

Embedding Knowledge into Practice

How to increase the effectiveness of employee training

Have you ever attended a work-related training session or seminar, only to find that just weeks later, you have a folder full of notes but an empty head of what you *learnt* on the day? And then, if you do recall some of what you learned, how much transferred to behaviour? Has it changed the way you live and work?

Training is an important and ongoing component of professional life and optimising its outcomes is both possible and crucial. The traditional model of training, where participants attend a facilitator led session and then return to the workplace with the exhortation to *go forth and apply*, can be greatly improved upon as we shall see.

A survey conducted in 2010 by McKinsey reported that only 25% of respondents believed that training measurably improved performance.¹ In 2020, only 25 percent of the 4.4 million Australians who undertook work related training “reported always using skills or knowledge gained from their training”.²

Quoting various research, the authors of the study, *Transfer of Training: does it truly happen?* say, that “although approximately 40 percent of content is transferred immediately following training, the amount transferred falls 25 percent after six months and 15 percent after one year”; and that “only 10 percent of all training experiences are transferred from the training environment to the job”.³

When we put dollars against this knowledge-to-application gap, the U.S spent 82.5 billion in training in 2020.⁴ There are some significant dollars flowing into the wastelands of training ineffectiveness.

While there are many methods to employ in the teaching aspect of training—to facilitate the “real time” learning process—the key question to consider is, *How do we ensure that what was learned in the classroom is transferred to the workplace and ongoing performance improvement of the employee?*

Consider Coaching

A study conducted on thirty-one managers in the health sector who undertook training demonstrated that training increased productivity by 22% but when followed by eight weeks of coaching, the productivity improvement lifted to 88%. The authors of the study concluded that “The benefits from managerial training will likely be suboptimal if there is limited follow up, feedback, and measurement of outcomes (end-results). Executive coaching is an important way of ensuring that knowledge acquired during training actually emerges as skills that are applied at work”.⁵

Using a coaching process after training is an effective way of embedding knowledge into practice. Consider the following:

1. As part of the training, have each attendee create action plans for *what* and *how* they are going to implement what they have learned.
2. Structure the process whereby a coach reviews the action plans, ensuring there are realistic time frames, goals, and both qualitative and quantitative metrics to assess progress.
3. Ensure the coach and employee meet regularly to review progress. These meetings should contain:
 - The opportunity for the employee to discuss wins and relevant challenges; to reflect on what is working and how to further integrate their learning.
 - Feedback on performance and accountability to the action plans.
 - Further knowledge impartation to build on the employee’s ongoing learning: either from the coach or recommended resources.
 - Praise to reinforce the performance improvement of the employee.⁶

It is a cyclical process as demonstrated below.

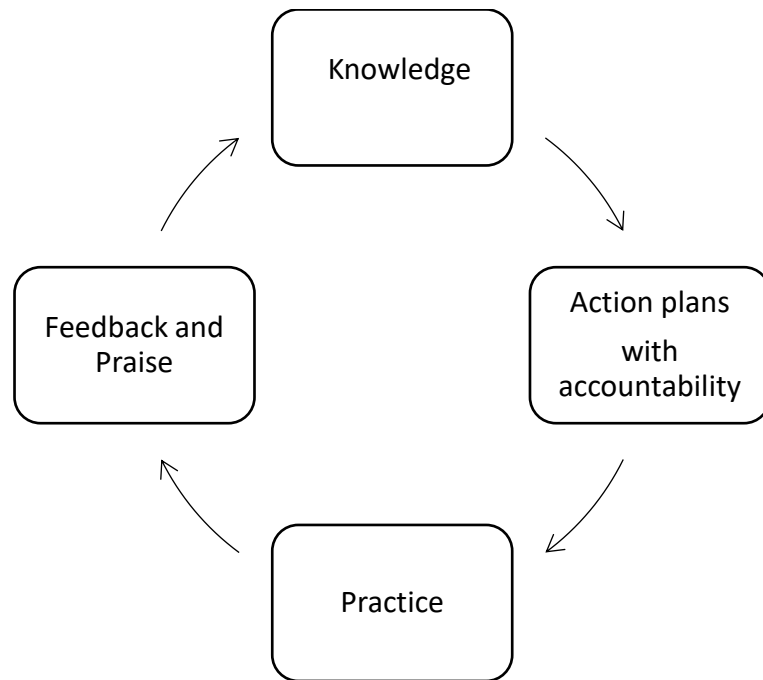


Figure 1. The Knowledge Practice Cycle

SUMMARY

The ultimate goal of workplace training should be improved performance by employees. When you are considering your future training requirements ask the following questions:

- Why do my people need this training?
- What do I want to be different?
- What problems do I need to solve?
- How will I measure the effectiveness of the training?
- What post training process can we employ to ensure that what was delivered in the classroom is *applied* in people's roles?

Considering the research demonstrating less than ideal outcomes of training effectiveness, it is critical to establish the goals of training along with the post-training process: to embed knowledge into practice. In this way, you will ensure your employee development dollars will be well spent.

NOTES

¹<https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/getting-more-from-your-training-programs>

²<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/work-related-training-and-adult-learning-australia/latest-release#work-related-training>

³ Bhatti, Muhammad Awais, Mohamed Mohamed Battour, Veera Pandiyan Kaliani Sundram, and Akmal Aini Othman. "Transfer of training: does it truly happen? An examination of support, instrumentality, retention and learner readiness on the transfer motivation and transfer of training." *European Journal of Training and Development* (2013).

⁴ <https://trainingmag.com/2020-training-industry-report/>
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/788521/training-expenditures-united-states/>

⁵ Olivero, Gerald, K. Denise Bane, and Richard E. Kopelman. "Executive coaching as a transfer of training tool: Effects on productivity in a public agency." *Public personnel management* 26, no. 4 (1997): 461-469.

⁶ Praise combined with task clarification and performance feedback has been validated as a major behavioural reinforcer. One such study was: Crowell, Charles R., D. Chris Anderson, Dawn M. Abel, and Joseph P. Sergio. "Task clarification, performance feedback, and social praise: Procedures for improving the customer service of bank tellers." *Journal of applied behavior analysis* 21, no. 1 (1988): 65-71.