

System of Accountability Improves Transfer of Training

For over twenty years, researchers in the field of Human Resource Development have worked to understand the conditions that promote or inhibit the transfer of training information to the workplace. Transfer of training occurs when participants successfully take the training information learned and actively apply it to improving their day-to-day work. Simply investing in a training opportunity does not guarantee transfer of training. In fact, studies indicate that only half of all organizational training investments result in direct benefits to the organization (Saks, 2002). A recent article published in Human Resource Development Review found that accountability plays a key role in improving the process of incorporating new skills and strategies into the structure of an organization.

Currently, field professionals agree that successful training transfer functions as part of a system of influences. A leading model proposed by Baldwin and Ford in 1988 organizes these many influences into the following three categories:

- 1) Characteristics of the training participant
- 2) The design of the training and
- 3) The work environment of the training participant

Researchers are now beginning to tease apart this complex system by looking at the degree of impact certain factors might have on successful training transfer.

Recently, researchers Lisa A. Burke from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga and Alan M. Saks from the University of Toronto in Ontario, Canada teamed up to explore the specific role of accountability in supporting the transfer of training information. This concept of accountability deals with the degree to which organizations hold learners responsible for applying skills obtained from training to their work. The supervisor-trainee relationship can facilitate accountability, an element strongly tied to the culture and structure of an organization.

What did they do?

After conducting a comprehensive review of the training transfer literature, Burke and Saks identified various academic materials supporting accountability as a key factor. Next, they studied the psychology literature as it relates to accountability and identified a framework developed by Schlenker and colleagues in 1994 (The Pyramid of Accountability) which suggests that individuals can be held accountable for their actions if:

- (a) they feel connected to them
- (b) they make a commitment to them and
- (c) they realize their actions carry certain expectations and intended effects with them.

The authors of the current paper propose that organizations utilize the framework developed by Schlenker and colleagues to guide both research and practice in the area of training transfer.

Why is this relevant to coalitions?

Each year, many coalitions invest significant portions of their limited resources to train key leaders, coalition members and other stakeholders. The development of strong coalition capacity in the implementation of evidence-based strategies necessitates this investment as part of a local, data-driven plan. However, training participants often cite numerous challenges in taking the information back home. For example, participants that experienced increased motivation after a training event might find themselves frustrated when they return to their community and receive criticism for trying a new approach. On the other hand, some training participants might not put forth any effort to utilize the information they learned. In both situations, organizations waste resources and training information does not significantly benefit the capacity of the coalition.

What Coalitions Can Do

- ✓ **Assess the culture of your coalition as it relates to accountability for training transfer.** Do individuals involved in trainings and in supervisory roles feel accountable for transferring learning back to the organization? If not, a coalition's needs may require a larger conversation around this issue. It will be important for all those involved, including coalition key leaders, to agree that the coalition's best interest requires working toward effectively conveying training information and maximizing resources spent.
- ✓ **Develop clear roles and responsibilities for individuals involved in the transfer process.** Prior to attending trainings, both the trainee and the supervisor should come to a consensus and commit to what they are each responsible for in terms of ensuring training transfer. Will the individual receiving the training be expected to develop a report or "brown bag" presentation on what they learned? Will their supervisor meet with them after the training and discuss how to put the training to practice?
- ✓ **Put in place a system to evaluate transfer of training information.** If training participants and supervisors understand the importance of training transfer and clear roles and responsibilities for both parties are in place, it makes sense to assess whether or not transfer occurred. For example, as part of yearly performance evaluations, trainees might be required to report on what they have done to transfer the information and supervisors might report on what they have done to facilitate training transfer. Organizations can also implement rewards for transfer and consequences for not doing so.

To review the original source, please refer to:

Burke, L.A. & Saks, A.M. (2009). Accountability in training transfer: Adapting Schlenker's model of responsibility to a persistent but solvable problem. *Human Resource Development Review*, 8 (3), 382-402.

Baldwin, T.T. & Ford, J.D (1988). Transfer of training: A review and directions for future research. *Personnel Psychology*, 41, 63-105.

Saks, A.M. (2002). So what is a good transfer of training estimate? A reply to Fitzpatrick. *The Industrial-Organizational Psychologist*, 39, 29-30.