

GETTING LEARNING INTO PRACTICE - A GUIDE FOR MANAGERS

Extract from: Research in Practice (2012) Training Transfer: - getting learning into practice. Darlington Trust

'If poor performance results from a lack of staff knowledge or skills, training can be provided. If it results from other factors, e.g. organisational, social, resource, managerial or attitudinal, these must be addressed accordingly.'
(McKenzie et al 2002)

Without **training transfer** – the use of the acquired knowledge or skills once back at work – the training can be a waste of both time and money. Maximising the return on investment from training programmes is always important, but it becomes essential during times of austerity.

Within research around social care training, three factors have been identified as being important in influencing transfer.

- Individual characteristics
- Training design and delivery
- Workplace factors

There is also:

- Subject climate – this refers to how good a match exists between what training says should happen, and what actually happens at work.

The characteristics of individuals who attend training programmes have a significant impact on whether training is transferred in practice. The degree of engagement with learning is affected by many things, including:

- cognitive ability
- self efficacy (belief in ability to perform certain tasks)
- organisational commitment
- perception of relevance of the training
- 'tick box' training culture
- Negative transfer climate

The best designed training programme is unlikely to have an impact if it is attended by people who are not motivated to attend, learn and transfer. Research has found that people who attend training voluntarily are more likely to transfer their learning to their work.

Adult learning theory outlines that motivation to learn in adults is triggered as they identify learning needs that will help them succeed in the role they hold.

Motivation that stems from an internal willingness to learn – intrinsic motivation – has a stronger relationship to transfer than extrinsic motivation, i.e. external pressure to undertake e.g. mandatory training.

People are more likely to attend, learn and transfer training if they understand the purpose of attending and how it will assist them do their job better. **This has implications in terms of learning needs analyses, preparing learners for the training they attend, and discussing how attending will help the organisation to achieve its aims, i.e. improve the quality of life of the people they support.**

The way that training is designed and delivered can have a huge impact on training transfer. As well as taking account of the principles of adult learning, tools such as learning needs analyses and practice and feedback or skills are important. Other methods to increase transfer include:

- discussing training transfer and how learning will be used at work;

- creating action plans or learning goals;
- building in follow-up and evaluation – **staff are less likely to change their practice if no-one expresses an interest in whether they have or not;**
- ensuring the content is relevant to delegates – people are not likely to use learning that they can't relate to their job.

To put this in context: if staff have no idea about the principles of child protection, or how to implement it, then training might be a useful way to improve their practice by meeting that learning need. However, if they understand the principles and how to put them into practice, but are unable to work effectively because of structural or financial constraints, then asking them to attend more training is likely to only cause resentment.

Basing training content on an analysis of learning need leads to higher levels of training transfer. **Adopting structures such as learning needs analysis as a standard part of the supervision process also contributes to higher perceived utility of training, and motivation to attend, learn and transfer.**

Points to consider for managers/organisations:

- Do you have a policy of mandatory training? How does this affect staff motivation to attend training?
- How do you support your staff to identify their performance-related learning needs?
- What steps do you take to ensure your staff are motivated and prepared for training? Is training the right way to improve performance?
- How do you support staff to understand the relevance of training to their role?
- What do you do to follow up on the impact of training after people have attended?
- How do you support people to use new learning in their practice?