

Transfer of Learning

What is it: the degree the intended learning is applied in a new or different context (such as applying to new learning back on the job after a formal learning event).

Why it is important: Sponsoring organizations and participants are requiring outcomes that are applicable, practical, and make a difference. For example, billions of dollars are spent annually for continuing professional training and development. “When all costs, direct and indirect, are combined, the range goes even higher. Management expectations from training and education programs are high” (Daffron, Metzgen-Ohlswager, Skinner, & Saarinen, 2012, p. 613 as cited by Caffarella & Daffron, 2013).

Estimates of transfer of learning since the 1980s have generally been low. Recently, studies show estimates still remain low at about 10 percent. Much of this expensive training and continuing education is wasted because of continued low transfer (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013).

Strategies to improve learning transfer:

- Learning is about creating experience not just delivering information (though this is important); look for ways to create experience during and especially after the learning episodes through practice and feedback – *the work is the learning*
- Ecological validity (does the learning look and feel anything like how the learning will be applied)
- Partner with the learners so learning becomes *their* learning not *the* learning by taking care to design learning strategies in a relevant context
- Help participants turn their workplace into a classroom with resources and tutorials that they know how to use
- Opportunities for practice during the learning episode and planning for practice for after the learning episode is completed
- Action or implementation planning (learners plan what they will start doing, stop doing, do more of, do less of; easy to implement – big change, easy to implement – small change, hard to implement – big change, hard to implement – small change)
- Coordinate periodic reminders about key aspects of the learning
- Facilitate joining a social media work group / network specific to the topics covered in the course
- Peer learning / peer cooperation back on the job
- Checklists of key steps to employ or practice back on the job
- Smart cards - pocket or mobile device ready references featuring key aspects of the learning
- Embedded / on demand resources inserted into the workplace and workflow (and practice using them)
- Effective evaluation of the learning transfer using any identified gaps in the learning as opportunities for follow up learning
- Work instructions
- Job aids (resources that help workers complete requisite work tasks)
- Performance standards
- Coaching (if you want to see it all day, you have to coach it all day. Linehan, 2017)
- Mentoring
- Feedback on practice / feedback on performance
- Supervisor / leader support and encouragement
- Micro refreshers (post formal instruction)
- Formal learning is postured for *how to learn* the content not just *delivering* the content
- Formal learning delivered in succinct, micro-sessions
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