concerning this topic (.81).
4. Training is designed and conducted to help me better conceptualize what I do on the job (.67).

Transfer of training

1. S/he has applied the new knowledge and skills learned in the training class when performing his/her actual job (.89).
2. His or her job behavior changed following the training course (.81).
3. S/he changed his/her job behavior to be consistent with the material taught in the training course (.76).
4. His or her performance has improved due to the skills that he/she learned in the training course (.75).
5. The quality of his/her work improved after using new knowledge and skills acquired from the training course (.65).
6. S/he makes fewer mistakes in the job activities when using the new knowledge and skills that learned in training (.61).

Perceived organizational support

1. My organization cares about my opinions (.58).
2. My organization really cares about my wellbeing (.61).
3. My organization strongly considers my goals and values (.67).
4. Help is available from my organization when I have a problem (.62).
5. My organization is willing to help me when I need a special favor (.82).
6. My organization provides technological support to assist in transfer of training (.66).
7. My organization provides employees with opportunities to use new knowledge and skills (.66).
8. My organization recognizes and rewards transfer of training (.89).

Job satisfaction

1. In general, I like working here (.77).
2. In general, I don't like my job. (R) (.75).
3. All in all, I am satisfied with my job (.83).

Customer service quality

1. When he/she promises to do something by a certain time, he/she will do so (.64).

2. When customers have problems, he/she is sympathetic and reassuring (.79).
3. S/he is reliable (.71).
4. S/he performs his or her work effectively (.91).
5. S/he does not tell others exactly when services will be performed (R) (.55).
6. Customers do not receive prompt service from him/her (R) (.67).
7. S/he is not always willing to help others (R) (.88).
8. S/he does not respond to other requests promptly (R) (.77).
9. S/he can be trusted (.69).
10. People feel safe in my interactions with him/her (.70).
11. S/he is polite to customers (.71).
12. S/he often helps others (.88).
13. S/he does not give customers individual attention (R) (.90).
14. S/he does not know others' needs (R) (.83).

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