

# RECIPROCAL TRANSFER OF MBA LEARNING AND ORGANIZATIONAL OUTCOMES

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## Abstract

Part-time graduate business education requires from students a protracted and arduous investment, while balancing work and studies. This investment in career capital also involves an ongoing reciprocal transfer of knowledge between the two settings, which is likely to be mutually beneficial for both environments as well as the student. Despite these reciprocal benefits, there exists a serious deficit of empirical research concerning part-time MBA programs and this issue of ongoing bi-directional transfer of knowledge and skills. This research deficiency is significant, given the immense potential value that reciprocal transfer of skill and knowledge would seem to represent to the process of business education, the advancement of business theory and practice, and the evolution of business practice methods.

In the present study, the explanation of reciprocal transfer is grounded in goal setting theory, which classifies goals as either learning or performance oriented. Goal setting theory offers a compelling explanation of the effects of motivation to learn and perceived utility of the MBA program on the reciprocal transfer of knowledge and skills. Goal orientation is a relatively stable dispositional variable that assumes two forms: development of new skills or meeting normative-based standards (Colquitt and Simmering 1998). Corresponding to these two forms of goal orientation, there are two types of goals: learning goals and performing goals. Learning goals are associated with complex tasks that facilitate the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Performance goals, on the other hand, often involve the selection of perfunctory tasks that minimize risks of error and judgment. By voluntary selection of performance tasks which are easy to accomplish, one can project an aura of apparent success (Seijts and Latham, 2005). The present study was developed in order to enrich the state of understanding regarding the reciprocal transfer of knowledge within this framework of goal setting.

## Methods

Data were obtained by an online survey of 144 MBA students enrolled in at four US graduate business schools. These were public and private institutions in the Northeast region, a private institution in the Midwest region, and a private institution in the Pacific region. All subjects were employed while attending the university. Based on a review of the literature, a questionnaire was developed that included an “MBA Utility Scale” designed to measure perceptions of the training value of the MBA program (Cheng 2000), and a “Learning Motivation Scale” measuring the trainee’s desire to learn program content. Finally, a scale for “Perceived Knowledge and Skills Transfer” (based on Fecteau et al. 1995) was used to gauge perceptions of skill and competency transfer from MBA programs to the workplace. Partial least squares regression was used to analyze results.

## Results

Our approach demonstrated the impact of learning motivation and perceived utility of the MBA on the direction and intensity of knowledge and skills transfer. Specifically, we found that:

1. Perceived utility of the part-time MBA program and learning motivation positively predispose transfer of knowledge and skills between MBA studies and ongoing job experiences.

2. Perceived utility of the part-time MBA program and learning motivation positively predispose transfer of knowledge and skills between ongoing job experiences and MBA studies.
3. Both the transfer of knowledge and skills between MBA studies and ongoing job experiences, and the transfer of knowledge and skills between ongoing job experiences and MBA studies, positively predispose self-assessed job competence.

These results show that multiple goals of reciprocal knowledge and skills transfer ~~may be~~ are in harmony, and mutually reinforcing. We also found that these two forces were important factors in the transfer process, and their effects on MBA to work transfer were relatively equal.

References Available upon Request