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# THE IMPACT OF CULTURE ON LEARNING TRANSFER IN BURKINA FASO AND GHANA

## ABSTRACT

*Culture is a predominant force in people's lives that impacts learning and thus culture influences learning transfer. Because working across nations has become the norm and every year billions of dollars are spent on professional learning around the world, it is crucial for organisations to understand the role culture plays in the learning transfer process. Using a multidimensional model of learning transfer and the six dimensions of national culture model as conceptual frameworks, this qualitative study used a case study approach to examine the impact of culture on learning transfer in Burkina Faso and Ghana, West Africa. Interviews were conducted with 20 principals who attended leadership professional learning in Ghana and Burkina Faso. Data collection also included observations and document analysis. Findings indicated that several cultural factors influenced learning transfer in these two nations in the areas of pretraining and follow-up. Based on these findings, the author offers recommendations.*

**Keywords:** *six dimensions of national culture, training, learning transfer, professional development, professional learning*

## VPLIV KULTURE NA PRENOS ZNANJA V BURKINI FASO IN GANI – POVZETEK

*Kultura je prevladujoča sila v življenju ljudi, ki vpliva na učenje in tako na prenos znanja. Ker je delo v mednarodnem okolju postalo ustaljena norma in se po svetu vsako leto milijarde dolarjev porabijo za strokovno učenje, je ključnega pomena, da organizacije razumejo vlogo kulture pri prenosu znanja. V članku je predstavljena kvalitativna študija, ki znotraj pojmovnega okvira večdimenzionalnega modela prenosa znanja in modela šestih dimenzij nacionalne kulture v obliki študije primera raziskuje vpliv kulture na prenos znanja v Burkini Faso in Gani v Zahodni Afriki. Opravljeni so bili intervjuji z 20 ravnatelji, ki so se udeležili vodstvenega strokovnega izpopolnjevanja v Gani in Burkini Faso, zbiranje podatkov pa je vključevalo tudi opazovanje in analizo dokumentov. Rezultati so pokazali, da pri teh dveh narodih na prenos znanja vpliva več kulturnih dejavnikov, in sicer v začetni in naknadni fazi. Na podlagi rezultatov so bila pripravljena tudi priporočila.*

**Ključne besede:** *šest dimenzij nacionalne kulture, usposabljanje, prenos znanja, strokovno izpopolnjevanje, strokovno učenje*

## INTRODUCTION

In 2020, American organisations alone spent \$82.5 billion on professional learning (PL) to develop their employees' skills and knowledge base (Statista, 2020). Yet and despite the money invested, seminal scholars such as Ford et al. (2011) and Saks and Belcourt (2006) maintained that these investments yield low to moderate results because employees do not often transfer the newly acquired knowledge to their workplaces. Saks and Belcourt (2006) affirmed that in Canada the rate of transferring learning to the workplace is low, with estimates of 38% of trainees failing to transfer immediately after PL events and almost 70% faltering after a year.

Culture is a predominant force in people's lives that impacts learning and the implementation of that learning (Rahyuda et al., 2014; Yang et al., 2009). Because working across nations has become the norm and cultures are not homogeneous among nations, it is crucial for organisations to understand the role culture plays on the learning transfer process in order for organisations to get a return on their financial, time, and human investments (Raver & Van Dyne, 2017).

Being able to transfer newly acquired knowledge and skills is the ultimate goal of PL, yet it is the most challenging to achieve (Baldwin et al., 2017; Grossman & Salas, 2011). Despite the large amount of research on learning transfer, there are a limited number of empirical field studies (Choi & Roulston, 2015; Rahyuda et al., 2014). There are also few learning transfer models that account for cultural differences in the transfer of learning process (Rahyuda et al., 2014; Yang et al., 2009). To date, learning transfer models have outlined the importance of organisational culture (Ford, 2020; Gil et al., 2021) and specifically the role transfer climate plays in enhancing or hindering learning transfer (Blume et al., 2019; Grossman & Salas, 2011; Hughes et al., 2018) but none have taken into consideration the central influence of culture on the transfer process. The purpose of this qualitative study was to fill this knowledge gap by examining how, if at all, cultural factors influence learning transfer. To illustrate the importance that culture has on PL and because there is a lack of studies that offer a practical perspective from developing countries (Rahyuda et al., 2014), this study took place among educational leaders in two West African countries: Burkina Faso and Ghana. If practitioners and PL organisers understood how culture affects learning transfer, organisations around the world would get a better return on their investments because the implementation of new knowledge would take place. In addition, employees would feel more empowered which would have a positive impact on the organisation's climate and culture.

This research adds to the learning transfer literature while also providing some country-specific and practical recommendations that will benefit training organisers and facilitators in Burkina Faso and Ghana. These recommendations will also provide a blueprint that other facilitators, leaders, and human resource officers in global organisations and multinational corporations can use to reflect on their learning transfer practices within the culture in which they operate.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Learning transfer, also referred to as training transfer, is defined as “the effective and continuing application by learners—to their performance of jobs or other individual, organizational, or community responsibilities—of knowledge and skills gained in the learning activities” (Broad, 1997, p. 2). Learning transfer has been studied for over 30 years theoretically and quantitatively in the organisational psychology, business and human resource development fields. In their seminal meta-analysis paper, Baldwin and Ford (1988) were first to categorise the enhancers and inhibitors to learning transfer. The authors organised them into three input factors: (1) the factors related to learners’ characteristics; (2) the factors pertaining to the intervention design and delivery; and (3) the factors affected by the work environment. The influence of cultural factors as described by Hofstede (2011) on learning transfer was absent from any of the training inputs.

Broad and Newstrom (1992) identified six key factors that either hinder or promote learning transfer: (a) program participants, their motivation and dispositions and previous knowledge; (b) program design and execution including the strategies for learning transfer; (c) program content which is adapted to the needs of the learners; (d) changes required to apply learning within the organisation, complexity of change; (e) organisational context such as people, structure, and cultural milieu that can support or prevent transfer of learning. Following Broad and Newstrom’s work, Holton et al. (2000) created, piloted, and validated in 24 countries a 16-factor Learning Transfer System Inventory (LTSI) based on 16 constructs (Table 1). The LTSI was designed as a pulse-taking diagnostic tool for training organisers. As with previous models, each of these constructs can hinder or promote learning transfer. As Table 1 indicates, there is no mention of culture.

**Table 1**  
*Learning Transfer System Inventory (LTSI)*

Capability	Motivation	Work Environment
Content validity	Transfer effort: Performance expectations	Supervisor support
Transfer design	Transfer performance: Outcome expectations	Supervisor sanctions
Opportunity to use	Learner readiness	Peer support
Personal capacity	Motivation to transfer Performance, self-efficacy	Performance coaching Personal outcomes: Positive Personal outcomes: Negative Resistance to change

Adapted from “Development of a generalized learning transfer system inventory,” by E. F. Holton III, R. A. Bates and W. E. Ruona, 2000, *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 11(4), pp. 338–340.

In their meta-analysis, Burke and Hutchins (2007) reviewed 170 articles and posited that anxiety and negative affectivity, openness to experience, and organisational commitment were the factors that influenced the transfer of learning most. Additionally, the climate, support, and being given the opportunity to transfer the new knowledge also influenced the transfer process. In this meta-analysis, there was no consideration of the impact of culture on learning transfer.

More recently, Blume et al. (2010) reviewed 89 quantitative studies in the United States and Canada and explored the impact of predictive factors such as trainee characteristics, work environment, and training interventions on the transfer of training to different tasks and contexts. The authors also examined moderator effects of the relationships between these predictors and transfer. The results confirmed positive relationships between transfer and predictors such as cognitive ability, conscientiousness, motivation, and a supportive work environment. Several moderators had significant effects on transfer relationships, including the nature of the training objectives but none of the studies considered the influence of cultural factors on the transfer process in a national context.

“Culture is the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others” (Hofstede, 2011, p. 3). Because learning is a social endeavour and knowledge is contextual, people’s cultures impact the way they learn, interact, communicate, and resolve conflicts (Lindsey et al., 2018). Culture also impacts learning transfer because if people do not learn due to a language barrier or because respect is not shown for traditions and preferred learning styles (collectivistic versus individualistic, for example), they will not be able to implement the new knowledge in their jobs.

There are currently a limited number of research studies that examine the influence of culture on learning transfer (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013; Closson, 2013; Sarkar-Barney, 2004; Silver, 2000; Yang et al., 2009). These scholars are among the few authors affirming a relationship between cultural factors such as collectivism versus individualism and learning transfer. Yang et al. (2009) asserted that the fundamental reason why cultural factors impact PL is that learning is a social process that takes place in certain cultural contexts. These authors posited that cultural factors affect PL events via the content, the selection of facilitators, and the preferred methods of delivery. For example, for nations that tend to be collectivistic on Hofstede’s (2011) six dimensions of national culture, group work would most likely promote learning and enhance learning transfer.

Scholars posited that cultural differences do not only impact learning (Raver & Van Dyne, 2017) and the training process (Yang et al., 2009), but that cultural differences also influence learning transfer (Closson, 2013) because if learners cannot learn, they cannot transfer new knowledge and skills. Beyond an awareness of who is represented in the room socially and ethnically, Caffarella and Daffron (2013) asserted that learning transfer should be discussed within contexts because context affects the way we teach, what we teach, and how we teach. Moreover, these authors affirmed the necessity for facilitators

to be culturally sensitive and understand norms, traditions, and culture to facilitate the transfer of learning. According to Caffarella and Daffron (2013), the planning phase of PL is when facilitators can deliberately include culturally responsive approaches that are informed by the nation's scores on Hofstede's (2011) dimensions of national culture.

Sarkar-Barney (2004) proposed a framework for global organisations that develop training in one context and deploy them internationally. The author used Baldwin and Ford's (1988) three input factors and posited that there were two levels of cultural values that impact learning transfer: individual level values such as openness to change and culture-level values such as conservatism versus autonomy. The author concluded her theoretical paper by asserting that cultural differences in training practices are not well understood. Rahyuda et al. (2014) supported the importance of culture in the learning transfer process and affirmed that there was a lack of studies examining the impact of culture and post-training interventions, particularly in developing countries. They also affirmed the need to conduct empirical rather than laboratory and simulation-based studies.

This study sought to understand the influence of cultural factors on the learning transfer process in the areas of pretraining and follow-up. To better comprehend the impact of culture on learning transfer, I used the Multidimensional Model of Learning Transfer (MMLT) (Brion, 2021) and Hofstede's (2011) model of national culture to analyse the data.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

On the basis of the literature on the role of culture in the learning transfer process, some authors argue that there is a need for a comprehensive, multidimensional, and unifying model of learning transfer that considers culture as a key factor (Raver & Van Dyne, 2017). Therefore, I merged and extended existing models of learning transfer to construct the MMLT (Brion, 2021).

### **Multidimensional Model of Learning Transfer (MMLT)**

The MMLT (Brion, 2021) is a culturally grounded and evidence-based model that developed from data collected, analysed, and synthesised over six years in educational institutions in five African nations (Brion, 2021). Even though the data were collected in Africa, the findings could be informative to nations with similar scores on Hofstede's (2011) six dimensions of national culture. In the MMLT, I assert that culture is the predominant enhancer and inhibitor to transfer and that culture affects the entire learning transfer process (Brion, 2021). Considering culture as the main enhancer or inhibitor to transfer is useful because organisations spend large amounts of money and resources on PL that do not often yield improved outcomes. MMLT is composed of six dimensions: Pretraining, Learner, Facilitator, Material and Content, Context and Environment, and Post-Training (Figure 1). In the MMLT, culture is the overarching factor that affects all other dimensions of learning transfer. A description of the MMLT elements is provided below.

### *Pretraining*

As Figure 1 indicates, pretraining includes the orientation of facilitators and other key stakeholders so that they can support the PL once it has begun. Pretraining also includes communicating expectations to facilitators and learners, explaining who will benefit from the PL event, stating that participants are accountable to implement new knowledge and sharing the schedule, goals, and information that is perceived as mandatory (Yang et al., 2009).

### *Learner*

Learners are the participants in the PL program. This dimension refers to understanding the learners' motivation and their background. The learner category also includes understanding differences in learning styles (Lindsey et al., 2018) as well as language and writing differences. It is also comprised of the participants' beliefs and attitudes toward their job (Yelon et al., 2013), whether or not they have the freedom to act, and the positive consequences of that application. Finally, it involves the participants' belief of the efficacy of the knowledge and skills learned (Yelon et al., 2013).

### *Facilitator*

Effective facilitators must understand the adult participants' background as well as their own and how their beliefs may affect learning and the learning transfer (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013). Facilitator also refers to the understanding of language and writing differences, setting goals, and the selection of participants (Yang et al., 2009). Leaders and facilitators should examine the biases they may have towards certain groups of people before teaching and gathering materials for the PL event.

### *Content and Materials*

Content and Materials involves using evidence based, culturally relevant, and contextualised materials (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013). It also involves using a pedagogical approach based on andragogy or how adults learn best (Knowles, 1980; Mezirow, 2000). In this dimension, PL organisers and leaders would ensure that the content reflects the participants' needs and backgrounds.

### *Context and Environment*

This dimension comprises the training and work environment and the sociocultural context. It also refers to having enough time to transfer knowledge, the support for action, the resources, the freedom to act, and peer support (Burke & Hutchins, 2008). Finally, Context and Environment refers to the training incentives: intrinsic incentives such as providing educators with growth opportunities, and extrinsic incentives, such as reward or promotion (Facteau et al., 1995).

*Follow-up*

Follow-up is often overlooked and is necessary to avoid skill decay and training relapse. Examples include tutor-facilitated networks via mobile technology (Brion, 2018), micro-learning using mobile technology, coaching, testimonials, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) or Community of Practice (COPs), apprenticeships, coaching, and e-coaching (Speck & Knipe, 2005; Wang & Wentling, 2001).

Understanding how culture practically impacts learning transfer in Burkina Faso and Ghana would help PL attendees implement new knowledge, improve organisations’ outcomes while also increasing their company’s return on investments in these two nations.

**Figure 1**  
*The Multidimensional Model of Learning Transfer*





## A Multidimensional Model of Learning Transfer

### PRETRAINING:

- Orient supervisors & facilitators
- Explain that implementation is expected
- Learn about professional learning audience & goals

### LEARNER:

- Understand the cultural background of all stakeholders
- Understand that different learning styles will be present in the professional learning event
- Understand that different languages & writing might be present in the professional learning event

### FACILITATOR:

- Understand the cultural background of all stakeholders
- Understand that different learning styles will be present in the professional learning event
- Need to have the dispositions necessary to be an effective facilitator

### CONTENT & MATERIALS:

- Materials are evidence-based, culturally relevant, & contextualized
- Pedagogical approach used is adult-friendly; it should be based on how adults learn best
- Learn about professional learning audience & goals

### CONTEXT & ENVIRONMENT:

- All stakeholders understand the work environment and socio-cultural context
- Create a climate that fosters transfer
- Allow for peer contact and support

### FOLLOW UP:

- Tutor facilitated networks
- Use of mobile learning
- Use of coaching, e-coaching, PLCs, COPs
- Include detailed feedback, modeling, & reflection

## The Hofstede Model

This paper illustrates the impact of culture on learning transfer in two different contexts, Burkina Faso and Ghana. To do so, I used Hofstede's model (2011) to learn more about each country's culture and frame my data collection and analysis. The model consists of six dimensions (6D) that emerged from a comprehensive study of how values in the workplace are influenced by culture. The countries' positions on the six dimensions are expressed in a score on a 100-point-scale with zero being the lowest possible score. The cultural dimensions represent independent preferences for one state of affairs over another that distinguish countries (rather than individuals) from each other. The dimensions of the model are explained below and Table 2 outlines how Burkina Faso and Ghana scored in each of the dimensions.

### *Power Distance Index (PDI)*

This dimension expresses the degree to which the less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. Both Burkina Faso and Ghana score high in this dimension.

### *Individualism Versus Collectivism (IDV)*

Individualist societies refer to societies in which the propensity is for individuals to take care of themselves and their immediate family only. In collectivistic cultures, people think of the needs of the group over individual needs. Both nations are collectivistic.

### *Masculinity Versus Femininity (MAS)*

In this dimension, masculinity represents a preference in society for achievement, competitiveness, heroism, assertiveness, and material rewards for success. On the other hand, femininity embodies an inclination for cooperation, modesty, caring, and quality of life. Burkina Faso and Ghana lean towards femininity.

### *Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI)*

This dimension speaks to the degree to which individuals are uncomfortable with uncertainty. Both countries scored high indicating a preference to avoid uncertainties.

### *Long-Term Orientation Versus Short-Term Normative Orientation (LTO)*

Long-term orientation denotes a society that is focused on the future. Short-term orientation societies focus on the present or past and value traditions. Both countries value traditions.

### *Indulgence Versus Restraint (IND)*

Indulgence refers to a society that accepts having fun and enjoying life. Restraint is for a society that eliminates the gratification of needs and controls it with strict social norms. This research project focused on the power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation dimensions.

**Table 2***Cultural Profiles: Burkina Faso and Ghana*

Cultural Dimension	Burkina Faso	Ghana
Power Distance	70	80
Individualism/Collectivism	15	15
Masculinity/Femininity	50	40
Uncertainty Avoidance	55	65
Long-Term Orientation	27	4
Indulgence	18	72

## METHODS

This qualitative study used a case study design to better understand the impact of culture on learning transfer. I opted for a case study approach because it provides the ability to examine in detail a phenomenon as it manifests in everyday contexts (Yin, 2014). The unit of analysis was school principals across two countries, framing the case study to explore the impact culture has on learning transfer. In this paper, I report the findings related to the following research question: What elements of Hofstede's (2011) six dimensions of national culture and what dimensions of the MMLT influenced learning transfer?

Prior to conducting the study, I sought and received approval from my institution's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The purpose of this process is to ensure that the research design does not violate the ethical institutional and federal guidelines.

### Selection of Sites

The sites selected for this research study were seven leadership PL events in Burkina Faso and 18 in Ghana over the course of six years. Each PL program lasted for two or three days. The participants were school leaders and proprietors of Low-Fee Private Schools. These sites were selected because I had been working in these countries and had access to these schools and training sessions.

### Selection of Participants

This research relied on a purposive criterion sampling of 20 men and women principals, 10 in each country, working in Low-Fee Private Schools in urban and rural areas. Their age ranged from 36 to 62 years old. Purposive sampling allowed me to select participants from whom I could learn the most to answer the research question of the study (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). Criterion sampling was also used to select participants. Criterion sampling involves selecting participants that meet a predetermined criterion (Patton, 2002). Participants were chosen according to their willingness to participate in the study, their ability to attend the three-day school leadership training, and their aptitude to speak and understand the national languages, French for Burkina Faso and English for Ghana.

## **Data Collection**

Data collection included interviews with 20 school leaders in 2018, field notes pertaining to how the six dimensions of national culture (Hofstede, 2011) influenced learning transfer from 70 days of training observation, as well as document analysis.

### *Interviews*

In 2018, I conducted one-on-one interviews with 10 principals from Burkina Faso and 10 principals from Ghana during the fifth year of my work in West Africa, which allowed me to more deeply understand the cultural differences and commonalities between the nations. The interviews were semi-structured, open-ended and lasted 45 minutes. An interview guide was developed. I asked open-ended questions such as “Tell me what helped you to implement the new knowledge after the PL” and “What prevented you from implementing that knowledge?” Interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim in French and English. The French transcriptions were not translated into English but rather coded in French, my native language. These interviews occurred approximately three months after the principals attended the three-day school leadership PL to allow for reflection and transfer time.

### *Training Observation*

I observed the 20 principals during the PL events. I observed a total of 70 days of training over six years: 25 in Burkina Faso and 45 in Ghana. Per Wolcott’s advice (1994), the observations were structured. I used a check list to help me identify instances of when culture influenced the training and learning transfer. The check list was inspired by Hofstede’s (2011) six dimensions of national culture and included items related to power distance, long-term orientation, and uncertainty avoidance. These notes and check list were later coded and added to the data analysis to understand the influence of culture on learning transfer.

### *Document Analysis*

I analysed group text messages from WhatsApp. The PL facilitator used the WhatsApp application to follow-up with the participants after the PL. This follow-up method was used in Ghana only as Ghana is more technologically advanced than Burkina Faso and most participants in Burkina Faso did not have a smartphone at the time of the study. I analysed text entries from the WhatsApp platform as a form of document analysis.

## **Data Analysis**

Coding is the base of the analysis (Saldaña, 2009). Due to the large amount of data to code, the data were pre-coded by highlighting significant participants’ quotes or passages that related to the research questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The pre-coding allowed me to place relevant quotes under the MMLT’s pretraining and follow-up categories. Following the pre-coding, the analysis of qualitative data took place over two cycles of

coding. In round one, I used in vivo coding to develop codes for each key point emerging from the interviews, documents, field notes, and journal. Examples of codes that emerged from the data during this coding phase included titles, gender issues, age differences affect interactions. In round two, using axial coding, I grouped the preliminary codes into overlapping categories to create themes. Examples of codes were power dynamics, formalities, group.

### **Trustworthiness**

To enhance the present study's internal validity, I included four strategies into the design of the present study. First, I triangulated the data using several different sources of data such as the interviews, numerous observations, and document analysis. The different sources of data contributed to achieving saturation and the quality of the data collected (Creswell, 2013). Second, I went back to the participants to ask them to check the accuracy of the findings (Mero-Jaffe, 2011). Third, I created a data trail (Rodgers, 2008). This is a qualitative research practice where I copied the participants' quotes from the present study's transcript data and pasted them under each theme that emerged from the data analysis. This strategy helped ensure that sufficient transcript data supported the results that I reported in this study. Following this process also ensured that I was not sharing my viewpoint but, rather, the perspectives of the participants.

## **FINDINGS**

To preserve the integrity of the findings, I used the participants' comments verbatim. I also used pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the participants. The findings are categorised using the MMLT and Hofstede's (2011) 6D when applicable. In this paper, I share the findings pertaining to the MMLT's pretraining and follow-up categories because these are the dimensions that are often overlooked in the learning transfer process. In Hofstede's (2011) model, the data indicated that culture affected the dimensions of uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, and power distance. Other cultural factors that were important to foster learning transfer were the notion of time and the use of technology to communicate and be reminded of the learning that took place in the PL.

### **Pretraining**

During the six years that I worked in Burkina Faso and Ghana, I saw in all the principals the following cultural factors affecting the pretraining phase and appeared to hinder learning transfer: the notion of time, the importance of avoiding uncertainty, respecting traditions and understanding how power is viewed and enacted.

#### *The Notion of Time*

In both nations, the notion of time was lived differently. In Burkina Faso, the participants arrived one hour early to the PL and the event started on time, whereas in Ghana, it was common for the PL to start two to three hours after the scheduled time as the team of

facilitators would wait for most of the attendees to arrive. In my journal, I wrote the following comment regarding the notion of time: “Coming from the West, I often wondered if the tardiness was due to the heavy traffic or the fact that participants were school leaders who may have gone to their schools prior to the start of the PL.” Curious about the reasons for such dissimilarities between Burkina Faso and Ghana, I sought some explanations from the participants and their Ghanaian local colleagues who explained that “it was cultural.” My local colleagues advised the facilitating team to start the PL on time. Agnes explained: “As participants see the value in the PL, they will come on time, they come late first because they do not know what they can gain from training events, it happens all the time.” A Ghanaian principal named Godwin used a joke to make fun of himself: “You Americans have nice watches, but we have the time.” Although this joke may be seen as a stereotyped notion of culture, it denoted the unperturbed attitude that the Ghanaians had towards time and was important to facilitators so they could plan their PL accordingly and learning transfer was not inhibited.

Understanding the notion of time has important repercussions for the pretraining phase. During this phase PL organisers should orient facilitators on cultural differences, communicate expectations and norms to facilitators and learners, explain who will benefit from the training, state that the participants are accountable for implementing new knowledge, and share the schedule. If participants come late, they miss some training content and thus they will not be able to transfer knowledge they may have missed due to the different understandings of the notion of time. It was also important to know that Burkinabe come early to PL events as facilitators could use this time to bond with their audience, re-explain concepts, and ask participants about their schools. Josephine explained: “I do not have many opportunities for education, so if it is there, I must embrace all of it and do not want to miss one minute of it because I want to improve my school.” Caleb shared this sentiment: “We generally come on time or early because we want to learn and pick up new ideas and meet other colleagues.” Eli similarly stated: “We were invited and told that important information will be shared, so we have to come on time to learn, and anyway we expect our students to come on time so why shouldn’t we?” Eli stated that the attendees were “invited” to the PL programming. These invitations were given to participants during the pretraining phase and appeared to be important culturally to avoid uncertainty.

### *Uncertainty Avoidance*

In Hofstede’s (2011) 6D, both countries showed a preference for avoiding uncertainty. This was key in understanding how to organise the training because participants did not feel comfortable not knowing about the PL event ahead of time. Participants requested clear descriptions of the training and why they should attend, how the training would benefit their schools, who the facilitators were, the PL goals, and a detailed schedule for each day that outlined breaks and lunch times. When I asked local colleagues in both nations about the need to create an hour per hour schedule, they replied:

It is part of our culture, you just have to do it, or they will not come. I think it is because it takes a lot of effort to come to a training, transportation in the dust, time, gas, so they want to know if it will be worthwhile.

Martha from Burkina Faso added:

I like to know what is going to happen in advance, so I can get prepared, get there on time, and get coverage at school and at home. I also like to know where the training is and if there are breaks and food, so I know if it is going to cost me money.

Adwoa in Ghana shared the sentiment of the group when she said: “I think it is nicer when we know all the details and expectations in advance so we can decide to come or not.” Reuben noted:

We also do not often go to hotels for a training, so when we know the location in advance, the detailed content and if we are expected to do something post training, who will be there because we do not want to waste our time with training that is not well put together and do not force us to improve.

As the participants mentioned, providing detailed information ahead of time was not only a cultural expectation, but it also increased motivation, attendance, and punctuality. Avoiding uncertainty by preparing a detailed description of the PL allowed participants to decide to attend the PL or not. During the pretraining period, PL organisers have an opportunity to communicate the value of the PL and the importance of its application, which leads to the participants’ belief of the efficacy of the knowledge and skills learned, an important enhancer of learning transfer.

#### *Long-Term Orientation: Formalities Matter*

Short-term orientation societies focus on the present or past, and value traditions (Hofstede, 2011). Both countries scored very low in long-term orientation, indicating that people value and honour traditions. Burkina Faso, however, is more formal than Ghana when it comes to PL. For example, it is not unusual for Burkina Faso to have an opening and closing ceremony with media, speeches, and special addresses at PL sessions. Being French, I could hear the formality of the French language during these ceremonies. In an excerpt of my journal, I wrote:

I could see the conventionalism and importance of these events in the formal traditional attire people wore. During the pre- and post-PL ceremonies, organisers or authority figures gave formal speeches outlining their roles and titles, the importance of the training, and welcoming participants and facilitators.

This custom was essential to understand when planning for PL in order to include more time for speeches and closing remarks. It was also important for facilitators to prepare a speech. Finally, understanding this tradition helped build trust and rapport among the participants, local dignitaries, and officials. Additionally, this cultural practice was significant for PL because time and resources had to be allocated for the ceremonies. When asked about these ceremonies, participants stated that they were sort of markers and that they created memories. In particular, Joshua shared: “You know status is important, so when you go to a training and there is a ceremony with important people coming to value the training and tell us to use it in our schools, it tells us that we should go too.” Momo explained: “If local dignitaries tell us that the training has value and that the content needs to be implemented, we believe it, so we are more likely to also see value in the training.” Joshua and Momo indicated that mentioning these ceremonies and guests when sending a formal invitation during the pretraining phase was a contributing factor to attending and implementing the new knowledge. Knowing the importance and potential impact of these ceremonies on learning transfer, PL organisers could schedule accordingly, prepare the room adequately for the festivities, and include them in the invitation sent to the participants prior to the PL.

#### *Power Distance: Titles, Gender, and Age*

Power distance refers to the degree to which the less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally (Hofstede, 2011). Both countries scored high in this dimension. Power distance was demonstrated among titles, gender, and age; it was particularly apparent in the Burkinabe PL context. Titles were extremely important. If participants were reverends or had any kind of affiliation with the Church, they were automatically respected and trusted by the rest of the group. People tended to let reverends speak first. Moreover, academic titles and formal educational levels appeared to matter to trainees. For example, Eli described the local facilitators holding a PhD as “important people.” Emile expanded on this idea when he said: “You know here, it makes you look like someone if you have a title and you get respect and recognition, so we are more likely to attend a training and use the knowledge learned if people are known and or have titles.” Ama seconded this perspective when she said: “If there is a famous or semi-known pastor in the room, I will come because if that person sees value in the training, I better see it too.” In their own words, Emile and Ama shared that who is in the PL room matters at first and has an influence on transfer. Consequently, during the pretraining, organisers could share the participants’ names and affiliations if and when culturally and legally appropriate.

Power distance was also expressed in relation to gender and age. Martine, who is in her late thirties, expressed the following: “It is culturally inappropriate when a younger person brings new ideas so if the session leaders and facilitators do not create the conditions for sharing safely and equitably, women and particularly younger women will not share.” Lizette explained: “I need new blood in the school. In Africa, we tend to respect the old brother, the elder, but we cannot ask him to do what you want him/her to do.” She felt that

being a young leader, it is culturally easier to work with young people due to the power distance that exists with elders. What Martine and Lizette said has the potential to impact transfer because learning is a social and a cognitive activity and if women and younger participants feel stifled, unable to fully participate and be involved in the PL, they will not learn as much as they might have and hence will not be able to transfer as much either. The follow-up dimension of the MMLT was also impacted by culture.

### **Follow-up**

Using WhatsApp as a post PL intervention was “brilliant” according to Reuben and Ama as “it reminded us of the training, encouraged us to continue to learn more from peers and encouraged us to do something.” Adwoa agreed with her colleagues and said: “We saw our colleagues post things they had done at their schools, so it motivated us to implement too.” Asantewaa wrote about WhatsApp as a reminder of content learned during the PL: “Comments from my colleagues always draw my attention back to what was learned at the PL. We got ideas and copied some ideas.” Most participants shared that they were happy to hear from colleagues after the PL, keeping “the good atmosphere beyond the training.” Edy, who did not share much on the group text, added: “Despite the fact that I never wrote anything on the platform I was reading all the messages and learned a lot from the others that way.”

In addition, all Ghanaian participants suggested that WhatsApp was motivating due to the peer pressure it created. When the leaders saw photographs on the phone of what their colleagues improved in their schools, they were more inclined to do the same and share their progress on the platform. Helen affirmed this by saying:

When I see other schools making so many changes, I must make some too! I liked what some of my colleagues did and I must now try to do the same at my school. If they can do it, why can't I? I must at least try and show them.

Michel agreed with Helen and wrote: “I do not go to the others’ schools, but I see pictures they send, and it helps me to change too.” Godwin made a similar statement: “Usually after training, people feel reluctant to use what was learned but *WhatsApp* gave us pressure and motivation and it always reminded us to do what we set out to do.”

## **DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION**

### **Pretraining and Follow-up Matter in Learning Transfer**

The findings from this study suggested that several cultural factors influenced learning transfer in the areas of pretraining and follow-up, dimensions that are currently not found together in learning transfer models. Specifically, using the 6D (Hofstede, 2011), uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, and power distance had the potential to affect learning transfer in Burkina Faso and Ghana. Two other cultural factors could impact learning transfer: the notion of time and the reliance on a form of communication such

as WhatsApp. WhatsApp is readily accessible and used in Ghana in the training context; in fact, it is the most common way of communicating in Ghana. In terms of pretraining, the study findings are in agreement with Yang et al. (2009) and Ford et al. (2018) who asserted that pretraining was a key component of organising PL since it sets the tone of the event. Similarly to the findings in this study, these authors maintained that PL organisers should orient supervisors so that they can support the training once it has begun and should communicate the expectations to the trainers and the trainees. As a result, this study adds empirical data to the conceptual work of Yang et al. (2009) which posited that pretraining is key and should outline who will benefit from the PL, the schedule, the session goals, and other information perceived as mandatory.

When working in Burkina Faso and Ghana, pretraining is particularly important because local and foreign facilitators may not be familiar with the relation between cultural factors and learning transfer. For example, findings from this research outlined that the Burkina-be culture valued opening and closing ceremonies with dignitaries. Without knowing this and respecting this cultural norm, facilitators may unknowingly disrespect participants and their culture. As a result of this cultural faux pas, participants may not attend the PL or may not be willing to transfer knowledge. In the same way, the participants highlighted the importance of having logistical details ahead of time, which is particularly important when working in countries or with people from cultures that score high in Hofstede's (2011) uncertainty avoidance dimension. Within the pretraining phase, this study provided specific examples of cultural values that can influence learning transfer and hence provided a road map for organisations and practitioners working in these countries or with countries with similar cultural values.

For the follow-up category of the MMLT, the findings suggested that using the group text function of WhatsApp to enhance the chances of learning transfer was an effective and culturally responsive approach that used the collectivistic inclination of Ghanaian society (Brion, 2018). As Ama said, "it reminded us of the training, encouraged us to continue to learn more from peers and encouraged us to sit up and do something too." The findings indicated that the WhatsApp group text allowed trainees to engage with each other in transformative discourse, allowing them to question their assumptions and gain new knowledge. The participants also stated that they were learning from their peers not just during the PL but also during the follow-up, whether they overtly participated in the WhatsApp dialogues or not. Thus, even without active participation in the WhatsApp group, there is the potential for vicarious learning and increased chances of transfer (Brion, 2018). In the adult learning transfer literature, authors such as Caffarella and Daffron (2013) discuss learning as being a social process and hence learning communities, collaboration, and interactions among participants are crucial to learning and its transfer. The findings demonstrated that WhatsApp is an affordable, sustainable, and culturally appropriate follow-up tool that fosters interactions among PL attendees. This study indicates that the use of culturally responsive mobile technology such as WhatsApp in the follow-up stage could prevent training relapse, in which trainees lose their motivation

and/or knowledge, hindering the transfer of learning. These findings are significant as the use of mobile technology as a culturally responsive follow-up approach after a PL event is largely absent from the current learning transfer literature. As a result, this study adds to the current learning transfer literature and provides a culturally responsive solution to effectively and sustainably follow-up post PL.

Based on these findings pertaining to cultural factors in the pretraining and follow-up phases, there is a need for a comprehensive, multidimensional, and unifying model of learning transfer that considers culture as a key factor (Raver & Van Dyne, 2017). The MMLT was designed to promote cultural awareness by respecting participants' cultures when planning, organising, conducting, following-up, and evaluating PL events. This model is relevant for all institutions and should be of particular interest to organisations that work with a diverse staff population and/or work across countries. Rahyuda et al. (2014) stated the importance of national contexts in the learning transfer and affirmed that there was a lack of empirical studies examining the impact of culture and post-training interventions, particularly in developing countries. In this way, this study adds empirical data to other laboratory and simulation-based studies (Rahyuda et al., 2014).

### **Implications for Practitioners and Scholars**

What recommendations can be drawn from the acquired data? First, to enhance learning transfer post-PL and get a return on investment that would in turn positively affect organisation outcomes, PL events should account for culture before, during, and after PL events. PL organisers and facilitators should consider using the MMLT (Brion, 2021) to organise, prepare, deliver, and evaluate their PL offerings. Since learning is a social endeavour, the MMLT enables PL organisers to take culture into consideration for each of the MMLT dimensions for maximum learning transfer.

Second, it is necessary that PL stakeholders remain flexible and open to learning about different cultures and adjust their organising, teaching and learning transfer strategies accordingly without judgment. Additionally, to enhance learning transfer post-PL, a mobile platform that is already readily used in the country in which they work could be implemented as an affordable and culturally responsive way to follow-up with participants. In terms of scholarship, further research could use the MMLT as a conceptual framework in various cultural, professional, and geographical settings to assess its content validity.

### **Limitations**

First, the sample was limited to Low-Fee Private Schools and second, the schools were located in two countries in West Africa, limiting the generalisation of the findings to other contexts. However, these findings may be informative for PL organisers who work in and with people whose countries have similar cultural values and scores on the 6D.

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