

Chapter 6

Selection for Training: The Forgotten Employment Decision?

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Training selection decisions are employment decisions that have important implications for influencing the career advancement outcomes for employees. Employees who receive training are generally afforded more opportunities to advance within the organization, as well as greater career mobility relative to employees not selected into training programs. This can present ethical and legal issues when training opportunities are not provided to employees in an equitable fashion. Organizations often must face this issue due to practical constraints that require training opportunities occur at different points in time for employees or only for a subset of the total workforce. Organizations also must balance their responsibility to ensure their employment practices are free from discrimination and minimize adverse impact against protected classes (ADA, 1990; ADEA, 1967; Title VII, 1964; UGESP, 1978). Therefore, the presence of adverse impact in training selection decisions can increase the likelihood that organizations may face discrimination lawsuits (Dukes v. Wal-Mart, 2001; EEOC v. Ford Motor Co., 2005; Maurer & Rafuse, 2001).

This chapter reviews recent litigation brought against organizations based on charges of unequal opportunities to participate in training events. These examples demonstrate the ethical responsibility of organizations to insure the criteria used to select employees for training does not disproportionately exclude protected classes. Additionally, the Training Opportunity Decision Making (TODM) model is introduced as a framework to demonstrate the organizational context and process in which training selection decisions occur and to provide a description of the anticipated outcomes associated with these decisions. Future directions for research in the empirical examination of the TODM are discussed.

Legal Implications of Training Selection

In 2005, Ford Motor Company agreed to pay an \$8.55 million settlement to a nationwide class of African-Americans who were rejected for an apprenticeship training program after taking a mechanical aptitude test known as the Apprenticeship Training Selection System (ATSS).

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Although the test had been validated in 1991, it continued to evidence disparate impact by selecting White applicants for entry into the training program at a significantly higher rate than African-American applicants. Despite developing a less discriminatory selection measure in subsequent years, Ford chose not to modify its selection procedures. In addition to paying monetary relief, Ford agreed to replace the ATSS with an alternative selection procedure that would be valid for predicting job success and reducing adverse impact (*EEOC v. Ford Motor Co. and United Automobile Workers of America*, 2005).

Other high-profile cases illustrate a growing concern regarding barriers to training opportunities in organizations. For example, in 1999, an African-American mechanic at American Eagle was awarded \$950,000 in damages for claims of a racially hostile atmosphere in maintenance facilities and of unequal treatment in training and advancement opportunities (*The Dallas Morning News*, 1999). A 47-year-old female was awarded \$355,000 in 1993 by Chrysler Corporation after charging that a younger male with less seniority received preferential treatment in terms of special job training and shift selection (*Automotive News*, 1996). In 2002, American Express Financial Advisors Inc. was ordered to pay \$31 million to three female employees who claimed they were provided fewer training opportunities than their male counterparts (*Minneapolis St. Paul Business Journal*, 2002). Similarly, four female brokers from Smith Barney were awarded \$33 million in 2008 after charging the company of depriving females of equal training and sales support (*Forbes*, 2008). The Paul Hall Center for Maritime Training and Education and Seafarers International agreed to pay \$625,000 in monetary relief to a group of applicants who were refused admission to their apprenticeship program because they were over 40 (*EEOC v. Seafarers International Union*, 2005). In 2001, a class-action lawsuit against Wal-Mart Stores Inc. was filed on behalf of over 1.6 million female workers who alleged they were denied access to training opportunities necessary for promotion because of their sex (*Dukes v. Wal-Mart*, 2001). Finally, in 1991, the Assistant Comptroller General of the General Accounting Office (GAO) testified before Congress that racial and gender disparities were found in up to 20% of the geographic locations served by the \$4.6 billion Job Training Partnership Act program. According to the GAO, females were more likely than men to receive classroom training for lower-wage jobs and White participants were more likely to receive classroom and on-the-job training, while African-American participants were more likely to receive only job search assistance (*The Washington Times*, 1991).

In sum, these cases demonstrate that disparate impact in selection for training opportunities can cost organizations a great deal of time and money. Although numerous charges of disparate treatment and disparate impact in personnel selection decisions are brought forth each year, the cases described above suggest more attention should be paid to ensuring training opportunities in organizations that utilize a fair and ethical process to minimize adverse impact and perceptions of unfairness within the organization.

Opportunities for Training

Estimates indicate that organizations spend upwards of \$134 billion every year on training, learning, and development (Paradise, 2009). There are numerous definitions of training in the literature, but most definitions borrow from McGehee and Thayer's (1961) classic model, which defines training as the formal procedures that an organization uses to facilitate learning so the resultant behavior contributes to the attainment of the company's goals and objectives. Although training is typically approached in the literature from an organizational behavior perspective,

identifying and selecting employees for training opportunities is an employment decision subject to legal regulations. The Uniform Guidelines on Employment Selection Procedures (1978) explicitly state,

Employment decisions include but are not limited to hiring, promotion, demotion, membership, referral, retention, and licensing and certification, to the extent that licensing and certification may be covered by Federal equal employment opportunity law. Other selection decisions, such as *selection for training* or transfer, may also be considered employment decisions if they lead to any of the decisions listed above. (emphasis added, p. 7)

Selection for training is a critical employment decision because employees who complete certain training programs may improve their knowledge and skills which can lead to an increase in available opportunities for promotions, skill-based pay increases, bonuses, and other career advancement outcomes. Organizational decision makers need to carefully consider the process and outcomes associated with identifying employees for participation in training programs. A thorough understanding of the environment and outcomes associated with training selection decisions should facilitate informed decision making to better address these issues.

Despite a proliferation of frameworks and models focused on training issues such as training needs analysis (Goldstein & Ford, 2002), instructional design (Gagne, Briggs, & Wager, 1992), trainee individual differences (Herold, Davis, Fedor, & Parsons, 2002), training transfer (Baldwin & Ford, 1988), training delivery (Wexley & Latham, 2002), and training evaluation (Kirkpatrick, 1976), there is little work or guidance available in the training literature on the legal and ethical implications of decision making in the selection of employees for training opportunities. Therefore, the following sections in this chapter are devoted towards developing a conceptual framework to identify the characteristics of training selection decisions in organizations.

A Model of Decision Making in Selecting Employees for Training Opportunities

The Radford Multilevel Model of Training Opportunity Decision Making (TODM) is presented in Fig. 6.1. The TODM model describes how training selection decisions made at the organizational level can have important implications at the employee level on career advancement outcomes. The three primary antecedents to TODM include training culture, training policy, and

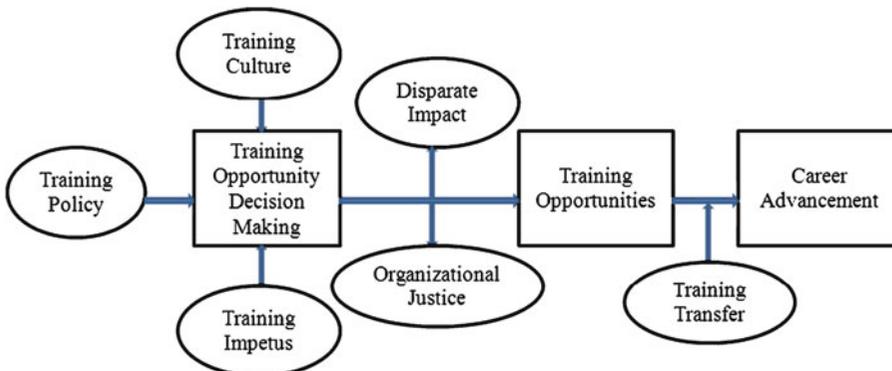


Fig. 6.1 The Radford multilevel model of training opportunity decision making (TODM)

training impetus. We also propose that training selection decisions made by the organization influence employee perceptions of organizational justice and disparate impact (or lack thereof) as it related to training opportunities. Finally, career advancement opportunities that arise from training opportunities are moderated by five characteristics of the training transfer environment consisting of identical elements, opportunities for practice, multiple contexts, supervisor support, and maintenance.

Antecedents of TODM

Training Culture

Training culture refers to the extent that training is emphasized and valued in an organization. Organizations with a strong training culture are likely to place greater importance and value on TODM, while organizations with a weak training culture are likely to place little importance or even neglect a consideration of TODM process. A weak training culture presents major obstacles to TODM, and resources should be devoted to improving the training culture before further interventions can be considered. Training culture should be assessed during the organizational analysis step of a training needs assessment (Goldstein & Ford, 2002).

Training Policy

Training policy refers to the formal guidelines (written or otherwise) established by an organization regarding its training requirements. For some jobs, such as medical or teaching jobs, continuous training is required to maintain licensure or certification. Many organizations require a certain amount of training hours to remain employed with the organization. Some organizations may require a certain number of training hours to be considered for promotion or advancement, while some companies offer a “buffet-style” option in which employees can pick and choose the training programs they would like to attend. The training requirements outlined in the formal policies and procedures have a direct influence on defining the organization’s training culture. Organizations that value training will provide explicit information about expectations for training and procedures in policy manuals. A potential problematic issue organizations may face is deciding which employees receive training first. If a company-wide training initiative is undertaken, the organization must select an initial number of employees to attend the training to maintain an acceptable level of productivity. A typical solution is to give the most senior employees priority, or to choose employees from departments or units most affected by the training. However, these rules of thumb could be particularly problematic for larger organizations, where training inclusion criteria still includes a substantial number of employees in the potential training participants’ pool. Moreover, regardless of the size of the organization, a situation could arise where training is required for a higher level position within the company with an urgent application deadline and employees who first complete the training may have an advantage in the selection process that would not be available to employees who have not yet received the training. Therefore, organizations need to develop policies to clearly define the standard operating procedures in these scenarios (e.g., extend the promotion application).

Training Impetus

Training impetus refers to the formal process used to identify potential participants for training programs. For example, organizations often use performance evaluation data to determine training needs (Goldstein & Ford, 2002). Typically, training needs can be determined by performance evaluation ratings, a self-evaluation process, or a combination of both techniques. The self-evaluation process requires formal documentation of the employee's self-rated areas of weaknesses. Employees that nominate themselves voluntarily for training may experience greater motivation to learn from a training program than those who are forced to attend training involuntarily. Another important consideration is the possibility of a stigma associated with employees who are required to complete remedial training due to poor performance. For example, an employee may experience reduced self-esteem and motivation if he or she learns that his or her coworkers are not required to participate in additional training. An organization should explicitly state in its policy manual the procedures and steps required for identifying and selecting employees for remedial or additional training. The organization should make an effort to assure attendance at these training sessions remains confidential and limit the interactions, to the degree possible, between involuntary trainees and other employees.

Consequences of TODM

Disparate Impact

Disparate impact occurs when an employment decision has a disproportionately negative effect on members of a protected group (UGESP, 1978). The UGESP explicitly states that selection for training opportunities is considered an employment decision. Organizations need to consider how training selection decisions can lead to disparate impact in access to training opportunities.

Several methods of establishing disparate impact have been proposed. These methods fall into two categories: statistical tests (e.g., standard deviation, Fisher's exact test) or practical tests (e.g., impact ratios or the 4/5ths rule, phi test, or the flip-flop test). Statistical tests provide information about the likelihood and significance of disparate impact data. Practical tests indicate rules of thumb for evaluating the presence of disparate impact in organizations. Previous case law decisions have demonstrated that Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) officials and selection experts rely on both types of tests to evaluate the presence and severity of disparate impact within the organization (Gatewood, Field, & Barrick, 2008). Training decision makers must be aware of the employment decision guidelines such as the UGESP and relevant case law with respect to training selection decisions. Further, decision makers need to manage the collection and evaluation of data related to the disparate impact of training decisions within the organization. These last two points are particularly noteworthy because employment guidelines and disparate impact analyses are rarely mentioned in organizational training literature.

Organizational Justice

Organizational justice refers to employees' perceptions of fairness in the workplace (Levy, 2009). The three components of organizational justice are distributive justice, the extent to which the employee perceives the outcome of a decision to be fair; procedural justice, the extent to which

the employee perceives the procedures used to arrive at the outcome of the decision as fair; and interactional justice, the extent to which the employee feels he or she was treated fairly in their interactions with the authority figure that communicated the decision (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001). Organizational justice has been linked to numerous work-related attitudes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, perceived organizational support, counterproductive work behaviors, and task and contextual performance (Ambrose & Schminke, 2003; Aryee, Chen, & Budhwar, 2004; Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Moorman, 1991).

Perceptions of fairness in organizations are influenced by the outcomes of organizational decisions. The organizational justice literature has emphasized the need for organizational decision makers to consider not only the outcomes of their decisions but also employees' reactions to those decisions, given the relationships between organizational justice perceptions and work-related attitudes and work outcomes (Folger & Konovsky, 1989). Training selection fairness (TSF) represents the extent to which employees perceive the training selection decision (distributive), the procedures used to arrive at the training selection decision (procedural), and their interactions with the authority figure that communicated the training selection decision (interactional) as fair.

TSF should be considered in addition to disparate impact analyses by training decision makers, and organizations should make attempts to assess employee perceptions of TSF. The quality of the information organizations provide to employees about training selection process can influence employees' organizational justice perceptions about training opportunities within the organization. Therefore, company policy manuals should make explicit the procedures required for employees to be selected for training opportunities, and these procedures should follow those stated in the UGESP. Organizations should also provide an appeals process for those who have been denied training opportunities as well as explicit statements of how these appeals will be handled. Research has indicated the courts prefer organizational decision-making systems that have an appeals component in place (Werner & Bolino, 1997).

From Training Opportunity to Career Advancement: Training Transfer as a Moderator

The last link in the TODM model is between training opportunities and career advancement. This link highlights how equal opportunity for training selection leads to equal opportunities for career advancement. On the other hand, barriers to training opportunities can lead to barriers for career advancement opportunities. However, we propose that this relationship is moderated by the extent to which trained knowledge and skills transfer to the job itself.

Training Transfer

Training transfer refers to the extent that knowledge and skills learned in training are utilized on the job (Goldstein & Ford, 2002). Estimates suggest that approximately 30% of what people learn in training actually gets used on the job (Robinson & Robinson, 1995; Saks & Belcourt, 2006). The "transfer problem" suggests that there are obstacles that prevent employees from using the knowledge and skills gained in training on the job. Obstacles to training transfer also may limit opportunities for career advancement. We identified five aspects of training transfer from the literature that potentially moderate the relationship between training opportunities and career advancement: identical elements, opportunities for practice, multiple contexts, supervisor support, and maintenance.

Identical Elements

Identical elements theory suggests that training transfer is maximized when the training environment resembles the on-the-job environment (Thorndike & Woodworth, 1901). Awoniyi, Griego, and Morgan (2002) provided some support for the role of identical elements in training through their research study results that indicated training transfer was enhanced when there was a higher match between the trainee's actual work situation and the scenarios presented in training. An example of a training intervention with limited identical elements can occur when employees are provided ample time to execute learned procedures during training, but receive a restricted amount of time to perform the task on the job. In light of this, organizations should seek to maximize the match between the elements of the training intervention and the job to increase the probability of the transfer of knowledge and skills to the job.

Opportunities for Practice

Opportunities for practice describe the extent employees are given opportunities to use their newly acquired skills during training and on the job. Practice is especially important for learning new skills, and research suggests that repeated practice sessions are particularly important for skills that must be maintained over long periods of time (Driskell, Willis, & Cooper, 1992). Organizations need to ensure the design of the training initiative allows for adequate amounts of practice to maximize the probability of skill transfer to the job.

An interesting paradox can occur, however, if employees gain knowledge and skills in training that makes him or her appear more marketable to another organization. Employees who receive training may leave organizations at a higher rate than employees who do not receive training. However, further research has demonstrated that promoting employees to a higher level within the organization that makes use of their newly learned skills can reduce intentions to quit (Benson, 2006). Therefore, organizations need to consider the role of practice not only during the training program but also how to incorporate practice into their formal positions within the organization.

Multiple Contexts

Multiple contexts are defined as opportunities to practice skills acquired in training programs under different scenarios. Providing opportunities to practice a learned skill under variable conditions and with different stimuli increases the likelihood skills learned in training will transfer to a variety of contexts on the job (Holladay & Quinones, 2003). Multiple contexts is an especially important consideration given the evolving nature of work that expects employees to adapt to ever-changing environments, situations, and roles. Organizations should seek ways to provide opportunities for trainees to practice their skills in multiple contexts both in and out of the training environment.

Supervisor Support

Work supervisors can play an important role in the transfer of training. If employees receive little support to use their trained skills on the job, this will limit the extent that training will transfer to

the job (Noe, 2010; Rouiller & Goldstein, 1993; Xiao, 1996). As an example, many years ago, the first author of this chapter participated in a month-long off-site training program for new hires in a social services agency. When he returned to the job, his supervisor indicated that the training program teaches workers how to do the job “by the book” and “here, we don’t do things by the book.” Imagine the deflated feeling employees can experience when a supervisor actually discourages the use of trained skills on the job! Organizations should encourage supervisor engagement in the employee training process, and training decision makers should seek ways to communicate the value of training to supervisors and trainees to increase the effectiveness of the training intervention.

Maintenance

Maintenance refers to helping employees continue to preserve their learned skills on the job through repetition, feedback, and continuous improvement. Employees must be able to repeatedly use the knowledge and skills learned in training on the job, they must be given feedback on a consistent basis from their supervisor (or peers, subordinates, customers, etc.), and the employee must be willing to incorporate feedback and make changes in their behavior if necessary (Kanfer & Ackerman, 1989; Komaki, Heinzmann, & Lawson, 1980). Organizations should set up formal maintenance programs such that employees are encouraged or even rewarded to use their learned knowledge and skills on the job on a consistent basis. Periodic post-training reviews should be conducted to measure employee knowledge and skill level compared to post-training scores. If knowledge and skill levels begin to decline, the organization should consider additional or “refresher” training courses for these employees.

Implications of the TODM Model

There are at least three implications suggested by the TODM model. First, training decisions are employment decisions. As such, organizations must be aware of the legal ramifications of inequities associated with these decisions. Unequal access to opportunities to participate in training may influence the career advancement of employees. If inequities are left unchecked, they can create unintended and illegal consequences for members of protected classes. Organizational decision makers must be capable of testing for the presence of disparate impact in their training selection decisions. Organizations must also be concerned about how employees perceive the process, outcome, and interactional components of training selection decisions, as perceptions of fairness influence employees’ decisions to pursue discrimination litigation. Employers should take steps to insure that all training selection decisions are treated with the same level of concern as any other selection decisions.

Second, the model suggests that more attention should be paid to the antecedents of TODM. Specifically, executives can foster a strong training culture by emphasizing the value and importance of organizational training programs. An old proverb states that you can tell what is truly important to a person when you take a look at his or her checkbook. The same can be said for organizations; if an organization truly values training, it should be a budgetary priority and emphasized in formal policy. Training policies should clearly outline the impetus for training. Developing clear specifications about selection procedures, eligibility, priority status, remedial training, and the appeals process are also important considerations that should be outlined prior to training selection decisions.

Finally, training transfer is an important factor organizations should also be concerned about in training selection decisions. Our model suggests that obstacles to training transfer are ultimately obstacles to career advancement. Organizations must develop a plan to minimize these roadblocks to increase the probability of highly motivated, engaged, committed, and satisfied employees who are able to translate the benefits of training into career advancement.

Avenues for Future Research Suggested by the Model

Organizational decision makers need to understand their ethical and legal responsibility to monitor the impact of training selection decisions on career advancement opportunities for employees. However, the extant training literature offers little consideration of this topic and guidance to organizations. A research study to validate the proposed TODM model would provide beneficial information to clarify the conceptual issues surrounding the training decision process and criteria. Additionally, the TODM model conceptualizes training selection decisions only within the context of an internal organizational environment. More information is needed to consider the role of external influences, such as globalization and the economic and political climate on training selection decisions. Therefore, future research is needed to verify the variety of procedures organizations use to select employees into training programs.

Limited information is known about how selection into training programs translates into specific career advancement outcomes. Therefore, research studies should evaluate the extent of the influence training has on different types of career outcomes. Knowledge gained in this area would aid organizational decision makers in developing alternative strategies for providing opportunities to employees who do not receive access to training opportunities. Overall, a greater knowledge base of the facets associated with training selection decisions can improve the legal defensibility and effectiveness of training initiatives used by organizations.

Summary and Recommendations

Organizations have a legal and ethical responsibility to consider how training selection decisions influence actual or perceived inequities in opportunities to participate training. This chapter reviewed several legal cases brought against corporations for claims of unequal access to training to highlight the need to further address this issue. The Radford Multilevel Training Opportunity Decision Making (TODM) model was proposed as a conceptual framework for understanding the organizational precursors to training selection decisions and its influence on employees. Training culture, organizational policies, and training impetus were suggested to influence the training decisions made by organizations. In turn, these decisions are likely to influence occurrences of adverse impact and perceptions of fairness related to training opportunities. Employees who receive training are at an advantage to achieve higher levels of career advancement if the organization provides the necessary environment to promote transfer of skills learned in training to the actual position.

Additional research is needed to examine the proposed linkages in the TODM model to develop specific recommendations for organizations in ensuring quality training selection decisions. However, in concluding our chapter, we offer the following guidelines for addressing inequities in training selection decisions:

1. Organizations should ensure that selection decisions are based on job-relevant criteria (Maurer & Rafuse, 2001; UGESP, 1978).
2. Organizations need to incorporate formal procedures for training selection decisions into their official policies (Maurer & Rafuse, 2001).

3. Organizations need to conduct disparate impact analyses to check for inequities in training selection decisions (UGESP, 1978).
4. If disparate impact is detected, organizations must develop alternative strategies to minimize limited career advancement outcomes associated with disproportionate access to training opportunities.

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