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FROM TRAINING ROOM TO WORKPLACE: SYSTEMIC BARRIERS TO SUSTAINING TRAINING OUTCOMES IN DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This article adopts a reflective practitioner-based qualitative analysis, synthesizing two decades of field observations and post-training supervision experiences rather than collecting new empirical data. Despite significant investment in the quality of the curriculum, the participatory approach, and the quality of the facilitation, the effectiveness of the training is seldom sustained once the trainees get back to the workplace. Instead of pointing a finger at the trainer's pedagogy or the trainees' motivation, the article proposes that the erosion in the effectiveness of training takes place largely because of the post-training organizational context. From these observations, four additional barriers have emerged as having relevance to the issue: the neglect of the post-training phase, resistance to learning-based practices by the supervisory and performance systems, the lack of mechanisms that facilitate post-training support, and misalignment between the content of the training activity and the livelihood realities of its constituents. By recontextualizing the question of training effectiveness within an organizational and managerial concern rather than solely personal, it seeks to add its input within the current debates. The discussion emphasizes the symbolic nature of effective training practices once organizational environments are ill-equipped to support those efforts after delivery. The implications of this discussion for organizations attempting to implement systemically supported learning practices are also covered.

1. Introduction: Rethinking Training Effectiveness from Practice

Training has traditionally been one of the key tools for capacity development, performance improvement, and organizational strengthening in governmental, non-governmental, and development organizations. In settings like Bangladesh, where service provision by the public sector (public-service delivery), microfinance operations, and livelihood programs are more dependent on the quality of work of frontline workers, training is often recommended as a panacea for programmatic and development-related problems. As a consequence, significant

efforts are invested in developing curricula, increasing facilitation capacity, and utilizing participatory methodologies and refinement of classroom learning environments.

Yet, a persistent problem remains: learning does not translate to sustained workplace practice in most cases -even though limited training budgets are being spent on developing such courses and on students taking them. This time lag between learning and the practice of learning has been well noted in the training transfer literature, which is concerned with those conditions after training that determine whether or not learning translates into action (Baldwin & Ford, 1988). Recent scholarship has further emphasized that transfer of training is shaped not only by individual motivation but also by dynamic organizational and supervisory conditions (Blume et al., 2019; Baldwin et al., 2019). More recent meta-analytic and organizational studies reinforce that supervisory support, organizational climate, and structured post-training environments remain decisive predictors of sustained transfer of learning (Gegenfurtner & Vauras, 2021; Hughes et al., 2024; Blume et al., 2023; Grossman & Salas, 2020; Saks & Burke-Smalley, 2022)). As an on-the-ground effort, training is frequently celebrated at the point of delivery for these reasons. Participants exit training inspired and empowered, and training organizations record successes on completion. But when trainees go back to their job sites, gains in knowledge utilization performance or skill use and behavior change are modest or temporary (Islam et al., 2019).

The literature on training effectiveness remains problematically dominated by pedagogical accounts, including instructional design, quality of facilitation, learning styles and participant motivation, which tend to overshadow the organizational conditions that structure learning after training. Certainly, pedagogical considerations matter, but focusing solely on what happens inside the training room risks obscuring a fundamental truth that I've seen firsthand countless times: Training too often helps them get it right during delivery and then falls apart when they walk out of the room. So, the issue there is not just learning adoption but continuation of learning in organizational settings.

Based on more than 20 years of professional experience in the design, delivery and evaluation of training programs for development and micro credit organizations in Bangladesh, it is suggested that training effectiveness is not primarily a pedagogical problem but rather one of post-training and institutional challenges (Mahedi et al., 2025). Similar patterns are present in various training programs — from behavior change to supervision, income-generation skills, and digital monitoring. Learners who come back from their training enthusiastic and determined, are met back at the workplace however, by performance pressure, supervisory pushback, and little support for actually using what they've learned.

This paper takes a practice-led view and is not empirical in any new data gathering respect. However, its aim is not to quantify training outputs statistically but to make sense of repeated observations that emerge from practice and which all too frequently are sidelined in routine training evaluations. Through its systematic analysis of these observations, the paper aims to offer practitioner-sourced insights to debates about training transfer, workplace and organizational learning, especially in development (or Southern) contexts.

One argument of this paper is that many times it is because the effectiveness of training programs is sabotaged by systems conditions after the program itself. These factors include inattention to the post-training environment, supervisory cultures that stigmatize learning-oriented practices, performance management systems which prefer outputs over

thoughtful application, and disjuncture between what is trained and participants' livelihood contexts. Designed, well-performed training has a difficult time surviving in such ecosystems.

This view questions a generally implicit premise of most training: that the main application onus is in trainees themselves. Field level experience indicates that this assumption is not only unrealistic but also unjust. Trainees return to offices with hierarchical oversight, strict benchmarks and established norms that tend to deflate the powers of imagination or deviation from common practices. Newfound knowledge and skills become irrelevant in short order without the buy-in of management, encouragement from peers or integration into performance systems.

The argument of this paper is that training effectiveness should be re-conceptualized as an institutional and management responsibility. Transfer of training, from this point of view, is less a matter of personal motivation than organizational receptiveness. When supervisors support learning, provide time for reflection and applaud learning-related activities, training results have a higher chance of sticking. In the absence of these, training is ceremonial—it gets done and so it is recorded and quickly forgotten.

This general theme is developed in four related practice-based analyses throughout the paper. It first discusses the reasons behind training failure beyond-training, since these phases are neglected by organizations. Secondly, it illustrates how supervisory techniques and performance pressures directly negate learning-based change. Third, it draws attention to the constraints of unsupported follow-up and pleads for integrated post-training support mechanisms. Finally, it explains how contextual and livelihood mismatch – in particular for income-earning and skills training – makes learning structurally irrelevant irrespective of quality.

Highlighting these dynamics, this paper makes a practice-informed contribution to debates on trainee development. Instead of offering new models and instruments, the book opens a reflective window on how training systems work in action within an organizational context and why it frequently fails to do what is promises. In so doing, it challenges those who are responsible for training (practitioner trainers), or for managing and overseeing trainers, encouraging them to think not only about the way training is offered but also how learning is deemed acceptable by organizations in a post-training/education capacity.

2. Positioning Methodologically: A Practice-Based Perspective

As a practice-based reflective study, the methodological rigor lies in prolonged professional engagement, triangulation of repeated field observations across multiple organizations, and iterative reflective analysis. While statistical replication is not intended, analytical generalization is achieved through pattern consistency across twenty years of supervised training interventions.

The study is strengthened by the author's tracking of training systems in government, semi-government, and non-governmental development organizations in Bangladesh for more than twenty years. The observations in this article on those two points derive from long-term studies of training, multiple post-training fieldwork interactions and supervisions and from organizations' reactions to learning activities.

The focus of interest here is not statistical generalization, rather it is how and in what ways to

gain analytic knowledge about the central processes that produce differences for what effectively works in training practice. The observations presented are illustrative, rather than comprehensive, and aimed at raising the profile of institutional dynamics that all-too-frequently fall by the wayside when formal training evaluations are conducted. By foregrounding practitioner reflection, the paper adds to an empirical evidential base the experiential dimension of practice without seeking to generalize or replace existing research knowledge about training transfer and workplace learning. Recent HRD literature increasingly calls for practice-based and reflective approaches to complement empirical training-transfer research, particularly in complex organizational environments (Gegenfurtner & Vauras, 2021; Raelin, 2021; Fenwick & Edwards, 2022).

3. The Post-Training Breakdown: When Learning Ends Where Training Ends

At development and microfinance organizations, trainings tend to end on an upbeat. Respondents are highly engaged, trainers witness their participation, and the feedback forms often show 4's or 5's for both content as well as delivery. For most of them they leave the training room all fired up and ready to go, convinced that their newfound knowledge will really make a difference in their job. However, it has been our observation (referred to repeatedly earlier) that the momentum disappears with time in an organizational setting.

The number one point of failure as far as the effectiveness of training is concerned is at the end of the training. Much attention is given to preparation, delivery, and facilitation, but the post-training period tends to be an administrative add-on rather than a time for implementing training into practice. The moment certificates move and reports go, training ceases to be an organization priority. After all, where training stops, learning has no choice but to stop.

How would this breakdown look like in practice, and what we are left with is the fast-diminishing gradient of training knowledge and motivation. After a few months of finishing the training, respondents have difficulty remembering many of the specific principles, tools, and methodologies that they were able to confidently articulate. That's not necessarily because of weak learning or bad facilitation. No such structure exists to reinforce, revisit, or legitimize learning once the trainee has returned to work. With no prompting, application chances or discussions to reinforce the training, knowledge gets farther from practice.

A familiar aspect of such post-training carnage is the absence of organizational investigation into the application of learning. It is rare for trainees to be asked by a supervisor or manager what they have learned, how they plan to use the information in their work, and what they are finding difficult. In some instances, supervisors don't even know the content or goals of the training their employees have received. So training is still an orphaned experience, separate from the day-to-day supervision, the planning and running of activities, or a session for performance measurement. But learning is now so non-referenced and non-recognized that it has almost lost all its saliency.

Evaluation methods that concentrate on immediate response to intervention rather than the long-term utility contribute to this cycle (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2020; Gegenfurtner, Zitt, & Ebner, 2020). Success in training is usually measured by trainee satisfaction or hitting an attendance goal. However, we pay only minimal attention to what happens next – does learning stick, evolve or drive behavior on the job. As a result, how well training is delivered

rather than how well it is used are the basis for judging the effectiveness as delivery well it trains so. In practice, this narrow focus of evaluation blurs the central aspect of training: that in which learning has to battle with what is already happening, with pressures and expectations. The post-training bust is accentuated by the lack of follow-up structure. On some occasions, follow-up comes in the way of an occasional visit or a check-in here and there, but it is seldom systematic or long-term. More often than not, there's no follow-up at all. Trainees go back to-the-grind creations with nary a safe space in which to debrief their learning, dabble in new (or different) strategies, or cry for help. The pressure of the day-to-day makes training fade away and concepts you once knew go out the window.

Crucially, this disaggregation should not be construed as a failure of individual dedication or motivation. Common field notes account for many trainees being eager to actually use what they have learned. Yet individual intention is not enough without organizational signals that such learning counts. Training needs reward, recognition, and relevance to thrive in complex work ecosystem. In the absence of these conditions, even well-internalized learning can be difficult to keep going.

What all of this amount to is – training is not developmental, it's episodic. Each training program is a single, independent episode, separate from and having no continuity with earlier training or subsequent practice. Gradually, the episodic approach conditions people to expect that training will not result in any real change. Trainees perceive training as escape from the mundane rather than for long-term mature development. In these places, the post-training let up is not the exception but the institution.

This deconstruction indicates that the effectiveness of training may not be fully explained by what happens in the training room. The question that matters isn't whether the trainees learned, it's whether their organizations created learning conditions after they left the training. When post-training stages are ignored, the results of training will most likely not last even if instruction was effective. Understanding symptoms of these malfunctions is the first step in questioning training effectiveness as a phenomenon that can only deal with its delivery and not an aspect of organizational life.

exposes them to physic, social, and mental threats.

4. Supervisory and Performance System Resistance: How Learning Is Actively Neutralized

Although a lack of post training attention accounts for some of the deterioration in transfer there appears to be an even more compelling dynamic at play as evidenced by practice-related findings. For the most part, training-acquired knowledge and skills are not merely ignored in typical organizational contexts— they are actually extinguished, often by supervisory behaviors and performance management regimes. Workplace learning research also endorses that the support from the manager or structure of an organization have a significant impact in legitimizing or limiting post training learning practices (Billett, 2001; Blume & Ford, 2021; Saks & Burke-Smalley, 2022). Recent HRD research continues to emphasize the decisive role of organizational climate and supervisory support in sustaining training transfer (Hughes et al., 2024; Blume et al., 2023; Amin et al., 2025). The fit of training with the reality of the workplace is then checked again when students are back at work, faced by managerial concerns, operational rhythms and dominant routines.

In this respect, line managers play a very crucial role. Since supervisors are the most proximate authority figures in most development and microcredit organizations, they decisively set the tone for what counts as “real work.” Field experience confirms that when supervisors perceive new learning as tangential or unfeasible, trainees learn in short order that practicing new ways of being is either too dangerous or unwelcome in their organizations (Nabi et al., 2018). In these settings, training is not considered an organization's investment but as a short-term dispersion from one's main duties.

This delegitimisation of formation is frequently subtle, but it can be just as potent. Managers may reject new practices instead as being unrealistic, too long to implement, or not addressing current operational requirements. Analytical tools, reflexive methods or behavioral approaches that are taught in training often come to be seen as “theoretical” or “soft,” particularly if and when compared with output-driven targets like loan recovery goals by banks, disbursements and service coverage. If trainees try to cite training in their interactions with supervisors, they may find that it provokes apathy or resistance and believe this demonstrates that what they have learnt in training has no practical application.

Performance management systems exacerbate this resistance. In much of the development sector, “success” is narrowly defined in terms of short-term outputs-monthly targets, recovery rates or activity numbers. There is little space for experimentation, retrospection or learning-based adaptation with these metrics. Programs that emphasize behavior change, problem solving or data-driven supervision take time, cognitive space and manager tolerance for small gains. But they dialysis units do not go hand in hand with performance regimes based on instant gratification.

Persisting under these performance demands, trainees may also become cognitively crowded. Anxiety over missed goals takes up cognitive and emotional bandwidth, leaving little room for reflection or implementing new ideas. In such instances, training knowledge is not simply deteriorating: instead, it is being overridden by the primacy of staying alive in the performance system. Well-motivated team even can rarely remember and respect the crafting-lesson learnings, once they lose their heads under an excessive observation and increased demand.

Crucially, supervisory opposition is not always overt or deliberate. Often the supervisors themselves operate under tremendous pressure from upper management and are judged by the same narrow criteria of ‘performance. Consequently, they might see training-type activities like coaching, learning discussions or experimentation as overheads rather than investments. This leads to a snowballing dynamic in which training is regularly set aside at all levels of the hierarchy despite official organizational recognition of the importance of building capacity.

This dynamic is most pronounced within programs that focus on behavioral change, digital supervision or novel service provision. That kind of training presumes some managerial openness to working in new ways. When this assumption does not hold, there is an implicit lesson to be learned: the use of training may also work against trainees, rather than help them within the organization. Eventually, the lesson that's learned is to suppress initiative and comply with the routine.

In so doing, the analysis draws attention to a fundamentally overlooked fact – that the effectiveness of training is predicated on supervisory and performance systems that endorse learning-informed practice. Supervisors who reject or ambush change due to training will automatically ensure that what is learned is not transferred; learning transfer becomes

functionally impossible. In such climates, the issue is not that trainees are unwilling to do what they know but that the organization does not allow them.

Identifying resistance in a supervisory and performance system moves effective training from individual behavior to organizational architecture. It challenges the idea that better training programs alone will lead to better outcomes trainees, and instead suggests that we need to rethink where supervisors sit in relation to our students/employees – or be prepared for lower quality student experiences. Without that alignment, training will continue to be overridden by systems that value now over learning, and control over progress.

5. The Absence of a Post-Training Support System: Why Follow-Up Alone Is Not Enough

In an attempt to address the issue of poor transfer of training, organizations frequently stress the importance of post-training follow-up. In reality, follow-up is often approached simply as a “one type of exercise” from a performance support mentality and not as part of the learning ecosystem. While follow-up might effectively serve to support learning, in practice this study approach suggests that a series of standalone follow-up interventions are not enough to maintain training effects without a structured post-training network of support.

With follow-up, moreover, it is generally of the short and piecemeal variety (e.g., one-time queries, monitoring visits; reporting requirements). Such interactions are usually dealing with monitoring more than learning: have you done what you were supposed to be doing, rather than how training knowledge might have been interpreted, modified or applied. Hence, follow-up becomes more an administrative exercise instead of a developmental one. Trainees may feel watched, but not nurtured.

A post-training assurance system, however, needs several connected components that are more than simply progress checks. All our field experience shows learning will be 'sticky' if managers are talking about coaching; if people have chances to talk together about their shared problems; and if the organization formally acknowledges that efforts have been based on learning (Garavan et al., 2021; Reinhold et al., 2022). These things are often in short supply in many development organizations. Managers don't usually have the skills or incentives to act as learning facilitators, informal peer-learning spaces exists precariously with limited recognition of putting learning into use at institutional level.

One common observation is that structured peer learning projects may fail for want of supervisory authority. Short presentations as well as reflective paragraphs can be presented by trainees on what they learned that week or month—and are encouraged to do so. Although in theory, these ventures seem promising, they are at a substantial risk of being undermined by managerial support. Peer learning soon loses credibility when the leadership does not take much interest, doesn't give enough time or considers it peripheral. Co-workers adapt to what management seems to ignore.

A second important gap is the connection between training and performance management systems. Performance appraisal systems within many organizations exclude learning application, experimentation, and skill development measures. As a result, trainees do not earn 'credit' for the application of training knowledge, even taking it on lives a little longer or

putting in extra hours. Unrewarded learning battles it out with rewarded, measurable task engagement.

The lack of a post-training support mechanism furthermore points to unclear institutional responsibility for what is learned. “The responsibility for the setting up and delivery of these training programs is often placed in the hands of training units,” according to the report, “where line management would assume that its role stops when the training finishes. This separation of functions leaves a void where there is no entity or actor responsible for ensuring that learning results in implementation. Therefore, the effect of training becomes an expected rather than a directed process.

Significantly, this systemic shortcoming unfairly burden the individual trainee. Interns are expected to apply learning on their own without understanding that they function within a hierarchical system that restricts autonomy and values rote applicability. Responsibility for poor uptake in use is commonly placed at individual motivation and capabilities, with insufficient focus on the organizational context, which leaves it unlikely that sustained application will occur.

From a practical standpoint, these findings highlight a basic failing in the way we even think about training value.” Follow-up, however, only scratches the problem's surface. Training is also subject to decay if it lacks a post-training feedback circuit (comprising supervision coaching, peer learning, performance alignment and institutional accountability). Learning cannot live by the efforts of individuals alone; it needs organizational scaffolding.

Re-conceptualizing training effectiveness as a systems-level outcome underscores the importance for organizations to invest in more than just delivering training, by creating the conditions that support continued learning. These range from changing the role of supervision, to legitimizing a learning focus and situating training outcomes within an overall organizational process. In their absence, training will be perceived to remain episodic and symbolic rather than a sustained influence on practice change.

6. Contextual and Livelihood Misalignment: When Training Is Structurally Impossible to Apply

In addition to post-training neglect, supervisory resistance, and weak support systems for the trained, a second, often fatal element that erodes the effectiveness of development training: Training content that misaligns with participants' lived economic realities (McGrath et al., 2020; Tikly et al., 2021). Field experiences make it evident that although training may be appropriately designed and well-received, learning will not occur unless the material, monetary, or livelihood conditions necessary to do so are in place. In those cases, the cause of training is failure, not behavioral or managerial, but structural.

This mismatch is most apparent in profit-generating and skills-focused programs. Development agencies often assume that training programs will automatically result in income increases, thus developing interventions designed around the acquisition of skills. This assumption neglects, however, an essential prerequisite: the fact that training a) is only deployable when participants own or at least have access to the assets and resources needed to implement what they learn. In the absence of considerations, training is a theoretical concept that lacks feasibility.

Field observations have repeatedly shown instances in which participant selection fails to take into account some of the fundamentals of livelihood. For instance, training in biogas technology or animal husbandry is sometimes made available even to landless people who have no space for farming and do not own any productive assets. In these contexts, learners can be able to 'make sense' of the technical knowledge provided in training courses but lack the means to convert that understanding into practice. The problem here isn't one of motivation or understanding, but the physical impossibility to apply what is proposed at all.

A parallel is found in skills training that does not include empowering resources. Sewing and tailoring skills can be trained with or without the allocation of sewing machines, access to community facilities or a connection to mechanisms through which credit is made available. With poverty comes the ability to figure out for yourself how to get that stuff is a luxury you simply can't afford. And so in those cases the learning there is all theoretical. These training schemes, rather than increasing participants' empowerment, frequently create frustration and reinforce the alienation from opportunities for work that training theoretically presents.

Misalignment at the level of context can also occur when training content does not match up with learners' real-world livelihood paths. People may move back and forth between rural dwelling and urban employment in development contexts with high labor mobility. These participants may be far more permanently mobile than others, and training strategies that ignore this mobility—for example, offering agricultural or livestock training to individuals who are primarily dependent on urban wage labor—are unlikely to elicit lasting impact. And even if knowledge is retained temporarily, it will be lost once these trainees return to their main livelihood activities.

These cases are emblematic of a more general trend that training is often developed and conducted without reference to the analysis of livelihoods. Programs Insider The logic of programs Value-for-money indicators Even if you are not directly involved in programming, chances are that the project proposals you will be reviewing have been prepared under the Results-Based Management framework, and might include inputs on value-for-money (page 3 of the latest ITCILO results matrix), a system which is driven by training outputs – number trained or receiving certificates – rather than issues of relevance and timing. The training thus becomes a symbolic display of intervention rather than an instrumental means to an end. There's a move towards not if training is deliverable, but whether the training has been delivered.

On a practical level, this discrepancy is symptomatic of an entrenched impulse within MA organizations to substituting training for systemic support. "Since wealth looks different in each culture, skills can fill in the gap where there is no asset, capital or opportunity." However, skills cannot in and of themselves create incomes or change lives when the right enabling conditions are lacking. You can't eat training like you can land, tools, markets and time. In contrast, if these truths are overlooked then training becomes development theatre – a convincing show but divorced from the reality of result.

The consequences of mismatch between context and livelihood go beyond individual programs. The more trainees are put through the rigors of training that they cannot use, the less credibility will be left for training as a re-mediation-process. Trainees do not disrupt because they are resistant to learning, but because of the knowledge that training very often has no

relationship with reality. Atrophy It is yielded over time and degraded in its creditability of legacy institutions as well as fruitful learning programs.

Understanding context and livelihoods misfit recasts the issue of training effectiveness as one of fit, not simply quality. Good training is about the right content and delivery, but also knowing your participants' assets, barriers, and livelihood trajectories. Without that kind of alignment, even the most well-intended training won't get converted into action. Attending to this dimension would thus be a crucial move away from symbolic training interventions to truly empowering development practice.

7. Implications for Practice and Policy

The qualitative assessment described in this article holds significant implications for how training is conceptualized, conducted, and evaluated by development and microfinance organizations. Implications for the effectiveness of training are that attention should be refocused on systems throughout the organization which promote (or disallow) transfer, rather than seeking effects through training events alone. These effects function at three interrelated levels: organizational behavior, monitoring and rewards, training and development.

7.1 Implications for Organizational Practice

There are a couple of keys to this happening; for starters, the organization needs to change their perception of training from an event to a process. Training should not be viewed as a 'done deal' at the time of delivery, certification or reporting. Instead, both the study and this article suggest that we need to design explicitly for what we do after the training ends as a core part of the learning experience. This is going to take time, resources, and the attention of managers to learning application post- return.

Organizations should communicate clear expectations that training knowledge and skills items will be discussed, reinforced, and implemented in the work environment. Easy approaches, including post-training debriefing, reflection sessions or application planning meetings, can help you keep learning in front of you. But in the absence of such exercise rigor the training is susceptible to rapid atrophy.

Secondly, it would be erroneous for organizations to leave the sole onus of applying learning/facilitation learning back into workplace to training participants. Experience-based evidence also suggests costuming trainees work in environments that limit autonomy and value essentially compliance. Organizational practice should therefore be geared to fostering conditions conducive to learning, among them legitimizing experimentation and acknowledging efforts made even where outcomes are incremental rather than instant.

In conclusion, institutions carrying out income-generating and skill-based training need to make the content of the training in harmony with learners' livelihood background. Participant choice and provision, timing of training and availability of resources are design features in their own right. Structurally constrained training that cannot be used is not only a loser in terms of the confidence and credibility in which participants hold institutions, it also removes control from the rural practitioner.

7.2 Implications for Supervision and Performance Management Systems

Supervisors and their role stand out as key stakeholders when it comes to sustaining or nullifying the training impact. Thus, these organizations should consider re-defining the role of supervisors as task enablers rather than task enforce- mentors. It does not oblige supervisors to

be trainers, but it obliges them to acknowledge that training is legitimate work and engage proactively with anything learning-based.

Supervisors' behavioral perception is significantly influenced by the PMS. Supervisors will inhibit work which they perceive as time-wasting or uncertain if indicators focus on short-term outputs only, such as learning application. Organizations might also incorporate learning-based metrics in performance systems, such as the extent of coaching, experimentation, or application of new skills. Even incremental acknowledgment of learning focused activities can indicate organizational involvement with training efficiency.

Supervisors need assistance in engaging the tension between performance demands and learning support. Until the pressure put on supervisors can be countered, shared and tackled further by management and other stakeholders a call for supportive supervision may just stay wishful thinking. There is, therefore, a need to train the supervisors not only on skill-based qualities but also on practical issues of learning under conditions of tight operations.

7.3 Implications for Training and Development Agenda

They have immediate and long-term implications in a policy context where the definition of effectiveness in VET training is currently under review. Policies that focus on the coverage, attendance or immediate satisfaction of training participants could further cement a culture of service delivery. Rather, training policies need to encourage assessment methods that ensure the sustainability of learning, transfer into the workplace and institutional support.

Training policies should also articulate responsibility for post-training results (ILO, 2021; UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2022). When training responsibility wraps up at the training unit, the application of learning becomes no one's specific charge. Clear policy direction regarding shared responsibility from training shop, line management and upper leadership can assist in filling this gap.

For projects doing livelihoods or income, the framework needs to quite clearly say "when you train people directly into [income activity], then there's a package of services we expect associated with that - whether it be tools, assets, finance, markets. Training as silver bullet should not be put on a pedestal as a solution to structural economic problems on its own. Understanding the boundaries of training is not a weakness but a necessary step in to design interventions that are feasible and ethical.

7.4 Toward Systemically Supported Training

Collectively, these implications indicate that improving the effectiveness of training involves system-level change rather than incremental changes. Whilst better curricula or facilitation are necessary, such efforts would be of limited benefit if organizational systems continue to negate learning post-training. A systemically guided shift in training would mean that all organizational practices, supervisory roles, performance incentives, and policy expectations are based on a collective investment in sustained learning.

Practice-wise, it also doesn't require us to tear up the rule book. It involves deliberate choices about what organizations value, measure and validate. With learning understood as centrally embedded in work rather than as a temporary interruption, training is more likely to deliver on its promise of facilitating meaningful and enduring change.

7.5 Practice Contribution

This paper offers three related implications for training and development practitioners. First, it re-situates training effectiveness as a post-training and institutional problem rather than a

pedagogical or individual one that pushes our focus off classroom delivery and onto organizational absorption of knowledge. Second, it illustrates how supervisory cultures, performance systems and weak post-training support structures reinforce against the sustainability of training outputs—even with strong training design and facilitation. Third, this underscores the fundamental importance of context and livelihood-fit in whether training—especially income-generating and skills-based activities—may have practical use. By explicating these dynamics from a practitioner perspective, the paper adds practice-grounded insight to ongoing discussions around training transfer and workplace learning, more broadly in development-sector settings where organizational pressures and livelihood realities play a big role in determining what is learnt.

8. Conclusion: From Symbolic Training to Systemically Supported Practice

In this paper we intend to focus on an enduring, though often unconsidered problem in training and development practice: why high-quality, well executed training is followed so rarely by lasting change in workplace practice. Taking from two decades of work experience in development and microfinance organizations, the insights hint that it's not so much what happens during training as what does afterward. With respect to practice, the effectiveness of training is decisively influenced by organizational factors that reach beyond the walls of the training room. From an organization's perspective, narrowly based training delivery evaluations may obscure the wider organizational context that ultimately determines the effectiveness of the training (Stufflebeam, 2003).

Through the four analyses, in the paper it is argued that training breakdowns does not stem primarily from flawed curricula, from poor facilitation or disengaged participants. Instead, the knowledge “high” achieved during training usually falls off in the post-training phase when organizational focus wanes and training acceptance is lost. Supervisory cultures and performance systems contribute to perpetuating this collapse when they reward immediate outputs more than reflective application, causing training-generated knowledge and skills to be passively dismantled. Even if follow-up were in place, the lack of any systematic after-training support for learning means that it is fragile and unsupported. Lastly, contextual and livelihood disjuncture (especially in income generation and skills based training) makes the learning structure ceaselessly absurd to be transferred--irrespective of good or bad quality of the training.

Collectively, these findings suggest a central message: training effectiveness is by-and-large an organizational and supervisory function. When organizations frame training as an isolated event rather than a component of continuous learning, they tip the burden for applying one's learning back to their trainees. An unrealistic notion in a hierarchical, time/space pressured context where autonomy is constrained and stepping out of line is not aligned with the status quo. Training thus becomes perfunctory-something done, ticked off, and then forgotten — rather than transformative.

This treatment-oriented reframing has significant implications for the way that training is viewed as being successful. Instead of whether participants learned during training, organizations should ask did they set conditions for learning to be reinforced afterward.” Antecedent conditions such as supervisor buy-in, some time to think, fit with performance

systems, and match between training message and participants' lived experiences may be required. Without them, investments in training are not likely to pay off over time.

Most importantly, this paper does not challenge training. If anything, the heavy emphasis on training at development organizations reflects a belief that this is where the promise of improved practice and outcome lay. What is at issue here is not so much the worth of training, but rather the presumption that mere training can induce change in a vacuum of systemic support. Acknowledging the limitations of instruction is not a denial of learning; it is its precondition.

From the practice side, bridging between symbolic learning and systemic supported practice is not far away. It needs to be intentionally aligned: between training goals and organizational need, between supervision with facilitation of learning, and between skills building and the context necessary for applying them. In circumstances where this alignment is in place, training can act as a driver for change which is incremental yet durable. In its absence, the most interesting training may be nothing more than one more transitory disturbance of one's actual work.

In providing a reflective, practice-based narrative of training failing and potential this paper adds to the contemporary debate on training transfer and workplace learning in development. It challenges training professionals, managers, and policy makers to think not so much about how training is delivered, as about how organizations access, support and legitimate learning. Ultimately the success of training has less to do with what people are taught than whether organizations enable learning to count as work. Future empirical research is encouraged to test the four identified systemic barriers across different development-sector contexts to validate and extend this practice-based model (Hughes et al., 2024; Ford et al., 2023).

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Ethics Statement

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Author Contribution Statement (CRediT)

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