UTCC International Journal of Business and Economics (UTCC IJBE)
Volume 10 Number 3, December 2018

DOMINANT FACTORS INFLUENCING TRAINING EFFECTIVENESS (LEARNING AND TRANSFER PERFORMANCE) OF SMES IN BEIJING, CHINA: A STUDY ON THE HOTEL SECTOR

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Abstract

By drawing on existing literatures, the dominant factors influencing training effectiveness of SMEs in hotel sector in Beijing, China were modeled and investigated in this paper. Methodologies were employed to explore the dominant factors and how they work. It is found that trainee motivation, training need, training design, training implementation, continuous learning culture, and support from supervisors and peers influence learning performance directly, and indirectly impact transfer performance through learning performance. In addition, all of the influence is positive. The implications about small and medium hotels, specialists, organizations paying attention to the training effectiveness, and the relative study were discussed.

Key words: Human resource, Human resource development, Training, Training effectiveness, Learning performance, Transfer performance.

Introduction

SMEs play a big role in economy, and around half the SMEs in Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) are in Indonesia and China (Chris, 2001). Chinese SMEs account for 99.7% of the total number of national enterprises, and micro and small enterprises account for 97.3%. SMEs create as much as 60% of the GDP (gross domestic product), 59% of the tax, 60% of the import and export. They provide 80% of jobs in cities and towns (Communication Information News, 2013). In addition, WTO (World Trade Organization) reports, China will be one of the most attractive destinations by 2020 (He, 2000). The Hotel Sector as a part of the tourism industry is becoming more important. Unfortunately, intensified competition, lack of talents, high separation rate, and family-based management structure limit the survival and development of SMEs (Yushui, 2013; Yongxia, 2013).

Training is needed to improve the level of employees and managers, because it is an important component to competitive success and enterprise strategy (Gerald, 2000). Previous research results have consistently found that SME training implementation result in better company performance (Mako', 2005). However, direct losing of output, less application, prediction of high cost comparing benefit, financing difficulties and lack of professionals lead to the reluctance of investment in formal training programs (Tung-Chun, 2001; Antonios, 2011).

Considering the disadvantage of SMEs' training and the importance to SMEs, efficiently controlling the dominant factors that influence the training effectiveness is very meaningful. Because service industries are more dynamic than manufacturing, further training is more common in the service sector (Nai-Wen, 2008).

Until now, literatures concentrated on, the factors influencing the training effectiveness, training success, and transfer of training, or only focus on an enterprise (Nurhazani and Issam, 2012; Vasiliki, 2012; Junchuan *et al.*, 2001; Xinyuan, *et al.*, 2004), a special field (Hyochang *et al.*, 2006), or overseas (Dan and Amanuel, 2005). Less attention was paid on SMEs in China, especially the hotel industry, although it has its own distinct characteristics. This study was designed to test the influence of various factors on training effectiveness. The objectives of this research include: (1) To evaluate the dominant factors influence the learning performance and transfer

performance of SMEs that focus on the Hotel Sector in Beijing, China, and how they work; (2) To investigate the relationship between learning performance and transfer performance.

Literature review

SME

SME has been variously defined. The most common criterion is the number employed, but capitalization, assets, sales or turnover and production capacity are also used by various economies (Chris, 2001). The most common definition standard is less than 100 employees (Chris, 2001).

In China, the thresholds are established based on staff headcount, turnover, and balance sheet total as the one established by European commission, in addition, the characteristics are considered. In lodging and restaurant industry, the enterprises that have employees less than 300, or business income which is less than ￥100 million, are micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, in which the hotels with less than ten employs, and less than ￥1 million business income are micro-sized enterprises (The national statistics and the ministry of finance, 2011). Most of micro-enterprises have not yet reached a stage that training is needed, what they need first are specialist assistance with business planning (Boocock *et al.*, 1999). The smallest SMEs are often reluctant to fund any kind of training at all (Nai-Wen, 2008). This study did not cover the micro-enterprises. For the convenience of judgment, the hotel size depending on the number of rooms further which is the main measuring standard was considered here (Xiangmin, 2005).This study concentrates on the hotels with the number of rooms is equal or less than 600.

Training effectiveness

In this study, training effectiveness refers to the extent to which individuals considered they had acquired and applied what they have gained in the training to the job, which is evaluated by learning performance and transfer performance (Xiao, 1996; Baldwin and Ford, 1988; Junchuan et al., 2001; Business Dictionary, 2015).

Kirkpatrick’s four-level evaluation model evaluates training effectiveness by reaction, learning, behavior, and results (Kirkpatrick, 1959, 1987, 1996). However, the fourth level almost needs

the participation of each department. It is a big challenge to the trainings in SMEs, so results level was not considered in this study.

It is found that most of the studies about training evaluation focused on trainee reactions and the degree of learning (Tracey *et al.*, 1995). However, the performance on end-of-training did not mean the future performance on-the-job (Severin, 1952). Measuring the changes of job performance and relating these changes to measuring the achievement of learning goals are more appropriate evaluation (Kreiger *et al.*, 1993). Baldwin and Ford (1988), and Ford and Weissbein (1997) assessed training effectiveness by learning and retention which is regarded as training outputs, and generalization and maintenance which is regarded as conditions of transfer. In this study, the training outputs and conditions of transfer are modified to training performance and transfer performance separately.

Baldwin and Ford (1988), and Ford and Weissbein (1997) believed that learning and retention have direct effects on generalization and maintenance. Similarly, even though some study found that there is no-significant relationship between learning performance and transfer performance, more researches illustrated that there is significant and positive relationship between them (Eddie and Danny, 2001; Hyochang *et al.*, 2006; Carnevale and Schultz, 1990). Based on the conclusions above, it is hypothesized:

H1: Learning performance significantly influences transfer performance.

In addition, higher amounts of researches on training effectiveness are based on trainer's or manager's perspectives. However, the frontline employee's perspective is important to be considered, because trainee's reaction is a potential predictor of training effectiveness (Xinyuan *et al.,* 2004; Morgan and Casper, 2000). Employee's perspective was adopted while evaluating the training effective in this study.

Designing factors influencing training effectiveness

The very common model (Table A-1) researching training effectiveness was established by Baldwin and Ford (1988), and further updated by Ford and Weissbein (1997). The factors were obtained mainly according to this model.

Training design dimension in Baldwin and Ford's Model consists of the incorporation of learning principles, the sequencing of training materials, and the

job relevance of training contents (Baldwin and Ford, 1988; Ford and Weissbein, 1997). These three factors are included in training design and training implementation of the training process. Tracey and Tews (1995) deemed opinions to training concentrated on evaluation of training need, training implementation, and training assessment. However, a long-standing principle showed that trainers must first assess the cause of a performance situation to ensure an appropriate intervention is employed (McGehee and Thayer, 1961). It looks more appreciate to consider training dimension by training process, which means training need and training assessment are added.

Trainees' characteristics in Baldwin and Ford's Model consists of ability, personality, and motivation, which may directly influence training transfer (Baldwin and Ford, 1988; Ford and Weissbein, 1997), among which motivation was a very popular one tested by the previous studies (Baldwin and Ford, 1988; Ford and Weissbein, 1997; Vasiliki and Maria, 2012; Hamid et al., 2012). Motivation was even treated as a very important factor influencing training effectiveness (Xinyuan *et al.*, 2006; Vasiliki, 2012). Desinmone and Harris (1998) indicated that motivation of trainee determined trainability. So, only motivation was kept in trainee characteristics.

All the above efforts were transferred to the following ten hypotheses:

H1: Learning performance significantly influences transfer performance.

H2: Training process related factors significantly influence learning performance.

H3: Trainee motivation significantly influences learning performance.

H4: Trainee motivation significantly influences transfer performance.

H5: Work environment significantly influences learning performance.

H6: Work environment significantly influences transfer performance.

Conceptual framework

According to the prior researches and incorporating appropriate variables for SMEs in hotel sector in China, the conceptual framework is as follow (Figure 1).

Research methodology

Population and sample

The population of this study is the employees who work in small and medium hotels according to the data from National Bureau of Statistics of China, which is 150,808 (http://data.stats.gov.cn/workspace/index?m=fsnd).

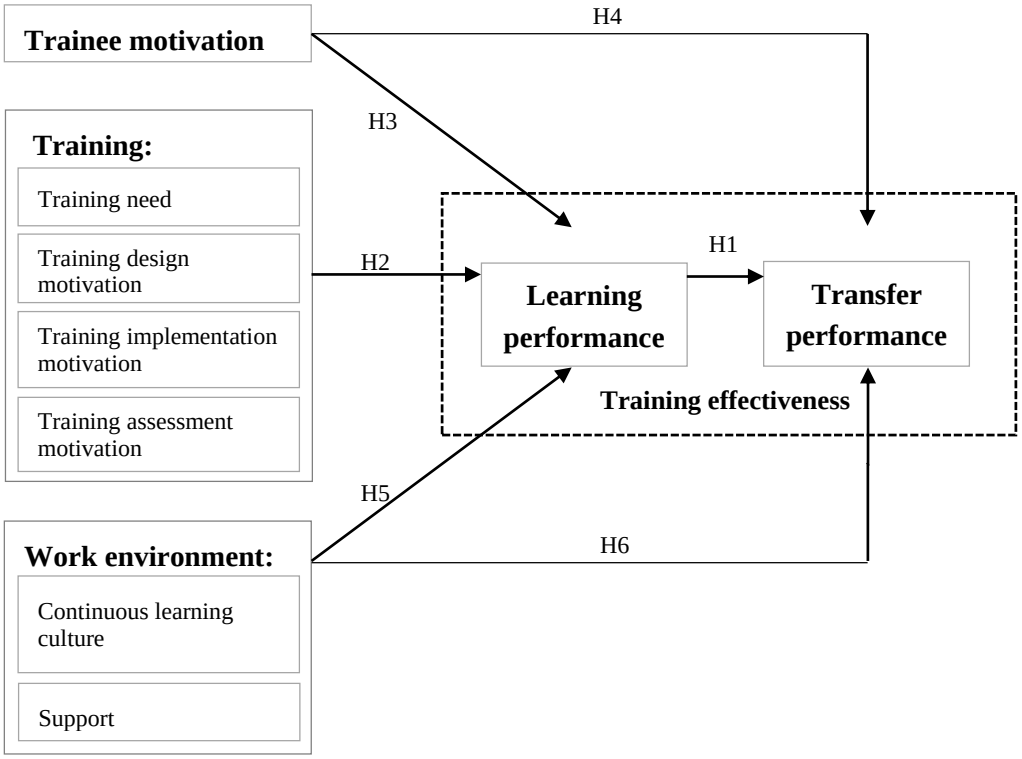

Figure 1 Conceptual framework

According to formula by Yamane (1973), the sample size of this study at 95% confidence level was calculated as follow:

$$n=\frac{N}{1+Ne^2}=\frac{150{,}808}{1+150{,}808\times 0.05^2}=377.02\approx 378$$

Considering the invalid questionnaires that might exist, 400 questionnaires were randomly distributed to respondents in 16 districts of Beijing to ensure that the valid questionnaires collected back are more than 378, which accords to the distribution of population (Table A-2).

Questionnaire design and measures pretest of research instrument

A series of items in questionnaires to measure all of factors were derived according to the conceptual framework and the previous literatures (Tun-chun, 2001; Swaminathan and Gowri, 2011; Xinyuan et al., 2004; Hyochang et al., 2006; Akhila et al., 2011; Osman, 2010; Tracey et al., 1995; Jane, 1998; Dan and Amanuel, 2005; Noe and Schmitt, 1986; Kossek et al., 1998; Pugh and Bergin, 2006; Lee, 1995; The Ministry of Labor and Social Security, and China association of worker education and vocational training, 2008; Rouiller and Goldstein, 1993; Xiao, 1996). Based on the review, a draft of the questionnaires consisting of Chinese version and English version were designed, and the pretest was carried out to ensure that the survey instrument is easy to understand for the respondents by evaluating its validity and reliability. 30 employees working in the SMEs of hotels in Beijing, China, were investigated. They were not included in the main study sample.

The retest reliability test and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient were implemented, and 0.7 is regarded as the cutoff value for being acceptable and reliable according to the suggestion from previous researches (Cronbach, 1951; Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). The results in Table 1 show that the questionnaires can produce consistent results.

Table 1 Reliability test by Cronbach's alpha

No.	Variables	Amount of items	Cronbach's Alpha	
			Pretest	Final
1	**Training**	**4**	**0.930**	**0.900**
	Training need	3	0.821	0.787
	Training design	5	0.890	0.841
	Training implementation	6	0.900	0.889
	Training assessment	4	0.856	0.842
2	**Work environment**	**2**	**0.937**	**0.875**
	Continuous learning performance	6	0.883	0.885
	Support	6	0.948	0.886
3	**Trainee motivation**	**7**	**0.860**	**0.845**
4	**Learning performance**	**3**	**0.734**	**0.784**
5	**Transfer performance**	**4**	**0.800**	**0.866**

There are three steps to test the validity of questionnaires: First of all, the specialists in the area of human resource development or management in hotel industry were asked to evaluate whether the factors influence the training effectiveness. Then, professionals of English and Chinese language were invited to evaluate the quality of the translation between two versions. Finally, the 30 employees were asked to fill out the questionnaires and to give suggestion about any item that could be ambiguous or hard to understand or difficult to answer.

Basing on comments and suggestions from each step of validity test, some items in the questionnaires were modified.

Data collection and analysis

On door to door basis, 41% of the hotels were randomly visited. The researcher sought help from well-connected friends who could reach to the respondents,

which made the other 59% of the hotels visited. Questionnaires were randomly sent out to the respondents who were non-managerial employees, because front-line employee's perspective was adopted in this study. The completed survey forms were collected directly.

The collected data was analyzed through the following methodologies:

Descriptive analysis was used for analyzing demographic information (Sadegh and Azadeh, 2012).

Correlation analysis was used for testing whether there were close relationship between independent variables and dependent variables. The factors did not significantly influence the dependent variables were rejected. Pearson correlation coefficient (R) and the Probability (P) were used in the study (Iman, 2013; Anderson et al, 2013). Based on the result of correlation analysis, regression analysis and multiple regression analysis were mainly used to finally get the dominant factors, and test how these factors influenced the dependent variables (Dan and Amanuel, 2005; Nurhazani and Issam, 2012; Xinyuan et al., 2004).

Results

Summary the demographic information by using descriptive analysis

378 valid questionnaires from 46 hotels were collected back. A demographic profile about respondents was provided in Table2

Data analysis and findings

Correlation analysis

The correlation matrix (Table 3) proved that all the variables were related significantly with each other, which provides an adequate basis for the regression analysis and multiple regression analysis (Anderson et al, 2013).

Hypothesis testing

The regression analysis was used for testing hypothesis. The results (Table 4 and Table 5) showed that, all the regressions were statistically significant ($P < 0.05$). Learning performance could explain 46.5% ($R^2=0.465$) of the variation of the transfer performance. Trainee motivation could explain 39.6% ($R^2=0.396$) and 46.3% ($R^2=0.463$) of the variation of the learning performance and transfer performance separately. Learning performance positively affects

the transfer performance, in addition, trainee motivation positively influence learning performance and transfer performance too (B＞0).

Multiple regression analysis was carried out to test the second, the fifth, and the sixth hypotheses. According to the results in Table 5, Model 3 of the second hypothesis which has the best goodness of fit was chosen, because it not only had the biggest R^2(0.336 ＞ 0.313 ＞ 0.275) and adjusted R^2(0.331＞0.309＞0.274), but also had the smallest standard error of the estimate. In this model, training assessment was removed. Similarly, Model 2 was chosen respectively in the fifth and the sixth hypotheses. The chosen three regression equations of the Models are statistically significant (P＜ 0.05).

Considering the value of T-test in Table 6, each predictor makes sense (P＜0.05). Among factors of training process, training implementation is the most important variable influencing the learning performance, which is followed by training need and training design (0.244 ＞ 0.238 ＞ 0.164). The tested relationships were positive (B＞0). In work environment dimension, both continuous learning culture and support from supervisors and colleagues could positively affect learning performance and transfer performance (B＞0), and the former one worked more than

Table 2 Demographic of respondents

Demographic		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	132	34.9
	Female	246	65.1
Age	18-22	106	28.0
	23-27	129	34.1
	28-32	58	15.3
	33-37	31	8.2
	38-42	26	6.9
	Over 42 years old	28	7.4
Marital status	Single	211	55.8
	Married	167	44.2
Educational level	Under high school	76	20.1
	High school	129	34.1
	Associate, bachelor	169	44.7
	Master	4	1.1
Working years	Below 3 years	142	37.6
	3-6 years	129	34.1
	7-10 years	50	13.2
	11-14 years	18	4.8
	Over 14 years	39	10.3

Table 3 Correlation matrix

	TN	TD	TI	TA	CL	Su	TM	LP	TP
TN	1								
TD	0.724**	1							
TI	0.645**	0.773**	1						
TA	0.617**	0.666**	0.675**	1					
CLC	0.618**	0.675**	0.684**	0.649**	1				
Su	0.565**	0.611**	0.655**	0.592**	0.778**	1			
TM	0.504**	0.494**	0.462**	0.436**	0.532**	0.517*	1		
LP	0.514**	0.525**	0.524**	0.451**	0.521**	0.497*	0.630**	1	
TP	0.598**	0.595**	0.602**	0.516**	0.614**	0.604*	0.680**	0.682*	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed)

TN = Training need, TD = Training design, TI = Training implementation,

TA = Training assessment, CLC = Continuous learning culture, Su = Support,

TM = Trainee motivation, LP = Learning performance, TP = Transfer performance.

Table 4 Regression results of H1, H3, & H4

Hypotheses	R	R^2	F	P-value
H1 (TP on LP)	0.682	0.465	326.878	0.000
H3 (LP on TM)	0.630	0.396	246.999	0.000
H4 (TP on TM)	0.680	0.463	323.754	0.000

Table 5 Multiple regression of H2, H9, H10

Hypotheses	Model Name	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	P-value
H2 (LP on T[a])	1	0.275[b]	0.274	0.63827	142.936	0.000
	2	0.313[c]	0.309	0.62230	85.459	0.000
	3	0.336[d]	0.331	0.61260	63.110	0.000
H5 (WE[e] on LP)	1	0.272[f]	0.270	0.63986	140.361	0.000
	2	0.293[g]	0.289	0.63132	77.712	0.000
H6 (WE on TP)	1	0.377[h]	0.375	0.61366	227.112	0.000
	2	0.417[i]	0.414	0.59427	134.057	0.000

a. T is training.

b. Predictors: (Constant), training design

c. Predictors: (Constant), training design, training need

d. Predictors: (Constant), training design, training need, training implementation

e. WE is work environment.

f. Predictors: (Constant), continuous learning culture

g. Predictors: (Constant), continuous learning culture, support

h. Predictors: (Constant), continuous learning culture

i. Predictors: (Constant), continuous learning culture, support

the later one (0.341＞0.232, 0.365＞0.320).

The results of the hypothesis testing are shown in the following Table 7. Based on the hypothesis testing results, the conceptual framework was modified as follow (Figure 2).

Table 6 Regression results of H1, H2, H5, H6, H9, & H10

Hypotheses	Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	P-value
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
H1	(Constant)	1.147	0.147		7.823	0.000
	LE	0.707	0.039	0.682	18.080	0.000
H2	(Constant)	1.408	0.171		8.250	0.000
	TI	0.245	0.068	0.244	3.600	0.000
	TN	0.206	0.054	0.238	3.818	0.000
	TD	0.165	0.075	0.164	2.189	0.029
H3	(Constant)	1.214	0.160		7.606	0.000
	TM	0.667	0.042	0.630	15.716	0.000
H4	(Constant)	0.988	0.156		6.335	0.000
	TM	0.747	0.042	0.680	17.993	0.000
H5	(Constant)	1.557	0.173		8.978	0.000
	CLC	0.343	0.069	0.341	4.934	0.000
	Su	0.226	0.067	0.232	3.353	0.001
H6	(Constant)	1.121	0.163		6.863	0.000
	CLC	0.380	0.065	0.365	5.813	0.000
	Su	0.323	0.063	0.320	5.093	0.000

Conclusion, discussion, and recommendation

Conclusion and Discussion

Dan and Amanuel (2005) tested training effectiveness by post-training declarative knowledge, training transfer, training generation, and training maintenance. Hamid et al. (2012) only focused on the transfer of the training. This study paid attention on both learning performance and transfer performance, which supported the method of Hyochang et al. (2006). In addition, it tested the relationship between learning performance and transfer performance further. The finding showed that learning performance positively influenced transfer performance, which supports the previous studies (Baldwin and Ford, 1988; Ford and Weissbin, 1997; Hyochang, et al., 2006).

Vasiliki and Maria (2012) only paid attention on trainee characteristics, training design, and work environment. Vimala and Yanan (2011) concerned on types of training, training environment and work environment. This study is a synthesis of these.

Training

Training design was not only evaluated by content, but also evaluated by training objectives, material, pedagogical methods, the length of the course, trainers, the organization of the training and training environment were considered in this study.

Table 7 Summary of the hypothesis testing results

Item	Hypothesis	Result
H1	Learning performance significantly influences transfer performance.	Accepted
H2	H2: Training process related factors significantly influence learning performance.	Rejected
	H2-1: Training need significantly influences learning performance.	Accepted
	H2-2: Training design significantly influences learning performance.	Accepted
	H2-3: Training implementation significantly influences learning performance.	Accepted
	H2-4: Training assessment significantly influences learning performance.	Rejected
H3	Trainee motivation significantly influences learning performance.	Accepted
H4	Trainee motivation significantly influences transfer performance.	Accepted
H5	H9: Work environment significantly influences learning performance.	Accepted
	H9-1: Continuous learning culture significantly influences learning performance.	Accepted
	H9-2: Support significantly influences learning performance.	Accepted
H6	H10: Work environment significantly influences transfer performance.	Accepted
	H10-1: Continuous learning culture significantly influences transfer performance.	Accepted
	H10-2: Support significantly influences transfer performance.	Accepted

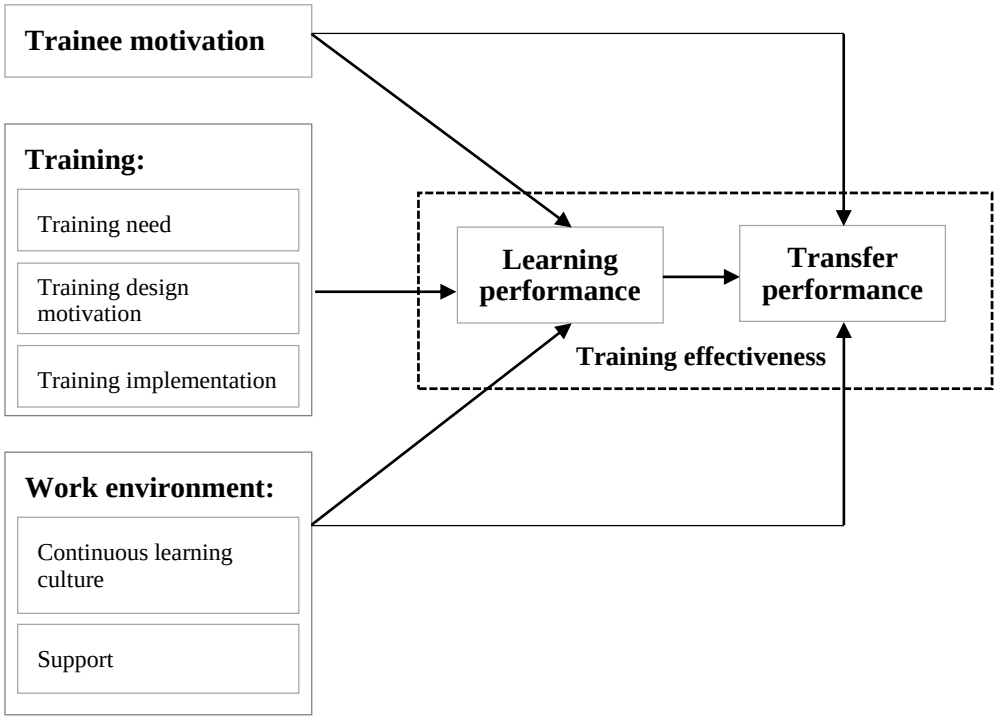

Figure 2 Conceptual framework

Content has a positive impact on learning and acquisition (Hyochang *et al.*, 2006; Vasiliki, 2012). Iqbal (2010) proved that training methods, trainer, training management, training environment, and training material have significant positive impact on reaction in training and learning. Xinyuan *et al.* (2006) found that training assessment has a significant influence on training effectiveness, but training implementation does not work. Junchuan *et al.* (2001) further revealed that training assessment has significant impact on learning performance, which is contradicted by this study. The reasons could be that training assessment is not that efficient because of the lack of professionals or the test results fail to use for stimulating training effectiveness.

Trainee motivation

If the employees are fully motivated towards training program, they will pay full attention and there will be more chances for success of training program (Punia and Saurabh, 2013). Training motivation is the factor which had significant influence on the training effectiveness (Hyochang *et al.*, 2006;

Punia and Kant, 2013; Hamid *et al.*, 2012; Homklin *et al.*, 2013), which is supported by this study.

Work environment

Continuous learning culture has significant impact on training or application rate (Tracey *et al.*, 1995; Elangovan and Karakowsky, 1999). This study further emphasized that there is positive impact. There is strong relationship between management support and training effectiveness (Tun-chun, 2001). Supervisors are directly related to transfer performance (Birdi and Kamal, 2005; Hyochang *et al.*, 2006), but peer support enhances learning transfer (Jefferey *et al.*, 1995; Xinyuan *et al.*, 2004).

In online learning, consistent learning environment and support from supervisors only affect learning performance, but not transfer performance (Hyochang *et al.*, 2006). Nurhazani and Issam (2012) argued that rewards system and social support from top management and supervisors make positive contribution to training effectiveness. It is found that organizational environment affects training effectiveness (Junchuan et al., 2001), which is supported by this paper.

Contributions and limitation

Considering the financial limitations of SMEs (Ferna´ ndez and Nieto, 2005), it is very significant to achieve a good training effectiveness with low cost in small and medium hotels. It is meaningful to increase the success of trainings or make the training more efficient by controlling the dominant factors well as follows:

It is needed to assess training need with appropriate method to find out the right training need accurately and supply the right content by appropriate approach in an applicable environment. It is important that organize the training well in a good training environment, and implement training by a right trainer.

Building performance appraisal system that ties financial reward with competence and distributing the challenging job assignment that employee is interested in are good methods to develop continuous learning culture. The immediate supervisors could supply time for trainee to attend training and condition to apply what the trainee learned, and show feedback about the application.

There are rarely researches focused on dominant factors influencing training effectiveness in SMEs of hotel sector in

Beijing, China. The findings provide precondition for the further study about one dimension, which could be training, work environment, trainee characteristics in this scale.

The study only focused on the hotel sector in the Beijing, which will limit the generalization. It is a large amount of questions to some respondents, and they did not answer carefully. The sampling groups came from various backgrounds, which might lead to more explanations were needed by some respondents. Therefore, the answer might be distorted. In addition, the variables used for evaluating the hypotheses are only part dimensions chosen from the systematic measurement built by previous researchers, which might increase or decrease the score of each variable.

Management implication

Hotels, training organizations, and specialist can utilize results of this study as a guideline for improving training effectiveness. To ensure the quality of training in SMEs of Hotel industry, they can make sure the training need, training design, training implication, trainee motivation, continuous learning culture, and support should be achieved.

Even though training need, training design, and training implication are very important to ensure training quality, trainee motivation and work environment could be paid more attention, because it not only directly affect learning performance, but also directly influence on transfer performance.

Recommendations for the future research

Future research can collect data from more industries and areas or other one area, or focus on one of the variables used in this study with more systematic dimensions. Training effectiveness can be evaluated further to result level. The supervisor's perspective and peer's perspective can be considered, even exam score can be used for testing the variables, especially the learning performance part.

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Appendix

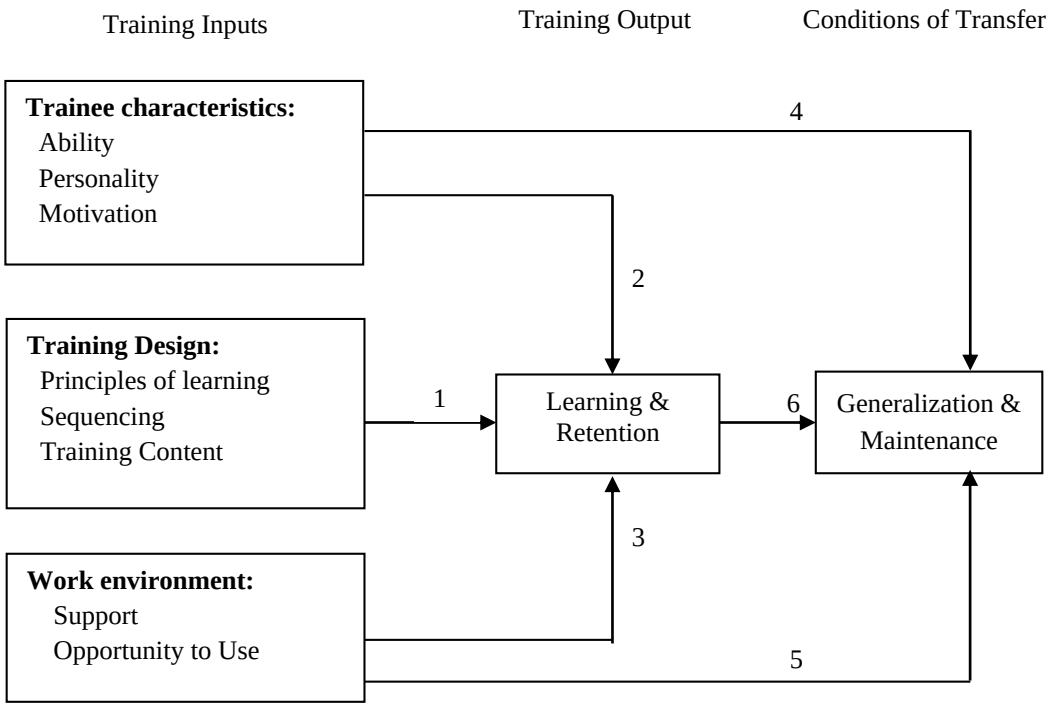

Figure A Baldwin and Ford's model

(Source: Ford and Weissbein, 1997, p.24)

Table A Distribution of employees working in SMEs of the hotel in Beijing

No.	District	No. of hotel	No. of employees	% of employees	Sub-sample size
1	Chaoang District	809	102,080	24.22%	97
2	Dongcheng District	394	86,068	20.42%	82
3	Haidian District	696	76,303	18.10%	72
4	Xicheng District	473	50,789	12.05%	48
5	Daxing District	85	22,791	5.41%	22
6	Fengtai District	264	20,655	4.90%	20
7	Shunyi District	88	18,042	4.28%	17
8	Changping District	95	13,486	3.20%	13
9	Shijingshan District	51	6,589	1.56%	6
10	Huairou District	57	4,382	1.04%	4
11	Fangshan District	61	4,053	0.96%	4
12	Tongzhou District	44	4,029	0.96%	4
13	Mentougou District	34	3,888	0.92%	4
14	Miyun District	31	3,154	0.75%	3
15	Pinggu District	31	2,620	0.62%	2
16	Yanqing District	29	2,553	0.61%	2
	Total	**3,242**	**421,482**	**100.00%**	**400**

(Source: Beijing Municipal Bureau of Statistics, China, 2013)