Transferring Learning to the Work Setting
The Influencing Factors

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We know from experience that, following a training program, execution (transfer) is often taken for granted or left to chance. We tend to ignore most of the work setting environment issues that deter the desired execution and behavior. Studies have concluded that less than one third of all training delivered actually gets implemented in the work setting. Well maybe it's higher or maybe it's lower. The point is, as training professionals, we know this is a major problem area. Our clients know it too. Yet, we do little about it. If any specific training program is truly important, then surely it is worthwhile to explore the need for a transfer action and to put it into play where appropriate.

The term "transfer action" means the use of any technique or method to help ensure that knowledge and skills learned are executed as planned on the job to achieve the intended results. The term "transfer strategy" is used to identify the approach we will take with the client, sponsor, participant, and others to get the transfer action to be accepted and implemented. To put it another way, transfer action is "what we will do to influence transfer" and transfer strategy is "how we will make the action happen". The workshop on my Situational Needs Assessment Process™ provides tools to help determine if a transfer action is needed for a training program, provides a worksheet to help develop a transfer action and strategy, and addresses typical transfer issues.

Execution (or application on the job) is necessary in order to translate new knowledge/skills into key business results. Unfortunately, execution is the phase of the training process that has received the least amount of attention. A variety of factors influence the degree to which an environment supports learning transfer. An organization's information systems, work processes, reward systems, supervisor reinforcement, and so forth, all greatly impact the way individuals execute their work. Table 1 lists potential barriers that may exist to deter the transfer of training in the work setting. *Keep in mind we are dealing with the masses here. We are not addressing crisis situations. We are not trying to solve execution issues for the 10% that may be in the wrong job, or simply do not fit-in, or they have personal issues that would inhibit performance in any situation. We are addressing that 90% of our workforce who shoulder the load day-to-day.*

Table 1 - Potential *Barriers* to Learning Transfer

Transfer Deterrents	Transfer Deterrents
1. Old habits or personal preference	10. Non-supportive supervisor or organization culture
2. Use of the skill or behavior perceived to be incompatible with work procedures or processes	11. Technology or other compatible process component not ready for use at right time
3. Lack of proper tools, equipment, or materials	12. Excessive workload or perception of inequitable workload distribution
4. Insufficient confidence in ability to apply skills or behavior correctly (training solution missed the target or lack of mastery)	13. Insufficient time or competing priorities
5. Inadequate incentives or inappropriate consequences	14. Lack of Active Management Reinforcement™ from supervisor or other key stakeholders
6. Perception that failure will be criticized or punished	15. Unknown or unclear expectations
7. Old behaviors continue to be rewarded or ignored	16. Peers or customers disapprove of the new behavior/change
8. Perception of insufficient authority to act	17. New behavior requirements are inconsistent with personal beliefs
9. Performer perceives that the new procedure, process, skill, or behavior is less effective than existing methods or behavior	18. New procedure, process, or skill perceived as more time consuming than existing methods

The list of deterrents is quite lengthy. Can you add to the list? Use the space provided below to list the factors from the above table that you feel are most common at your facility or in your company situation. Also add new factors to the list that you have experienced.

A. Factors from Table 1 that are most common in your situation: _____
_____
_____

B. Factors you have experienced that are not on the list: _____
_____
_____

Reviewing the possible deterrents can be distressing and can make one wonder how we ever succeed at transferring learning. Certainly, we know that if we have

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identified one or more deterrents that will likely be in play with a specific training program and population, then we need to address the possibilities of a transfer action and strategy. A good place to begin is to review a list of actions that can work to enable transfer. Table 2 below provides a list of potential enabling actions. These actions will be useful to help determine appropriate transfer actions for your learning engagement.

Table 2 - Potential *Actions* to Enable Learning Transfer

Actions to Enable Transfer		Actions to Enable Transfer
1. Job application tools (job-aids)		9. Specific job application discussion
2. Coaching (group or individual)		10. Action planning
3. Web-based tools/templates		11. Performance contract agreement
4. Renewal workshops or discussions		12. Help line/call desk
5. Encouragement/reinforcement (team, peers, or immediate supervisor)		13. Buddy assignment on the job
6. Follow-up facilitated events (web/on-line events, conference call, etc.)		14. Pre-learning briefing or goal setting with immediate supervisor
7. Follow-up letter encouraging job application and offering tips or assistance		15. Skill/behavior is part of personal development plan
8. Learner practices during the training using simulation or scenarios matching job conditions		16. Skill/behavior is part of personal performance improvement plan

There are many other potential transfer actions as well. For example, delivering training to intact work teams/groups instead of offering it through open enrollment delivery where participants come from different parts of the organization. In the former approach, peer support and supervisor support often occurs naturally and the unit manager is more involved. In the latter case, support must often be engineered and is more difficult to initiate and sustain. Here is a brief explanation of each transfer action from the above table.

1. *Application tools (job-aids).* Job-aids can be a useful transfer tool in many situations. They contain information that the user can access on demand. For example, a job-aid is useful when a skill or behavior is not routinely applied and a reference or memory jogger is needed for those infrequent occasions when application is called for. Or a job-aid can be useful when there is considerable information or steps to recall. Job-aids can contain items that are procedural in nature or informational in nature. Examples of job-aids are: an instruction booklet or decal on how to change a flat tire, a to do list, a small plastic card with CPR instructions on it, a procedural guide on the steps to follow when discharging a

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patient from a hospital, a computer troubleshooting guide, the dosage instructions on a bottle of aspirin.

2. *Coaching (group or individual).* Coaching is often seen as a routine part of a supervisor's job. It can also be an intervention in its own right. Coaching can also be coupled with a traditional classroom or desk top training program where, by design the training stops short of delivering a complete training engagement and coaching finishes the job.

For example, knowledge is imparted during the formal training engagement. but time is not allotted for skill practice. Communication with supervisors explains their role in facilitating and encouraging the continuation of learning through guided application, encouragement, and feedback. In another example, skill practice is provided during the formal training, but the wide range of possibilities and implications for skill application cannot possibly be fully treated during the training. Coaching is used to continually influence the learning for several months following the training until participants have been able to utilize the skills in various job settings and scenarios.

In situations where coaching is used as a transfer action, it is important that the coach fully understand his/her role and be capable and willing to execute it. The need to train the coaches on "how to coach" should be considered. With group coaching, it will be helpful to segregate the learners into homogeneous groups who have like needs regarding the skills/behaviors.

3. *Web-based tools/templates.* When new or revised processes are the focus of the training, easily assessable tools and templates can be the perfect job-aid. Because processes can tend to change frequently, it is important to have web-based tools or templates that can be updated frequently and accessed instantly by the users.

4. *Renewal workshops or discussions.* This works well when logistics allow you to pull it off. It gives people another face-to-face opportunity to address changing products, problems with products or services, new or difficult customer scenarios, or changing work processes. One example where renewal workshops are useful as a transfer action is in call centers where the range of customer issues seems endless and can often get complicated. The renewal allows time to share experiences, problems, and resolutions so employees can return to work with a renewed confidence and energy.

5. *Encouragement/reinforcement (team, peers, or immediate supervisor).* This works well when the training is with intact work teams or groups. Everyone is close to being on the same page and likely faced with the same issues so encouragement comes easier. It can also work well in open enrollment situations where a learning culture exists and team members understand the importance of reinforcement.

6. *Follow-up facilitated events (web/on-line events, conference call, etc.).* Training organizations are still experimenting with the on-line events. They are inexpensive and excellent to influence transfer. Webinars, Q&A sessions, and process demonstrations are a few approaches used. Getting full voluntary participation can

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sometimes be an issue. Also, some workplace facilities and situations may not be equipped for on-line events.

7. *Follow-up letter encouraging job application and offering assistance.* This is inexpensive but may also be among the least effective transfer strategies. Letters are easy to ignore whether in email form or the hard copy version. It is sometimes more successful if you can draft a letter for the immediate supervisor or department manager or VP to sign. Ask the person signing the letter to put their own personal touch in the letter and be certain they are sincere about supporting what you are trying to do. An insincere or rubber stamp approach to this can do more harm than good.

8. *Learner practices during the training using scenarios matching job conditions.* Well maybe we're stretching a bit calling this a transfer action when in fact it would be ideal if all training solutions were designed this way. The fact is, a training program design that is void of skill practice is immediately in jeopardy of job transfer. So a word to the wise, unless you are delivering knowledge only, or the job application is very basic, include skill practice where at all possible to put you on the high road to success.

9. *Specific application discussion.* This works well where the training provides the generic knowledge/skill and an individual identifies a specific task that they are trying to implement on the job (using the generic knowledge). A supervisor, peer, or task expert works with the individual in the job setting to apply the generic to a specific work unit issue or task. An example is negotiation skills applied to negotiating a vendor contract.

10. *Action planning.* Action planning is usually incorporated as part of the training design. Participants are informed up front before attendance that action plan completion is a requirement. Participants set an objective for improvement and they identify planned steps to achieve results. The plan is reviewed by the instructor. After returning to the work setting, participants work their plan during the next several months which requires utilization of skills learned during the training. At the end of an identified time frame the participant sends the results to the instructor. This process works well with soft skill programs and with open enrollment programs.

11. *Performance contract agreement.* A performance contract is similar to action planning. The major difference is it is between the participant and his/her immediate supervisor.

12. *Help line/call desk.* You have probably experienced the benefits of a help desk or help line either as an employee or a customer. It can be administered on-line, by telephone, and by email. Help desks work well with technology programs and web-based training and depending on the situation, they can become a permanent fixture. This learning package you are experiencing uses a help line as a transfer strategy, your designated EES Key Resource.

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13. *Buddy assignment.* Buddy assignments probably work best with new employee orientation, apprenticeships, or in any situation where the parties understand that one individual has a known skill set and the second individual is a known beginner in the job or task.

14. *Pre-learning briefing or goal setting by immediate supervisor.* Any activity taking place prior to the central learning engagement which includes the immediate supervisor can also be a positive influence on transfer following the training. Pre-activity calls attention to the new skill set or behavior requirement and begins a formal process of communicating expectations. With pre-activity it is easier to get cooperation for follow-up activities. Goal setting, when compatible with the skills/behavior being addressed by the training is a strong influence on attaining transfer.

15. *Skill/behavior is part of personal development plan.* Placing a training requirement on a personal development plan can have the same effect as goal setting since it has likely been identified or approved through discussion with the immediate supervisor. It can be a useful transfer action because the alignment possibilities are strong. Transfer may occur naturally because there are potential consequences aligned with performance due to the supervisor's direct involvement. Many organizations capture skill needs on a real-time basis through Learning Management Systems (LMS). A need is identified and entered into the LMS by the supervisor or the employee. The employee may immediately become a candidate for training to support satisfying the need. The employee either signs in to initiate on-line training or has his/her name placed on a list for the next available classroom training.

16. *Skill/behavior is part of personal performance improvement plan.* This has the same characteristics and benefits as the personal development plan.

While the transfer actions are important, of equal importance is our ability to influence our key stakeholders to understand why transfer actions are necessary. Once they understand why, then we must gain their involvement and support to execute the transfer action. These issues are addressed in the author's Performance Alignment and Linkage Process™, presented in his upcoming book to be published by Pfeiffer in October 2008. The title of the book is "Aligning Training for Results: A Process and Tools That Link Training to Business".

This new process will allow you to break through the barriers to success by getting your clients involved to achieve the results both of you desire

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