



Australian Journal of
Educational Technology

A process approach to the transfer of training: Part 2: Using action planning to facilitate the transfer of training

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In the previous article [Foxon, 1993] the author presented two models of transfer. The first, based on force field analysis, highlights the inhibiting and facilitating factors that impact transfer. In particular, intention to transfer and the perceived level of supervisor support were discussed. The second model conceptualises transfer in terms of a five stage process (ranging from initiation to unconscious maintenance) rather than as an outcome or product of training. In this article three strategies to facilitate greater transfer are presented, with a detailed discussion of end-of-course action planning as an effective means to help learners bridge the gap between the training environment and the application arena.

The previous article presented a model of transfer (Figure 1) based on Lewin's (1951) theory of force field analysis. This model situates training within the organisational system, treating transfer not as a training product or outcome, but as a process subject to various inhibiting and facilitating factors.

This is a significant departure from the traditional approach to transfer. Typically evaluators and trainers have attempted to measure the use of previously learned skills (referred to as training transfer) at a specific point in time. Such evaluations of the post-course application of training focus on whether learners are using the training on the job or not. However, in treating transfer as a 'product' many of the nuances of transfer are missed. The evaluation fails to assess which skills have been used, how often, and why they are not being used or used more often. By contrast the Stages of Transfer Process model (Fig 2) conceptualises transfer as an on-going process, and recognises both the phases and the extent of transfer. Transfer may be limited to occasionally "trying a few things out" (initiation) or it may result in deliberate application of newly learned skills and knowledge until these become integrated in the repertoire of work behaviours (unconscious maintenance).

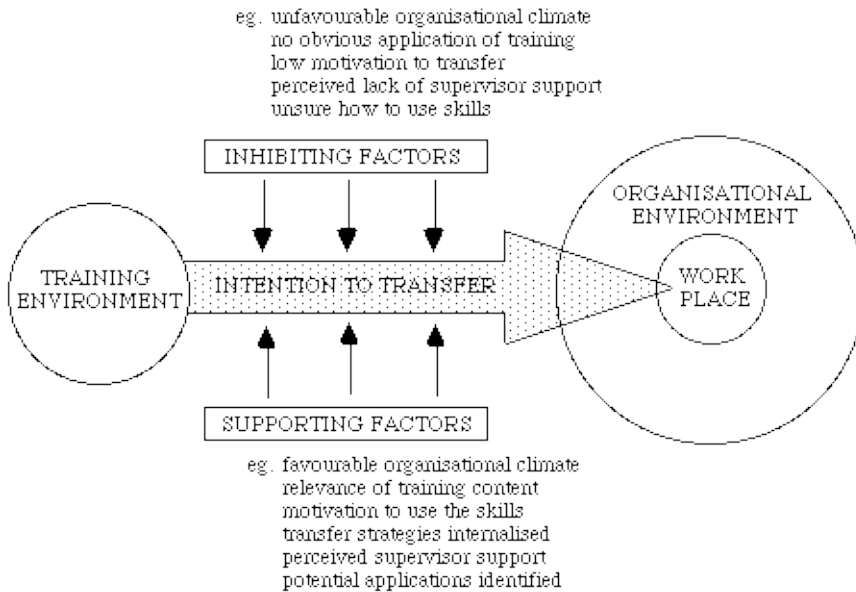


Figure 1: Transfer Model

This systems view of training carries certain implications. Trainers can no longer assume that what happens back on the job is out of their control or is the responsibility of others. Another implication is that factors other than the design, development and delivery of the training will impact transfer. Two such inhibiting or facilitating factors are transfer intention and the perceived level of supervisor support.

The intention (or motivation) to transfer has been under-researched, but there is some evidence that a high level of transfer intention leads to greater use of the training on the job (Huczynski & Lewis, 1980; Noe, 1986). The other factor which has been shown to affect transfer quite markedly is the perceived level of supervisor support for use of the skills on the job. An expectation that skill use will be required, encouraged and actively supported has been found to facilitate transfer; whereas, negative expectations have the reverse effect (Richey, 1992; Rouiller, 1989).

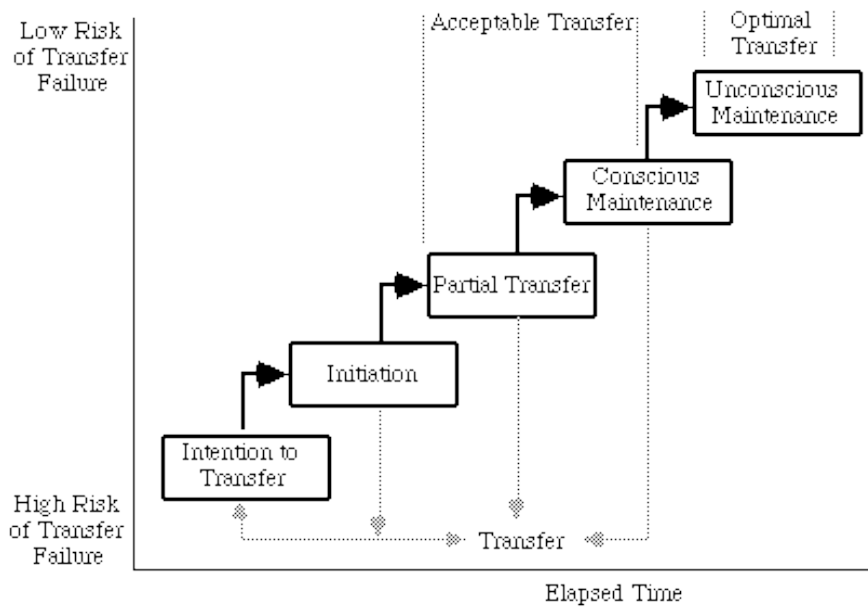


Figure 2: Stages in the Transfer Process

No matter how well designed, job relevant, or skills-based the training, there is an inevitable degree of artificiality about it (Hendrickson, 1990; Long, 1990). The training environment can not replicate or incorporate the organisational system pressures and factors which influence trainees to revert to their former work habits and forget about the training applications. At best, the training environment is only an approximation of the application environment. Moreover, trainers do little to equip learners with techniques and skills to facilitate transfer. Consequently, when learners return to the job, a variety of organisational pressures may function to inhibit transfer. For example, learners usually lack the time and motivation to think through how and where to apply the training, and the pressure to be productive forces them back into their habitual ways of behaving. The pressure to 'catch up' after the absence from work takes precedence over thinking through the possible applications of the training (Broad & Newstrom, 1992). Coworkers or supervisors may not enthusiastically support the changes initiated after training. The longer this delay between learning and application, the less likely it is that the gap between the training room theory and the work place practice will be bridged. This failure on the part of learners to think about and commit to potential applications of the new skills and knowledge places the transfer of training in jeopardy (Grabowski, 1983; Holt & Courtney, 1985).

Transfer Strategies

If the transfer of training is to be given serious consideration by performance technologists, these issues have to be addressed, and strategies which take their moderating effect into account must be implemented during the design, development and delivery of instruction. This is particularly so in the case of high level conceptual skills training where applications are individualised and not always obvious as in the case of motor or procedural skills. In recent years there has been an interest in finding better ways to help learners bridge the gap between the training environment and work place. There are several transfer strategies outlined in the literature which can be incorporated into training courses, and research has produced some encouraging results. In particular, when learners are given goal setting and self management instruction as part of a training course, they demonstrate a significantly higher level of transfer (eg., Gist, Bavetta, & Stevens, 1990a; 1990b). Such strategies increase the likelihood of transfer because they acknowledge the impact of organisational system factors while at the same time assisting the individual to focus on potential applications and to 'make plans' for using the training. Both designers of instruction as well as those delivering it have a responsibility to address the transfer issue - to help learners think through how to integrate the skills into their jobs, and to plan in terms of what will facilitate or inhibit the transfer. It is no longer good enough to leave it up to the individual learner - if it ever was.

When trainees are held accountable in some way for the implementation of their learning, it is assumed that transfer is more likely to occur (Laker, 1990). This has prompted several researchers interested in improving the level of transfer to experiment with two interventions to facilitate transfer - behavioural self management (eg., Frayne & Latham, 1987; Tziner, Haccoun, & Kadish, 1991) and goal setting (eg., Gist, Bavetta, & Stevens, 1990b; Gist, Stevens, & Bavetta, 1991; Wexley & Baldwin, 1986). Both strategies incorporate a cognitive and a behavioural component, and share similarities in their processes and goals.

Goal setting has been promoted as an effective organisational planning and motivational tool for many years (Locke & Latham, 1984; Tubbs & Ekeberg, 1991), but its potential as a post-training transfer strategy has only been recognised relatively recently. It is believed that trainees are more likely to use the training on-the-job when they are presented with a skill utilisation objective, or when they determine their own goal in consultation with others, such as the trainer or their supervisor (Tziner et al., 1991). Self management differs in that it involves identifying obstacles to performance, planning to overcome these, setting goals to achieve the plans, self-monitoring progress, and self-reinforcing goal achievement (Gist et al., 1990a). This system of rewards and punishments is intended to

shield the learner from the situational pressures likely to undermine the transfer process (Wexley & Baldwin, 1986).

When learners employ self management strategies and / or set behavioural goals, improved transfer levels are reported. This may be because these strategies enhance perceived self-efficacy (Frayne & Latham, 1989; Gist et al., 1991; Tziner et al., 1991). It may also reflect the capacity of the learner to organise and carry through the generalisation of the new skills from the training environment to a novel situation in the workplace (Gist et al., 1990b). Self- management strategies are not difficult to incorporate into established training programs and require no changes to the existing instructional content.

The best known transfer strategy based on behavioural self management is relapse prevention, developed by Robert Marx (1982; 1983; 1986). Relapse prevention is an adaptation of an approach originally used to successfully treat addictive behaviours. In Marx's opinion, learners must "negotiate an analogous array of disruptive psychological and environmental influences in order successfully to maintain long term behaviour change" (1982, p. 433). Relapse prevention facilitates the long-term maintenance of newly learned behaviours by having learners anticipate and prepare for possible relapses.

Marx identified three causes of training relapse: (a) organisations fail to provide a sufficient degree of support for skill retention, (b) the possibility of relapse is not discussed during the training course, and (c) trainees lack a systematic procedure for identifying and coping with threats to their skill retention (Laker, 1990). Relapse prevention involves four steps to counter these relapse threats. First, trainees are made aware of the possibility of relapse and are taught that temporary slips are the predictable outcomes of trial and error learning. Second, they pinpoint situations that are likely to sabotage their attempts to maintain the new behaviours. It is important that learners have an awareness of those threats in the post-training environment that will undermine their skill transfer. In the third step they are provided with coping skills so they can deal effectively with the threats. Finally, trainees are taught to experience a sense of accomplishment at using these skills in problematic situations by means of practice dealing with anticipated obstacles. Marx terms this four step process "engaging in fire drills". If, at the end of the training, individuals are confident they can successfully perform the tasks as trained, know that relapses are likely and acceptable to a point, and have identified potential obstacles as well as coping skills to deal with them, they will be more resilient when encountering factors inhibiting transfer. Thus relapse prevention reduces the unpredictability of the post-training environment, while enhancing the learner's sense of self efficacy. In this way the strategy short circuits slips and prevents major relapses.

Marx considers relapse prevention particularly relevant to management development training, claiming it will facilitate transfer even when management or immediate supervisor support and reinforcement is lacking, inappropriate, or not recognised by the learner (Marx, 1982; 1983).

Recent Transfer Studies

Various goal setting and/or self-management techniques, including relapse prevention (RP), have been researched in recent years (eg., Baker, 1986; Gist et al., 1990b; Gist et al., 1991; Noe, Sears, & Fullenkamp, 1990; Tziner et al., 1991; Wexley & Baldwin, 1986). Despite mixed findings, post-training interventions designed to facilitate transfer have generally produced positive performance outcomes.

Noe et al. (1990) and Tziner et al. (1991) employed the RP model in their transfer research. Although Noe et al. found that relapse prevention (RP) training caused trainees to engage in more cognitive rehearsal than the control group and to more easily acknowledge their 'bad habits' in the workplace, the results do not clarify the degree to which RP facilitates positive post training performance. Tziner et al. (1991) found that trainees given RP training demonstrated higher levels of immediate post training mastery of training content, a greater likelihood of utilising skill transfer strategies (based on trainee self reporting), and a greater likelihood of actually transferring and applying skills (based on supervisor reports). Their findings suggest that two hours of RP training can lead to significant increases in knowledge and application.

Wexley and Baldwin (1986) compared three interventions given to College students receiving instruction in time management. The interventions were assigned goal setting, participative goal setting (with trainee and trainer working together to determine goals), and behavioural self-management based on Marx's relapse prevention approach. They found both forms of goal setting superior to self-management in inducing maintenance of behaviour change over a two month period. The group exposed to RP techniques did not develop the same degree of behavioural commitment as the goal setting group. A possible reason for this is that they were not required to commit themselves to specific actions or strategies for coping with potentially inhibiting factors in their post-training environment.

Gist et al. (1990a, 1991) carried out two studies using MBA students who were receiving negotiation skills instruction. They compared the outcomes from goal setting and self-management, although the latter technique was not specifically modelled on the RP approach. Their findings appear to contradict Wexley and Baldwin's. When compared with the goal setting group, the self management group demonstrated higher levels of transfer,

and of skill generalisation to different tasks. Based on their 1991 results, post-training intervention may also moderate the influence of self-efficacy on skill maintenance. High self-efficacy trainees appear to respond to the goal setting intervention better than low self-efficacy trainees, because the former tend to set difficult goals which in turn leads to better performance. This conclusion agrees with the earlier findings of Locke and Latham (1984). It should be noted that in both their studies, Gist et al. used behavioural measures rather than relying on self-report, and their findings may therefore provide a more accurate insight into the effects of the interventions than those studies relying on self-reporting. Baker (1986) also used a self-management intervention similar to RP, and found no significant effect on retention or immediate skill application. However, he did find self management positively contributed to performance when measuring transfer across settings, after a period of three months.

Action Planning

Self-management and goal setting are transfer strategies which link training to the workplace. As such they build on the intention to transfer and have the potential to undermine inhibiting factors which may produce transfer failure. Action planning is another transfer strategy, but one which is more direct in its transfer focus (Campbell & Cheek, 1989; Stroul & Schuman, 1983; Trost, 1985). The term 'action planning' was coined during the 1970s by Mosel (Youker, 1985), who advocated this strategy as an important way to confront and overcome negative influences back on-the-job. He believed that "all training, even the most humble, should include training on how to overcome the problems encountered in applying the training. Foremost of these problems is the deterrent effect of other people" (Mosel, 1957, p. 63).

Action planning was popular in the mid 1970s and early 1980s when many courses included an action planning component. During the late 1970s the US Office of Personnel Management (USOPM) incorporated action planning into courses as a means of assessing transfer of training and evaluating the impact of training on work performance (USOPM, 1980; Youker, 1985). Some practitioners have reported their experiences with action planning (Foxon, 1987; Hollenbeck & Ingols, 1990; Jones & Lowe, 1990; Swinney, 1989) but it would seem the popularity of action planning as a technique to increase transfer has declined and the anticipated benefits have failed to materialise. In many cases action planning failed because the action planning segment was too brief or superficial, or because the plan neglected to take into account the organisational realities that would inhibit transfer. There is a body of anecdotal literature which suggests however that when trainees are shown how to prepare an action

plan, and sufficient time is allocated to action planning, it does promote transfer. Despite the inclusion of action planning in lists of suggested transfer strategies in numerous training articles, there has been no empirical research into action planning as a strategy to facilitate transfer.

Action planning is the process of preparing an individualised action plan at the end of a module or course of instruction, detailing in behavioural terms what aspects of the newly learned knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours will be applied on the job (Campbell & Cheek, 1989; Foxon, 1987). An action plan may also specify perceived organisational constraints, human and technical resources required, an implementation time frame, and how the learner will self-assess transfer progress at a later date.

The roots of action planning can be traced back to organisational and educational psychology. The identical elements approach (Ellis, 1965) stressed the importance of helping learners recognise the similarities between the training environment and the application environment. The concept of near and far transfer (Royer, 1979) is an extension of the identical elements theory and acknowledges that some transfer applications are less obvious to the learner than others. Both of these have influenced action planning, with its emphasis on having the learner match newly learned skills to relevant work place situations. Cognitive psychology has also influenced action planning. The development of a written individualised action plan by each trainee, identifying possible application problems, how to address these, and how successful application will be recognised, is a way of making a cognitive connection between the newly acquired skills and specific on- the-job applications (Leifer & Newstrom, 1980).

There is also an obvious relationship between action planning and goal setting (Locke & Latham, 1984). In this body of literature, the cognitive representation of the goal and the means of achieving it is often referred to as action planning or action strategies (Tubbs & Ekeberg, 1991). Inhibiting and facilitating factors moderate the degree to which an action plan is carried through. The 'good strategy user' model of Pressely, Snyder and Cariglia-Bull (1987) can also be related to action planning as a transfer strategy. According to this cognitive competence model, good strategy users not only understand which strategic procedures are appropriate to a situation, but when and where to apply them. They recognise too the need to expend effort to achieve goals, and that particular skills may have to be modified to fit different circumstances. When confronting a new learning situation, good strategy users often identify elements common to the new and the old. These similar elements tend to guide the selection of a strategy appropriate to the new situation, since the knowledge that goes with the strategy includes attributes of tasks where the procedure can be used. This cognitive model captures the essence of good action planning as a transfer strategy - namely, that trainees are able to match newly learned

skills and knowledge with work place applications involving both near and far transfer.

The Transfer Model (Figure 1) conceptualises the intention to transfer as being subject to inhibiting and facilitating forces. Action planning, therefore, constitutes a facilitating or supportive force acting to undermine the negative influences of such inhibitors as the learner's inability to connect the instructional content with work place applications, or the perceived lack of support from supervisors or co-workers. Simultaneously, it enhances the existing facilitating forces (such as post-course enthusiasm and intention to utilise the new skills on the job) by providing a 'road map' for the work place application of the training. It not only highlights the initiation arena, but situates the skill use in an on-going application which improves the likelihood of transfer maintenance.

How can instructional designers and trainers utilise action planning as a transfer strategy? Action planning involves the preparation of written plans by each trainee, either during or at the end of the course. The plan may be basic or complex. A basic plan specifies those aspects of the knowledge and skills learned which will be used back on-the-job, and anticipates changed work behaviours which will result from the application. A measure of these changed behaviours becomes one measure of transfer. A more complex plan will identify perceived organisational constraints, human and technical resources required, and an implementation time frame. As a transfer strategy, action planning is similar to the self-management approach already described, in that it provides a structure to assist with application and monitoring of progress. But there are some important differences.

Action planning goes beyond self-management and goal setting because it results in written commitments to action. Each action plan is individually determined, in light of the trainee's job requirements, and is stated in measurable performance outcomes as far as possible. Like Marx's Relapse Prevention, action planning acknowledges that trainees are returning to an organisational environment which may not support the application of their learning. The discussion of this during the preparation of the plan is similar to Marx's 'fire drills' concept. Another difference involves the monitoring of progress. This is not left to the individual, as in the case of self management strategies, but involves the trainer and/or management, as well as the trainee, using the action plan to monitor application of the new knowledge and skills. The self reward and reinforcement element of self management and RP strategies is not advocated in the action planning literature. In addition, action planning often involves the manager either in the planning process, or in post-training discussions about implementation. This collaboration does not appear to be a feature of the self-management or goal setting approaches.

Incorporating Action Planning into a course

The action planning process should be tailored to the specific requirements of a particular course. The general approach is as follows:

1. The instructor outlines the benefits and process of action planning.
2. The instructor briefly reviews the module/course content which is the subject of the action plan.
3. Learners identify aspects of the new knowledge and skills which they wish to apply in their workplace. Action planning is often part of the module or course content review and used to 'build a bridge' between the training environment and the work place (Mahoney & Lyday, 1984). Beaudin (1987) suggests trainees be asked to maintain a notebook throughout the course, listing potential applications of the training. These can be reviewed and used when preparing the action plan. An alternative approach, suggested by Anderson and Wexley (1983), requires learners to force rank the learning points in terms of their importance in their work setting. They then address the highest ranked point and develop a basic goal with specific activities and identification of persons who will be affected by these goals. Hollenbeck and Ingols (1990) ask trainees to bring specific work problems to discuss at the course; action plans specifically tailored to these are prepared during the course.
4. Specific applications of the new knowledge and skills are itemised on the action plan. Between three and five items is considered ideal (Foxon, 1987; Trost, 1985). Items in a complex plan (refer to the worked example in Fig. 3) take at least five minutes each to write, and often longer. These applications must be realistic, workable, unambiguous and sufficiently detailed. For example, rather than "communicate better with staff", a suitable action item might be "meet with staff for 15 minutes each morning to review priorities and clarify my requirements". It may even be feasible for trainees from the same work group to agree on specific actions that all will take (Spitzer, 1983).
5. For each application, trainees list observable behaviours that will be evidence of application. These must be in measurable terms. For example, as a result of learning a new time management technique, a measurable result could be "I will allocate at least 10 minutes per day for planning time, which is currently non-existent".
6. Trainees identify and discuss anticipated difficulties in implementing the plan, and what strategies will be used to enlist support and deflect opposition (Bramley, 1989; Leifer & Newstrom, 1980; Nelson, 1989). These difficulties may be personal (procrastination, poor organisation),

or organisational (lack of supervisor support, colleagues will oppose new approach, lack of resources). The discussion can be done publicly as one group (Spitzer, 1983; Trost, 1985), or in small groups or pairs. Dealing with inhibiting factors can be role played, as in the case of interpersonal skills (Yelon, 1992; Youker, 1985). If constraints are unable to be circumvented, the plan should be rewritten. However, by identifying potential difficulties and discussing solutions, trainees are better prepared to deal with resistance to their intention to use the training on-the-job.

7. After discussion, the plan is fine tuned and written on a planning form. Prior to any long term follow-up, trainers may wish to meet with each trainee after approximately one month, and based on the implementation results, work with trainees to refine or develop a new action plan (Frost, 1985).

Action planning can be done at the end of each module (Stroul & Schuman, 1983), at the end of the course as part of the content review (Michalak, 1981; Swinney, 1989), or at various natural content breaks during the course (Bramley, 1989; Foxon, 1987; Spitzer, 1983). This decision is influenced by course length (for example, a one week course may lend itself to a daily action plan), and whether there are specific skill areas for which instructors want all trainees to prepare action plans.

A more favourable climate for transfer of skills is likely to result if the learner's supervisor is involved in determining the action plan goals (Broad & Newstrom, 1992). Campbell and Cheek (1989) recommend that managers as well as trainers be held responsible for making sure learners take a realistic and workable action plan back to the workplace. Parry (1990) and Tallman (1987) suggest that the supervisor discuss the plan prepared by the trainee and that both agree on how and when it is to be implemented. Not only does this make the plan more concrete and validate its workability, but it also ensures some level of organisational support. Supervisor involvement means the trainee leaves the course with expectations about supervisor support back in the workplace, thus setting up a form of self-fulfilling prophecy.

Your Action Plan will help you plan specific ways to use the communication skills when you get back to your job. You may want to refer to your notes and the course materials. Be as detailed as you can - this will help you assess your progress later.

Here is an example of one action item ...

(a) Situation description	(b) What I would normally do	(c) What I will do differently	(d) How I will gauge my improved performance	(e) Potential obstacles to my plan	(f) How I will deal with these
About once a month JM misses deadlines, and I have to raise it with him.	Usually I get angry, and tell him it is unsatisfactory, etc. There is no discussion about it.	I will seek information on why he misses deadlines. I will seek his proposals on how he can avoid this happening so often. Then I will take action that, if possible, takes his suggestions into consideration.	I will stay calm, sit down with him and spend time sorting it out. I will do a lot more asking and listening. JM will contribute his point of view. His performance will improve.	My annoyance gets the better of me! JM is not very communicative; he may not want to talk about it. He might not have a satisfactory reason.	Plan what I will say; wait until I'm over my anger; encourage JM to explain why he misses deadlines and try to take an action that considers his viewpoint while being consistent with my policies.

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Turn to the next page to write your three action items...

Figure 3: Sample Action Plan

The sample action plan (Fig. 3) illustrates the format of a complex action plan, and provides a worked example of an action item. The trainee has identified the behaviours to be replaced, which new skills will be used and with what results, and potential obstacles and how to overcome these. Each element of the plan provides a tracking point for collecting data on the transfer process and degree of transfer. If possible, the plan should be prepared in duplicate, with the trainers retaining one copy for post-course follow-up (Foxon, 1987; Parry, 1990; Petrini, 1990). Advising trainees that a follow-up will occur may act as a further motivator to implement the training (Foxon, 1987). When trainees receive the duplicate plan, they are questioned about implementation. This provides the trainers with information about transfer, while serving as a reminder and re-motivator to the trainees to apply the training in the workplace. Suggested follow-up

time frames range from every second week until successful application has occurred (Swinney, 1989), after four weeks (frost, 1985), between three and six months after training (Campbell & Cheek, 1989; Foxon, 1987), and after seven months (Hollenbeck & Ingols, 1990). Anderson and Wexley (1983) issued trainees with a special form and required them to self rate their application every three weeks over a nine week period. This was intended to promote conscious introspection as to why the action goals were not being achieved.

Monitoring Transfer via Action Plans

The literature contains few guidelines as to what constitutes the successful application of an action plan and how it can be most effectively used to monitor transfer. In one of the few reported monitorings of action plan utilisation Swinney (1989) tracked the implementation of action planning and supervisor involvement as two strategies to enhance transfer over a four year period. Supervisors were required to work with trainees after the course to ensure a supportive environment for the application of the training. Swinney looked for evidence of on-the-job use of five out of seven skills from the action plan, as well as improved performance. When this goal was achieved, the trainee received a 'reward'. Swinney states that over the four year period, 92% of 2,300 supervisors attending a Supervisory Skills course demonstrated this level of skill use. In another organisation trainers evaluating a management skills course after three months found that more than 75% of the learners reported implementation of their action plan items (Foxon, 1987). But in both cases the evaluation adopted a 'product' focus and concentrated on whether the action plan items had been implemented or not. There was no attempt to measure the degree to which initiation had occurred, the extent of maintenance, and the impact of the action plan in neutralising the effect of inhibiting factors.

It is outside the scope of this article to discuss transfer evaluation techniques and data collection procedures, but performance technologists must develop instruments which can track skill application and the process of transfer if they are to gain an understanding of what is happening to the learning after attendees resume their jobs. Action planning provides one way of monitoring progress, particularly when learners have identified potential obstacles and the means to overcome these. It is not sufficient to say transfer has not occurred; we must be able to isolate the point at which transfer failure set in as well as suggest reasons why.

Summary

Action planning is a powerful intervention to facilitate transfer. It provides the learner with a cognitive link between the training room and the job environment, it capitalises on and enhances the end-of-course transfer intention, and it takes into account the possible negative effects of the

organisational climate. It also provides performance technologists with a tool to track the transfer process.

Action planning addresses the problem of bridging the gap between the training room and the work environment by providing trainees with an opportunity to plan how they will link the training to their jobs (Campbell & Cheek, 1989). Rather than relying on the trainees to make the leap from the theoretical to the applied once back in the work place, action planning provides the necessary structure and guidance to formulate application opportunities and strategies before leaving the training environment. Developing an action plan not only reduces the unpredictability of the post-training environment, but also orients trainees toward transfer initiation (Marx, 1986). Asking learners to make this commitment to action, rather than leaving it to chance, is therefore more likely to result in positive use of the new skills on the first day back at work (Anderson & Wexley, 1983).

Action planning also capitalises on the end of course level of intention to transfer. Trainees must not only be motivated to learn, but motivated to apply that learning (Huczynski & Lewis, 1980; Mosel, 1957). The very act of identifying and articulating potential uses of the training can increase the intention to use the new skills, by reinforcing the relevance and applicability of the training to the work place (Noe, 1986).

If trainees believe they will encounter a work environment which is unfavourable to certain training applications, action planning helps them systematically think through which aspects of the training could realistically be used within those constraints. As a result, the trainees return to the work place knowing there are specific things they can implement despite the perception of a low level of support (Youker, 1985).

Training is only effective in so far as learners use the new skills and knowledge in the work place and thus become more productive and efficient workers (Laker, 1990). It is unrealistic to expect them to return to their jobs after a training course and not be negatively impacted, however mildly, by the pressures of the workplace (Broad & Newstrom, 1992). Action planning is one way to assist learners to anticipate the work place demands, without a resultant decrease in their intention to apply the training. As a commitment to action, this strategy provides the mechanism for the learners to 'get started' (ie. transfer initiation) and a momentum to continue using the training, until it becomes an integral part of their work behaviours (ie. transfer maintenance).

In terms of the transfer model (Fig. 1), the action planning strategy enhances several of the facilitating factors, while potentially undermining the inhibiting influences of weak motivation, the inability to recognise work place applications, and a perceived unsupportive work environment.

Given the current level of concern about return on training investment, this strategy has practical appeal for corporate educators, performance technologists, and senior management in organisations committed to investment in training. The action planning technique is neither complex nor time consuming, and can easily be integrated into any type of training program. It is applicable to both technical and 'soft skill' training content. For the cost of an additional training hour, organisations can expect increased levels of training transfer. Where it is used in conjunction with skill applications which have measurable outcomes in dollar terms, the cost benefit of the training can also be calculated.

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Please cite as: Foxon, M. (1994). A process approach to the transfer of training. Part 2: Using action planning to facilitate the transfer of training. *Australian Journal of Educational Technology*, 10(1), 1-18.
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