Enabling the transfer of learning: A framework for work-integrated learning in human resource management

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The transition from classroom learning to workplace practice is a key challenge in WIL. This study investigates learning transfer as a mechanism for successful WIL experiences. Using data from Human Resource Management (HRM) programs in three different countries, the guiding research question is: "What enables or constrains different forms of transfer of learning between classroom and internship in HRM contexts"? The paper argues that planning for transfer is essential for effective WIL. Using a sequential mixed method approach, a taxonomy of learning transfer specific to the WIL journey was developed. Findings indicate an overemphasis on academically manageable transfer types and a potential undervaluing of others crucial for workplace competence. Recommendations for improving WIL outcomes and graduate employability include scaffolding the spectrum of transfer types within WIL program design. This could help students navigate the demands of academic requirements and employer expectations and offer insights for WIL practitioners and curriculum developers.

Keywords: Transfer of learning, forms of transfer, planning for transfer, far transfer, near transfer

THE ROLE OF TRANSFER IN WIL

The focus of this research study is work-integrated learning (WIL) in undergraduate Human Resource Management (HRM) programs, specifically the kinds of transfer needed to support students' journeys from the classroom to an internship. HRM emerged as an academic field in the early 20th century and since then has been constantly updated to accommodate the rapid pace of change in HRM practice (Mainga et al., 2022). HRM was selected for this study as a field that is particularly impacted by changing labor markets, as well as rapid technological shifts, which require students to not only apply concepts but to constantly adapt and innovate. The quality of education and training provision is fundamental to a sustainable and future-oriented HRM system (Alam & Dewi, 2024; Smith & Smith, 2007). While HRM principles provide the foundation necessary for preparing students for the demands of the workplace (Riani, 2024; Smith & Smith, 2007), there is an increasing need to develop skills relevant to the needs of current and future labor markets. Change is so rapid in the field of HRM practice that the possession of an undergraduate qualification is no guarantee that graduates will find employment (Pinto & He, 2019; Scott & Willison, 2021). This has led researchers to question the relevance of graduates' HRM qualifications for industry needs (Alaali & Rees, 2018; Kadir et al., 2020; Lichy & Khvatova, 2019; Sithambaram & Tajudeen, 2023).

Recent literature on employability in HRM (e.g., Alaali & Rees, 2018; Malik & Venkatraman, 2017; van Beurden et al., 2024) aligns with findings in the WIL literature about the persistent skills gap. The consensus is that developing relevant skills requires higher education and industry partnerships that can create "authentic work-focused experiences as an intentional component of the curriculum" (Zegwaard et al., 2023, p. 38). Such partnerships enable "a shift from the instructional paradigm to the learning paradigm" (Evans-Greenwood et al., 2015, p. 20) and provide students with better workplace preparedness (Ferns et al., 2019). Conversely, a lack of communication and collaboration can contribute to a "skills mismatch" (Adely et al., 2021), where graduates' knowledge is not aligned with industry

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needs. This mismatch is often cited as a key driver of graduate underemployment and unemployment, which can in turn exacerbate broader socio-economic challenges (Brunello & Wruuck, 2021).

While university-industry partnerships provide the essential structure for WIL, this study addresses the underlying mechanisms that make learning effective. We argue that the core curricular mechanism is the transfer of learning. Transfer, or how learning is applied and adapted to new situations (Haskell, 2001), is the bridge between the classroom and the workplace. The WIL literature has shown the centrality of transfer in effective WIL (e.g., Ferns et al., 2019; Jackson et al., 2019). Our study builds on this work, guided by the research question: "What enables or constrains different forms of transfer of learning between classroom and internship in HRM contexts?"

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The study is part of a larger project involving collaborative research on WIL in universities in the global North and South. Three universities from Namibia, Portugal and South Africa participated in this study of three qualifications in HRM: A diploma in HRM (commenced in the 1990s in South Africa), a Bachelor's in HRM (commenced in 1996 in Portugal), and a Bachelor's in HRM (commenced in 2016 in Namibia). The diploma is a three-year undergraduate qualification comparable in duration and academic level to the bachelor's degrees at the other two institutions. Table 1 provides details of the WIL models at the three universities.

TABLE 1: WIL models across the institutions.

Institution	WIL program	Structure	Duration	Assessment	Weighting	Prerequisites
U1	Compulsory	Internships	2 months 1st & 2nd year 4 months 3rd year	Reports & portfolios	1st & 2nd year (does not count for marks) 3rd year 20% reports 80% portfolios	Placement module
U2	Compulsory	Internships	3 months	Reports & portfolios	20% reports 80% portfolios	Placement module
U3	Compulsory	Internships	2 months & 1 week	Reports & portfolios	30% Portfolio of evidence 20% Reflection report 10% Pre-WIL workshop attendance 20% WIL Industry mentor/supervisor's evaluation 20% student's presentation	Placement module

The criteria for the selection of the programs were that HRM students should be engaged in both classroom-based and work-based learning. Postgraduate diplomas, master's and doctoral degrees in HRM programs are also offered by the institutions, however, the focus in this study is on three-year undergraduate programs.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: A TRANSFER TAXONOMONY

Haskell's (2001) seminal text on the transfer of learning provides a framework for understanding the mechanisms by which learning is applied in new contexts. Haskell (2001, p.23) defines transfer of learning as "how previous learning influences current and future learning, and how past or current learning is applied or adapted to similar or novel situations". Haskell proposed a taxonomy comprising six levels of transfer, ordered by increasing complexity and distance from the original learning event: 1) nonspecific transfer, 2) application transfer, 3) context transfer, 4) near transfer, 5) far transfer, and 6) creative transfer (2001, pp. 189-204). More details on these transfer types are provided below.

Subsequent researchers developed the concepts that Haskell outlined. Barnett and Ceci (2002) focused on near and far transfer. In near transfer, students transfer knowledge and skills to contexts similar to those which they originally learned. Because of the conceptual and contextual similarity, near transfer is generally easier to achieve. Far transfer, in contrast, is the application of knowledge and skills to situations that are conceptually and contextually very different from the original learning environment. Far transfer requires the student to go beyond following procedures, to recognize the underlying principles or structures, and apply them to novel situations. Far transfer, such as between theory-based academic tasks and practical workplace tasks, is considerably more difficult to achieve (Perkins & Grotzer, 1997). Successful transfer is more likely "between situations that are identical except for a few important differences" (Veillard, 2012, p. 253), or in "less complex tasks that relate to discipline-specific skills" (Jackson et al., 2019, p. 459). The logic is therefore to use pedagogical strategies to shorten the distance between the original learning event and the context of application.

For Eraut (2002), transfer nearly always involves some form of contextual transfer. This is particularly pertinent when students attempt to transfer academic learning into workplaces:

> Performance in the workplace typically involves the integration of several different forms of knowledge and skill, under conditions that allow little time for the analytic/deliberative approach favoured in higher education. (Eraut, 2002, p. 65)

The literature on transfer addresses different kinds of transfer and its challenges, such as theory-to-practice-transfer (Bouzguenda, 2014), application transfer (Hajian, 2019), creative transfer (Triantafyllaki, 2016), and so on. The literature includes systematic reviews and metanalyses related to transfer (Mishra & Sahoo, 2022; Sala et al., 2019), theoretical studies of transfer (Hajian, 2019) and studies that focus on teaching for transfer (Culpin et al., 2014; Pegg et al., 2012). Applying concepts developed by Haskell (2001) and others, this study developed a conceptual framework to guide the study, comprising a taxonomy of transfer tailored to students' WIL journeys in HRM. The framework is organized around two primary types of transfer; preparing for practice within the university, and reflecting on practice within the workplace.

Theory-to-Practice Transfer

Table 2 summarizes the conceptual framework for the study, following the students' WIL journeys. The columns on the left-hand side of the table represent the three continua of transfer 1) purpose (Haskell, 2001), 2) distance (Barnett & Ceci, 2002), and 3) context (Eraut, 2002). The rows on the right-hand side list forms of transfer and examples of transfer.

TABLE 2: Conceptual framework: A taxonomy of transfer types.

Transfer purpose	Transfer distance	Transfer context	Forms of transfer	Examples	Codes
Preparation	Far	Classroom	Theory-to-practice transfer	Some support (e.g., lecture, seminars, debates, with some examples of practice)	1
			Application transfer	Classroom-based project, case study, simulated learning, role-play	2
			Context transfer	University to workplace	3
			Practice-to-practice transfer	Mentoring (student's practice is improved by industry mentor)	4
			Practice-to-theory transfer	Reflection on practice through theory (e.g., lecturer visits, reports, portfolio)	5
			Non-specific transfer	Generic transfer (e.g., interpersonal skills)	6
			Creative transfer	Innovation, re-thinking, out-of-the-box thinking	7
Reflection	Near	Workplace			

The teaching of concepts and principles in HRM is often done in an abstract way, but initial forms of transfer can occur within the academic setting, when the lecturer uses or develops a pedagogy to bridge the gap between abstract knowledge and professional reality. Theory-to-practice transfer (Code 1 on Table 2) is the cognitive process in which a student learns how a theory relates to the world of practice (Bouzguenda, 2014). It is facilitated by lecturers who balance conceptual development with practical examples in their teaching practice. In professional education, teaching for transfer, even in a lecture hall, is about finding ways of preparing students for the world of professional practice.

Application Transfer

In a study of transfer theory, Hajian (2019) describes the difference between theory-to-practice transfer and application transfer (Code 2 on Table 2). In the former, the student is usually learning new abstract concepts. The student's ability to understand and transfer these concepts to other contexts can be supported with the use of more concrete examples or other means that bring the world of practice into the classroom. To further develop their understanding, the students need to engage more actively in application exercises in which they deliberately use HRM principles to solve a problem in a structured project or case study. Application transfer takes place when the students can transfer the knowledge gained from application exercises done in classrooms or simulation laboratories to actual situations in workplaces. Thus, application transfer is "the productive application of prior learning and experiences in novel contexts" (Hajian, 2019, p. 95).

Context Transfer

A crucial preparatory stage is context transfer (Code 3 on Table 2), which occurs as students are oriented towards their work placements, often by WIL coordinators or practitioners. An HRM specialist lecturer might bring in a WIL coordinator or HRM practitioner to orientate students to the shift from theory-based learning to practice-based learning. This could involve generic skills, such as Curriculum Vitae

(CV) writing or interviewing, or could involve a more specific introduction to a particular company and its practices.

Practice-to-Practice Transfer

Once in an internship, the nature of transfer shifts. Transfer remains an important part of learning with an internship. Practice-to-practice transfer (Code 4 on Table 1) occurs when students learn to improve their practice with the guidance of an experienced supervisor or mentor (Cooper et al., 2021). This usually involves facilitation by practitioners who "understand the diversity and complexity of … the workplace" (Cooper et al., 2021, p. 78) and can help students find their way in the new environment. While many researchers have found the support given to students in workplaces fundamental to improving their practice, researchers have also pointed out that academics generally do not value the attainment of practical knowledge (Hordern, 2014), and underestimate the role of "repeated practice" in attaining professional "know-how" (Culpin et al., 2014, p. 132).

Practice-to-Theory Transfer

Practice-to-theory transfer (Code 5 on Table 2) refers to the reflective process in which students link their practical work experiences back to the theories learned in the classroom (Randi & Corno, 2007). This occurs when students in work placements report and reflect on their practice, sometimes with the support of visits from a lecturer. Randi and Corno consider practice-to-theory transfer to "validate theory in practice by analyzing how the theory maps onto curriculum content" as well as a way to help practitioners "to adapt practice to theory" (2007, p. 334).

Non-Specific Transfer

Non-specific transfer (Code 6 on Table 2) is foundational, occurring across all contexts and involves learning and transferring generic skills that are not specific to HRM, often called soft skills, from classroom to workplace. In their systematic review of the literature on soft skills and transfer, Mishra and Sahoo point out that the role of soft skills training has been underestimated in transfer; they show that soft skills training "has been operationalized and measured as an antecedent and mediator of training transfer as well as an outcome itself" (2022, p. 1296). Manevska et al. (2018) point out that building communication skills in an academic setting is crucial to students' ability to learn and develop in the workplace. The impact of teaching soft skills in the classroom for transfer to the workplace is enhanced by using techniques such as roleplay and simulations, which build "pedagogic practice" (Pegg et al., 2012, p. 7).

Creative Transfer

Creative transfer (Code 7 on Table 2) is the furthest and most challenging form of transfer (Triantafyllaki, 2016). It represents an advanced achievement in which knowledge is restructured to create novel insights or solutions. This form of transfer moves beyond application to the creation of new concepts, procedures, or insights "in which knowledge restructuring and identity reformation are pathways into greater work flexibility and adjustment" (Triantafyllaki, 2016, p. 401). In the light of rapid changes in practice, often influenced by new or emerging technologies (Sithambaram & Tajudeen, 2023), creative transfer is becoming more important.

The conceptual framework shows that all forms of transfer can be located across continua and by understanding the dimensions of the continua (purpose, distance and context), we can better design WIL experiences that promote the desired level of transfer.

METHODS

Research Design

The aim of the study was to enhance transfer in HRM undergraduate qualifications. To achieve this aim, the researchers needed to study how academic staff and WIL practitioners in HRM departments understood the process of transfer between classroom and internships. The chosen research design was a sequential mixed methods study, an approach that is appropriate for research requiring "depth and theory development" (Cameron, 2009, p.141). In a sequential mixed methods study, data collection occurs in two distinct stages, where the first stage informs the second. The first stage comprised a questionnaire containing both fixed and open-ended questions, while the second stage comprised structured interviews to enable the researchers to obtain clarity and more depth and detail on issues of transfer. Questionnaires were distributed to HRM departmental staff; after an initial analysis of the questionnaire data, a purposive sample of respondents associated with WIL was identified for interview at each of the three universities (Table 3). HRM is a women-dominated field; thus, most participants were female.

TABLE 3: Research Participants.

Institution	Questionnaire responses	Interviewees	Total responses
U1	n = 5	HoD, Departmental WIL coordinators, HRM lecturers, (n = 6)	n = 11
U2	n = 6	HoD, Faculty WIL Coordinator, Departmental WIL Coordinator, HRM lecturers, (n = 6)	n = 12
U 3	n = 2	Dean, Institutional WIL coordinator, HoD, HRM lecturers (n = 5)	n = 7
TOTAL	13		30

Data Collection

All questionnaires were completed online. Some of the structured interviews were conducted face-to-face and some were conducted online. When additional information was required, a query was sent to the respondent either through a quick online chat, or via email. Data collection occurred between June 2024 and January 2025. The researchers did not expect participants to be familiar with transfer theory, but the questions they posed approximated to the concepts listed in the conceptual framework (See Table 2). Accordingly, participants responded to questions such as:

1. How do you help students connect the theories they learn in your lectures to what they might experience in a workplace?
2. What kinds of projects, case studies or simulations do students engage in?
3. How are students mentored in the workplace?
4. How is feedback incorporated into their learning?

In this way, we probed how participants understood different forms of transfer.

Methods of Analysis

Data from the transcribed interview and open-ended questions were coded using deductive content analysis (Pandey, 2019). A coding framework (Figure 1) was developed based on the seven forms of transfer in the conceptual framework (Table 2).

FIGURE 1: Coding the data.

				Theory-to-practice	Application	Context transfer	Practice-to-practice	Practice-to-theory	Non-Specific transfer	Creative transfer
PARTICIPANT	**DATA**	**Keyword**	**Codes**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
U1	In [Name of Country] a Placement Module is used for preparation that comprises seminar classes at the university and tutorship at the placement facilities. This module is used for preparation that explains what students need to present to the academics and to the organizations. Students must know about Project Management Topics as they struggle to link theory and practice.	Placement, preparation, seminar, tutorship [mentorship], placement, theory and practice	Theory to practice, Context, Practice-to-practice	1		2	1			

The authors independently coded the transcripts; discrepancies were discussed until consensus was reached. A content analysis was undertaken to show a frequency count of the number of times each category of transfer was explicitly mentioned by participants. This approach enabled the exploration of transfer practices in three-year undergraduate HRM qualifications from various perspectives.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics clearance for the study was obtained from the lead institution's Business and Management Faculty Research Ethics Committee (Clearance Certificate No. 2022_FBMSREC 053) and permission to conduct the study was obtained from relevant faculties of the three participating universities. Invitations to the survey and interviews were emailed to potential respondents. The covering emails explained the voluntary nature of their participation, as well as their right to withdraw from the study at any stage. The aims of the research, assurance of anonymity, and researcher contact information were also provided. Because all participants are in the field of HRM and might be recognized by their institution or others in the field, to ensure respondents' confidentiality, the respondents were referred to by university U1, U2, and U3. Thus, participants, their institutions, or countries were not identified.

RESULTS

In this section we describe the findings from the survey and interviews, using the conceptual framework to categorize the data into types of transfer.

The Continuing Struggle to Link Theory and Practice

All participants understood that HRM knowledge comprises both theory and practice, and that students "must be able to express and link" (U1) theoretical and practical forms of knowledge. Participants acknowledged that linking theory and practice is not straightforward, thus students "sometimes, report that what we teach is different, and what they learn is different from what happens in the workplace" (U1). While it is expected that students "must be able to express and link to the process of HR" (U1) in the classroom they may "only have [been] given some aspects of HR and cannot link it to the whole" (U2). There was thus a continuing "struggle to link theory and practice" (U1). This was understood to be caused by the fundamental differences between theoretical and practical forms of knowledge, and because classroom-based teaching cannot cover the full range of HRM knowledge.

When/where Does Application Happen?

Some participants understood application as happening in the workplace, rather than in the classroom, such as the participant who described student placement as an "opportunity to apply theory in practice" (U2). It was, however, generally agreed that some application of theory "preceding the placement [was necessary to] allow students to take part in applying their knowledge and skills gained in the academic courses" (U2). A participant described different forms of application across levels, for example, the first year of the Project Management subject was characterized using "case studies of topics" (U1), but by the third year, students "had begun their internships already" (U1) and their ability to apply their knowledge in the workplace was assumed. In another example, a participant explained that the "final year students study ERP [i.e. Enterprise Resource Planning, a software system that integrates and automates a company's core business processes] and are able to apply this skill in workplaces" (U1). A U3 participant explained that they "used case studies of topics at all levels [even giving] those who were not placed … a research project". Industry input was obtained on the research project to ensure its relevance, as well as the progression towards more complex case studies and projects across the HRM course. U1 similarly included the option of students "develop[ing] their own project in lieu of an internship".

Preparation for the World-of-Work

All participants believed that preparation for internships, supervised by the WIL coordinators, was effective in preparing students for the workplace context. Students were provided with guidelines on professional behavior in the workplace that "highlight[ed] what students [could] expect in the workplace" (U3). In some cases, the work placements were negotiated with companies and "students were prepared in advance through in-depth discussions, online workshops, lectures, including regulatory frameworks, workplace HR policies and procedures, knowledge about the specific organization such as their culture, strategic objectives, organizational design and development, etc." (U3). At U3, there was a formal module that was "time-tabled in the first quarter of the 3rd year [comprising] one lesson per week". There was a similar program at U2, and a more informal version at U1. In all cases the preparatory component consisted of a mixture of generic skills, such as CV writing, interview skills, interpersonal skills, time management, conflict resolution, reporting skills, as well as an orientation to the workplace, usually provided by industry

specialists during which "students had the opportunity to ask questions" (U2). Students were also informed about the internship requirements, such as producing a portfolio of evidence and attending debriefing sessions.

Learning by Doing – with a Mentor

Practice-to-practice transfer was described by participants as a WIL experience in which a student both "learns by doing" (U3) and at the same time is "provided with orientation or tutorship" (U1). In most cases, employers were responsible for the induction of students into the workplace, as well as providing mentorship and feedback on students' performance. In the case of U2, "once students are placed in industry … they are assigned industry mentors and a WIL Coordinator from the department". A similar process was followed in U3, in which "the employers deal with students according to guidelines; however, students can contact the WIL coordinators anytime needed". The WIL coordinators checked that "employers provide[d] students with an opportunity to be exposed to HR functions within their workplace" (U1). In some cases, workplace mentors appraised students' performance, which, in the case of U2 counted for "20% of the final overall mark of the placement". One of the institutions reported that the mentor's assessment was formative and "does not count for marks" (U1). A participant explained that during placements students were required to attend "seminar classes at the university and tutorship at the placement facilities" (U1). The processes used by U1 appear to have been successful:

> We've had very positive feedback about how much they learned in their placements, from the 1st to the 2nd year, from the 2nd to the 3rd year and how they feel 'empowered' when they graduate, knowing how it is done and dealing with negative and absence of responses.

Reflection on Practice Through the Lens of Theory

All the institutions require students to reflect critically on their experiences in the workplace in the form of reflective reports and portfolios of evidence. There were clear academic requirements for reflective reports and portfolios, for example: students were provided with "the WIL guide, logbook, and reflection forms where they describe the tasks completed and reflect on their learning and challenges while performing the tasks or learning" (U3). In all cases, it was academic facilitators who "monitored and assessed students' progress, reports and final portfolios of evidence" (U2). The requirement was to enable students to "theorize their learning" (U1) according to academic rules as students, and "can fail if [they] do not show HR knowledge – show link between process e.g. training, selection etc." (U1). Although interns were assessed by workplace supervisors, this did "not count for the final evaluation" (U1), or the percentage awarded to workplace assessment was low, as in the case U2 and U3. Academic processes tended to be valued above workplace processes, evident in statements such as:

> There are no meetings between academic staff and industry mentors. The student has orientations from the academic staff and brings to the seminar classes questions which are dealt with in the classroom so everyone can learn from it. (U1)

Offering employers or supervisors opportunities to provide feedback on "graduate attributes and employability skills as well as the portfolio of evidence" (U3) is a way of valuing their contribution but may not be sufficient. Thus, a more systemic approach, such as a Program Advisory Committee, could provide a formal way for industry partners to provide "inputs into the curriculum through … industry experts, faculty, alumni and students [who are] knowledgeable about the discipline and have expertise

in a specific industry" (U3). Internships could provide further opportunities for "employers to advise on curriculum issues and current trends within the field of HR" (U1).

Confidence Building

The placements provided opportunities for transferring interpersonal skills learned in the classroom to the workplace. Students initially "struggled with integration into the workforce, to provide input on certain aspects to personnel and communicating instructions to senior personnel" (U3). However, over time, students "develop[ed] themselves and their self-confidence" (U1) and "acquired general work experience, a work-ethic and soft skills" (U3). They also "deepen[ed] [their] knowledge about each other" (U2). Thus, the internship "help[ed] them with finding employment… and soft skills development" (U2). U1's practice of including three levels of internship in the first, second and third years, "improves employability and students gain employability skills as they apply it three times" (U1).

An Injection of New Ideas

In their coursework, students learned about AI applications, and lecturers "expect[ed] and encourage[d]" (U1) them to introduce these ideas into their places of work. Another participant claimed that "students provide an injection of new ideas" (U2) into workplaces, although "in some instances, the [university] programs are more sophisticated, and smaller organizations have less advanced needs…" (U1). One participant elaborated that "many times [neither] the employer, nor the student, has enough of a digital mindset" (U1). A participant admitted that there are technologies used in the workplace, which "the students don't know [about]" (U1), but that the "HRM department included industry-related technologies and AI tools in the program" (U1).

TABLE 4: Forms of transfer.

Form of transfer	Frequency of mentions	% of total mentions
Practice-to-theory transfer (5)	60	23%
Context transfer (3)	57	22%
Practice-to-practice transfer (4)	47	18%
Application transfer (2)	38	15%
Non-specific transfer (6)	30	12%
Theory-to-practice transfer (1)	22	9%
Creative transfer (7)	4	1%
Total Mentions	**258**	**100%**

Table 4 shows that the most common forms of transfer mentioned by participants were practice-to-theory transfer and context transfer, with 60 and 57 mentions respectively. Next frequent were practice-to-practice transfer and application transfer, with 47 and 38 mentions each. Non-specific transfer received 30 mentions. The least common were theory-to-practice transfer and creative transfer, with 22 and 4 mentions respectively.

DISCUSSION

Why were some Forms of Transfer Enabled or Constrained?

Addressing the research question of what enables or constrains different forms of transfer of learning between classroom and internship in HRM contexts is complex. The findings showed that, at least to some extent, context transfer, application transfer, and practice-to-practice transfer were enabled. All participants felt that the work-readiness preparatory training offered by the WIL coordinators and industry partners enabled successful context transfer. Eraut (2002) explains that the degree of context transfer is visible in how well students adapt to the workplace culture, understand professional expectations, and navigate the organizational environment.

Some academic subjects, such as Project Management, seemed to lend themselves to application transfer, as it is standard practice to use case studies, projects, research assignments, role-play, and simulation. Similar curricular and pedagogical arrangements could help students develop transferrable skills in other subject areas. The description of the successful transfer of ERP skills from classroom to workplace at U1 is a classic example of near transfer (Veillard, 2012). Developing similar work-specific skills into the academic classroom is an effective strategy for shortening the transfer distance (Jackson et al., 2019).

Practice-to-practice transfer provided opportunities for students to learn by experience with the support of orientation and mentorship. The role of improving practice overtime with the help of a more advanced mentor was possibly undervalued by participants. It is, as Cooper et al. (2021) point out, easy to undermine the expertise of an experienced supervisor or mentor, thus a more systematic approach is needed in which industry experts could contribute to assessment and provide input to the curriculum.

The initial development of a range of personal and interpersonal skills and practices in the academic classroom, as Mishra and Sahoo (2022, p. 1296) show in their review of the literature on transfer, is "an antecedent and mediator of training transfer" from higher education to work in the context of management. This form of transfer seems to have been acknowledged by participants but may need to play a stronger role in the HRM curriculum, such as embedding non-specific skill development within WIL preparation and academic modules.

Several constraints were evident in the data regarding theory-to-practice transfer and creative transfer. Theory-to-practice transfer received little attention from participants, apart from their acknowledgement of the challenges associated with linking theory to practice. The lecturers did not explain or provide examples of how they related HRM theory and practice in their teaching. Bouzguenda argues that educators' inability to shift between theory and practice in a lecture, for example, through examples and anecdotes from practice, causes a "break in the development of a learning transfer cycle" (2014, p. 23), thereby exacerbating the "widening gap between theory and real practices" in professional education (2014, p. 23). Eraut (2002) similarly warns that the segmentation of professional programs into different academic disciplines, in particular the separation of theoretical and practical components over time and space, works against transfer and integration. In this regard, Culpin et al. propose four principles of teaching for transfer: "active engagement, limited but some prior knowledge, clear applicability back into the workplace and the opportunity for repeated practice" (2014, p. 132).

Practice-to-theory transfer, or reflection on practice, received the most mentions by participants, but participants felt that students struggled to link their practical experiences to academic concepts (Randi & Corno, 2007). This loop back to theory was clearly important to all participants. It is also evident in the way in which marks were awarded for internships. In the case of U2, monitoring and assessment by the employer counted towards 20% of the final mark, while the reflective portfolio of evidence contributed 80%.

Creative transfer was the least mentioned form of transfer, perhaps because it is the most challenging form and it is not usually expected of WIL students at the undergraduate level. Researchers, however, point out that creativity, critical thinking skills, and problem solving are becoming progressively important in meeting the challenges of technological development in HRM practice (Sithambaram & Tajudeen, 2023; van Beurden et al., 2024). Participants acknowledged that the dynamic nature of the HRM profession, and the rapid increases in technology, places pressure on academics and students to become more innovative. Thus, creative transfer is likely to play a bigger role in workplace readiness, as well as preparing students for new forms of work and "identity reformation pathways into greater work flexibility and adjustment" (Triantafyllaki, 2016, p. 401).

From the survey and participants' accounts of their practice, practice-to-theory transfer was particularly important, because it is a formal requirement for students to theorize their practice, and is explicit in learning outcomes. In contrast, the assessment of actual practice is less mentioned and less valued. Participants confirmed that students' effective application of knowledge, their adaptability, problem-solving abilities, and competent performance were key to successful practice, but not as visible in formal course requirements. A broader range of curricular and pedagogical strategies might be required to enable learning transfer from classroom to work practice. While the study identified different forms of transfer, transfer can also be understood as a continuum, that is, transfer is not simply present or absent but can occur with varying degrees of success. It is "a multi-dimensional process that could occur at any stage of learning and could be enhanced through coaching, scaffolding, interacting, assessing and reflecting in situated learning environments" (Hajian, 2019, p. 93).

Implications for Practice

The study findings suggest that lecturers should strengthen theory-to-practice transfer, for example incorporating simulations, real-world examples, and industry case studies into lectures to prevent breaks in the learning cycle. WIL Coordinators could further enhance context transfer by foregrounding work-readiness modules on organizational culture, digital mindsets, and professional ethics. Universities and industry partners could consider ways to formalize practice-to-practice transfer, for example through guidelines that encourage systematic feedback and empower mentors to contribute to the assessment of professional know-how. Curriculum Designers could consider creative transfer and technological literacy (in particular, AI tools) into the curriculum to prepare students for the rapid evolution of HRM practice.

CONCLUSION

This study contributes a novel, context-specific taxonomy of learning transfer applicable to WIL, distinguishing seven forms that map onto the student journey from classroom preparation to workplace reflection. This framework offers a more granular lens than traditional near/far dichotomies for analyzing WIL effectiveness. Practically, this framework provides WIL coordinators, curriculum designers, and academic supervisors with a diagnostic tool to assess transfer strategies within their programs and identify potential gaps that may hinder graduate employability.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

One of the study's limitations is that the findings rely on self-reported data from academic staff and WIL practitioners across three institutions and do not include student perspectives on transfer. Future research could investigate students' experiences and perceptions of the seven transfer types. Longitudinal studies could track the development of transfer across the undergraduate program and into early careers. Additionally, researchers could explore the application of this framework in other disciplinary contexts and test interventions designed to strengthen the less successful forms of transfer, such as theory-to-practice and creative transfer. Further research is also needed to develop more precise measures of transfer levels and to investigate effective interventions for promoting higher levels of transfer, ultimately contributing to improved graduate employability and professional practice.

Bridging the gap would require academics and practitioners to support the full spectrum of transfer, through practical exercises such as simulations and case studies, while paying more attention to the forms of mentorship that facilitate practice-to-practice transfer. Institutions could strengthen this by formalizing the assessment of competent practice and creating platforms for ongoing dialogue between academic and industry partners. By making the entire transfer process – from the classroom to workplace – a shared goal, future HRM professionals could be better equipped for the complexities of their careers.

DISCLOSURE OF THE USE OF GENERATIVE AI

We confirm the use of Microsoft Copilot to check for spelling and consistency of APA7 for in-text and end-text references. No Generative AI was used in the preparation and writing of this manuscript.

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About the Journal

The International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning (IJWIL) publishes double-blind peer-reviewed original research and topical issues related to Work-Integrated Learning (WIL). IJWIL first published in 2000 under the name of Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education (APJCE).

In this Journal, WIL is defined as:

> *An educational approach involving three parties – the student, educational institution, and an external stakeholder – consisting of authentic work-focused experiences as an intentional component of the curriculum. Students learn through active engagement in purposeful work tasks, which enable the integration of theory with meaningful practice that is relevant to the students' discipline of study and/or professional development* (Zegwaard et al., 2023, p. 38*).

Examples of practice include off-campus workplace immersion activities such as work placements, internships, practicum, service learning, and cooperative education (co-op), and on-campus activities such as work-related projects/competitions, entrepreneurships, student-led enterprise, student consultancies, etc. WIL is related to, and overlaps with, the fields of experiential learning, work-based learning, and vocational education and training.

The Journal's aim is to enable specialists working in WIL to disseminate research findings and share knowledge to the benefit of institutions, students, WIL practitioners, curricular designers, and researchers. The Journal encourages quality research and explorative critical discussion that leads to the advancement of quality practices, development of further understanding of WIL, and promote further research.

The Journal is financially supported by the WILNZ, WACE, WIL Australia, and the University of Waikato.

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Types of manuscripts sought by IJWIL are primarily in two forms: 1) *research publications* describing research into aspects of WIL and, 2) *topical discussion* articles that review relevant literature and provide critical explorative discussion around a topical issue. The journal will, on occasions, consider good practice submissions.

Research publications should contain; an introduction that describes relevant literature and sets the context of the inquiry. A detailed description and justification for the methodology employed. A description of the research findings - tabulated as appropriate, a discussion of the importance of the findings including their significance to current established literature, implications for practitioners and researchers, whilst remaining mindful of the limitations of the data, and a conclusion including recommendations.

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