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Facilitating transfer of training to the workplace

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Facilitating transfer of training to the workplace

Abstract

The role of training in the 1990's is predicted to expand sharply, bringing with it both problems and opportunities. Professional trainers must be increasingly concerned with creating effective programs. Organizations will focus on outcomes that are observable and measurable in on-the-job behavior.

Facilitating Transfer of Training
to the Workplace

A Research Paper

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Chapter I

Introduction

The role of training in the 1990's is predicted to expand sharply, bringing with it both problems and opportunities. Professional trainers must be increasingly concerned with creating effective programs. Organizations will focus on outcomes that are observable and measurable in on-the-job behavior.

Many current training programs are not as effective as they could be because their designers and presenters fail to consider adequately the need to facilitate transfer of training to the work environment. According to Leifer and Newstrom (1980), a "good" program, one that produces change within the training context itself, is still inadequate if it fails to induce new behavior on the job.

Even after an excellent class, training frequently fails to pay off in behavioral changes on the job. Trainees go back to work and do it the way they've always done it, instead of the way they are taught in the training workshops. The phenomenon is called transfer failure. It happens because skills do not transfer automatically into job performance. Since the point of job-related training is to improve performance

on the job, transfer failure obviously defeats the whole purpose (Clark, 1986).

In this paper, a review of articles in major works of the organizational training literature, and a challenge to trainers to consider practical approaches to obtain a better payoff from their efforts will be presented.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

Definitions

Definitions of the the transfer of training abound in a review of the literature. A "good" transfer of training program produces change within the training context (Leifer & Newstrom, 1980). Transfer of training is the learning effect on future learning experiences for the participant (Gass, 1985).

Transfer of training also produces more rapid acquisition, retention, and transfer of work skills (Kelley, Orgel, & Baer, 1985). Another group of researchers (Zemke & Gunkler, 1985) define transfer of training as the effects of training on the subsequent performance of an operational task. Postitive transfer has been defined as the extent to which individuals use what they learned in a training situation on the job (Wexley & Baldwin, 1986).

Transfer of training is more than a function of the original learning. For transfer to have occured, learned behavior must be generalized to the job context and maintained over a period of time on the job (Newstrom, 1984).

Finally, Mathews (1986) defines transfer of training as the phenomenon of learning more easily or more effectively than otherwise in a new situation that is the result of the learning which has taken place earlier. Mathews goes on to say that transfer does not have to be seen as simply present or absent, but it is demonstrated to a degree.

There is a growing recognition of a "transfer problem" in organizational training today (Michalak, 1981). It has been estimated that although American industries spend up to \$100 billion on training and development, not more than 10% of these expenditures actually result in transfer to the job (Georgenson, 1982).

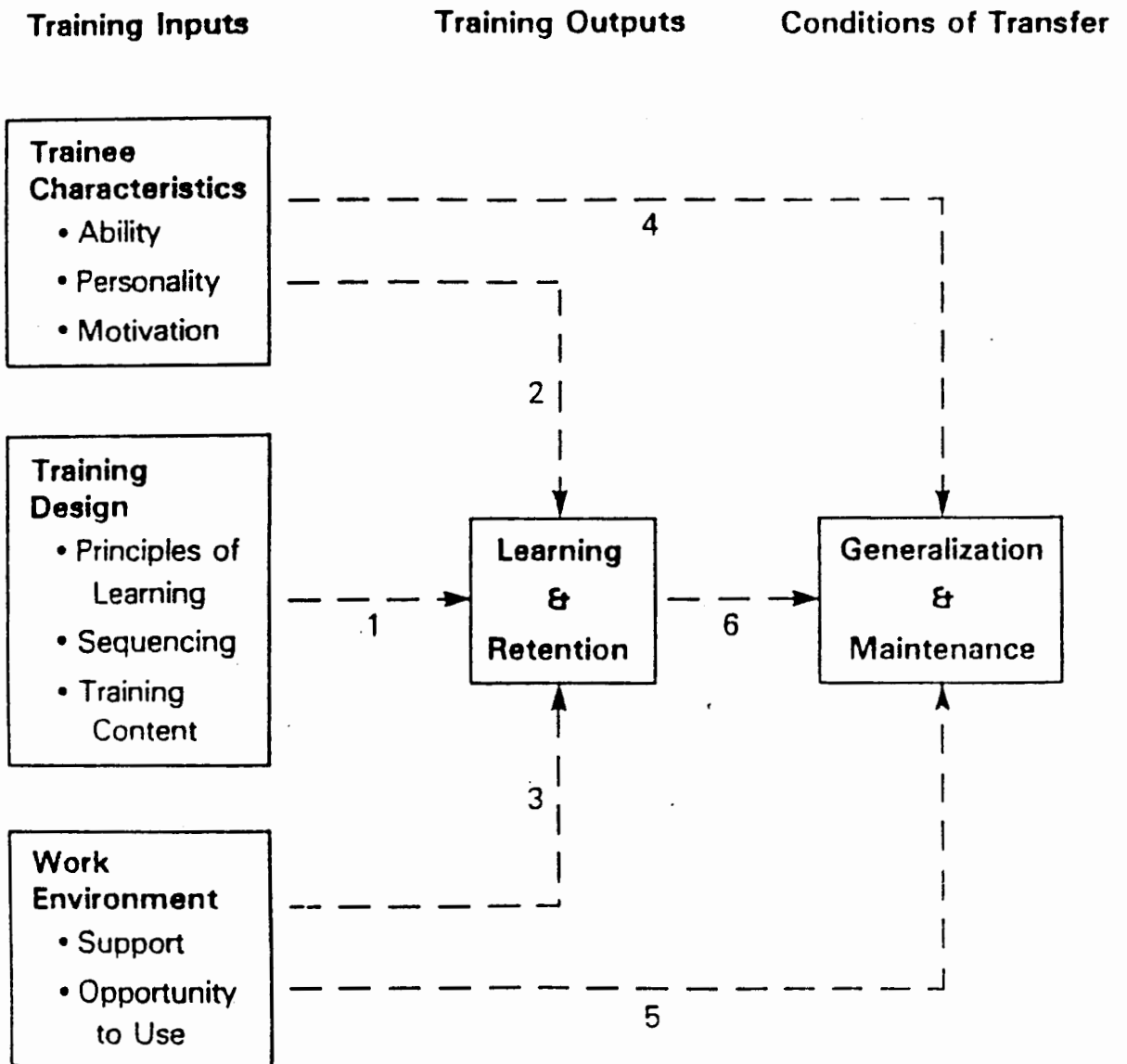


Figure 1: A Model of the Transfer Process

A Model of the Transfer Process

In a 1988 study, Timothy Baldwin of Indiana University and J. Kevin Ford of Michigan State University present a framework of understanding the transfer process. In Figure 1, the transfer process is described in terms of training input factors, training outputs factors, and conditions of transfer.

The conditions of transfer include the (1) generalization of material learned in training to the job content and (2) maintenance of the learned material over a period of time on the job. Training outputs are defined as the amount of original learning that occurs during the training program and the retention of that material after the program is completed. Training input factors include training design, trainee characteristics, and work environment characteristics.

The major training design factors are the incorporation of learning principles, the sequencing of training materials, and the job relevance of the training content.

Trainee characteristics include ability or skill, motivation, and personality factors.

Support and the opportunity to use are factors included in the work environment. A climate favorable to the positive transfer of learning includes an emphasis on human resource development, top management support, and an atmosphere of open communication.

As the model of Baldwin and Ford (1988) indicates, training outputs and training input factors have both direct and indirect effects on conditions of transfer. These are shown by six linkages which are critical to the understanding of the model. Training outputs of learning and retention have direct effects on conditions of transfer (Linkage 6 of the model on page 5.). For trained skills to transfer, training material must be learned and retained.

Trainee characteristics and work environment characteristics are seen to have direct effects on transfer regardless of initial learning during the training program or retention of the training material (Linkages 4 and 5 of the model on page 5). Hence, well-learned skills may not be maintained on the job due to lack of motivation or lack of supervisory support.

Training outputs (learning and retention) are seen as directly affected by the three training inputs of

training design, trainee characteristics, and work environment characteristics (Linkages 1, 2, and 3 of the Model on page 5). These three training inputs have an indirect effect on transfer through their impact on training outputs.

This Model of the Transfer Process provides a framework for the review of literature and recommendations from the literature to facilitate the positive transfer of training to the workplace.

In considering the over-all picture of the Model of the Transfer Process (Baldwin & Ford, 1988), it appears that the trainer/learning specialist has the most direct control over the training design input and the work environment input (Figure 1).

Trainee characteristics is a training input over which the training developer or trainer may have very little control. What trainee characteristics affect positive and negative transfer of training? Learning often depends on the individual's ability to listen to feedback about personal strengths and weaknesses. There are at least three situations that affect transfer (Van Velsor and Musselwhite, 1986):

1. Career transitions. A career transition increases one's motivation to listen and learn because

a real or perceived gap may exist between skills, tools, and confidence and demands on the job.

2. Personal crisis. A crisis usually creates self-doubt and personal re-examination and includes events such as marriage/ family crises, career progress/doubts, and questions concerning what the individual really wants to do with his or her life. This can provide a need for personal and professional advancement and development of skills or can diminish transfer of learning.

3. Job satisfaction and organizational stress. Decreased job satisfaction and organizational stress can result from interpersonal conflicts, dislike of an assignment or a project, new company policies, or decreasing job challenge. Organizational stresses can include financial problems, reorganizations, and alterations in climate due to change in top management or strategic directives. p. 58

Training Design

Principles of Learning and Sequencing

Researchers studied the procedures in training design that actually accomplish transfer (Kelly, Orgel, and Baer, 1985). They grouped these learning principles into categories that program developers and trainers can use to produce more rapid acquisition of skills.

Discover basic skills and concepts. When a trainee is provided, during learning task A, general principles regarding successful completion of that task, such knowledge will aid him in more rapidly learning task B if the same or similar principles apply. Building on the information,

learned earlier speeds subsequent learning.

The trainer should identify and train no more than 5 to 6 basic skills, and provide repeated practice using those skills on new problems and situations. This is more efficient, speeds up learning from session to session, and facilitates mastery.

Analyse, define, and field test. The trainer should task analyse components of the training program.

Then he should define these skills behaviorally. Behavioral definitions, like Mager's objectives, specify observable behavior, the conditions under which learning is verified, and the performance or mastery criteria.

For example: "Following every three practice role-plays, trainees will perform one unassisted problem-solving role-play; this cycle will continue until unassisted role-play is 100 percent accurate." The three components in this definition of joint problem-solving are the condition, the behavior, and the criteria. Trainees need behavioral definitions to know exactly what they're expected to do during role-plays and written exercises, and later on the job.

Finally analyses need field testing. By field testing whether task analyses and definitions produce the desired results before training, the trainer increases successful results and credibility of the training function.

Produce and verify mastery. To determine how much practice is needed to produce mastery, the trainer should establish mastery criteria for each skill based on experience of how much practice is needed to teach each one. When more than one skill is being taught,

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negative transfer (response interference) is likely to occur if training on the second skill is begun while the first is only partially learned.

Teach basic skills and general principles.

Training is more likely to transfer if trainees can use basic skills to solve new problems. Teaching basic skills ensures that every trainee initially achieves the same level of mastery for the basic skills before practicing them in the work place.

Teach trainees both correct and incorrect examples. Trainees should be exposed to incorrect models and, for an exercise, correct the errors and state the negative job-related consequences associated with the incorrect behavior. Trainees who perform skills correctly during training may not transfer those skills to their jobs unless there are positive consequences for doing so. Trainees can be prepared for the work environment by learning the positive consequences of performing the correct skills and the negative consequences of performing the incorrect skills.

Training Content Strategies

Traditionally, transfer of learning/ training has been a concern only in education and coursework. However it has become clear that there are a number of transfer enhancement strategies that educators and trainers can successfully implement before the learning event, within the controlled environment of the classroom or workshop, and after organized learning experiences in the workplace environment (Beaudin, 1987).

Include before-training strategies. In his article "Enhancing the Transfer of Job- Related Learning from the Learning Environment to the Workplace," Bart Beaudin (1989) suggests that even before training begins, trainers can begin to enhance their students' ability to transfer their training by collecting baseline information concerning the (1) the labor needs of the organizations whose employees will receive the training and (2) the skill deficits of the same employees. Such information can be collected from advisory groups, needs assessments, task analyses, and interviews with supervisors and training program participants.

Knowing more about the environment in which the learner will operate will better assist in the design of instruction and the transfer of new learnings to the workplace. Much time is spent preparing the learner and the learning event and very little time is spent on preparing the workplace to accept the new interventions. Beaudin lists the following questions that can be asked to provide additional background information to be used when formulating strategies to incorporate and prepare for transfer:

1. What is the business of the business?
Do the employees know where and how they fit?
2. Does the organization have situational specific methods that it uses that are not normally found in other sectors?
Would it be possible to capitalize on this uniqueness?
3. In what areas is the organization depended upon other organizations?
Will other organizations be impacted by internal changes?
4. What is the state of power and authority in the organization?
Would it be possible to co-op key figures to support a plan?
5. What are the formal and informal rules and regulation that will affect support or conflict) the introduction of alternative ways of doing things?
6. Will the work community be receptive

to change? Will time be needed for promotion of the concept?

7. Does the learner's values or the co-worker's values allow them to be accepting of the kind of change that will result from the intervention?
8. Do the goals of the intervention align with the goals of the organization? If goal conflict is expected, how will this organization circumstances be incorporated into the sessions?
9. How do the environment and workforce interact to accomplish goals? (p. 20)

According to Beaudin (1987, page 20), information provided from these questions can be used to design instruction which will transfer new learning to the workplace.

From the questions suggested by Beaudin, strategies for using the data to enhance an atmosphere conducive to transfer of training can be developed. These six strategies include the following:

1. Form an ad hoc advisory group composed of key informants and decision-makers (Beaudin, 1987).

Management advisory committees can be formed to set policy and to help review training courses while they're still in the development stage or before they are purchased. If a proposed program is scrapped due to lack of management commitment, better it should

happen early, before a lot of dollars are invested (Clark, 1986).

2. Develop a questionnaire or interview schedule that will collect data concerning organizational climate, relationships, and perceived problem areas (Beaudin, 1987).

3. Develop a needs assessment that will be responded to by all participants and supervisors (Beaudin, 1987).

Match courses to needs systematically. Training should flow from two primary sources: 1) a validated analysis of current job tasks and the skills required to perform them and, 2) a model of the future technological directions of the organization, agreed upon by upper management (Clark, 1986).

4. Work with key supervisors and get a commitment of support to the project. Management will see that training or education will make a difference and the manager will want the new skills maintained long after the training program (Beaudin, 1987).

As is already indicated, there is widespread agreement among Human Resource Development leaders that management support actions are important in making sure that that training is fully used back on the job

(Broad, 1982). In the article "Management Actions to Support Transfer of Training," Broad lists five categories of actions showing involvement of the upper management, the manager, and/or the supervisor to improve results of the training activities. These categories are Upper Management Involvement, Pretraining Preparation, Support During Training, Job Linkage, and Follow-up.

Upper Management Involvement are actions by those at the policy-making level of the organization and are designed to support full use of learning from a specific training program. These actions may occur before, during, or after training takes place.

Pretraining Preparation covers actions by managers and supervisors of trainees before training begins. These actions support the training program through participation in training design and development, selection and preparation of trainees and commitment for full trainee attendance.

Support During Training includes actions by managers and supervisors to maintain the relationship between trainee and job during the training period. These actions free the trainee to concentrate on

training without distraction and show continuing management interest in the training program.

Job Linkage involves actions designed to facilitate the entry or reentry of the trainee into the work situation. These actions occur toward the end of the training program as well as immediately following arrival back on the job. They show management what the trainee has learned for immediate and full use on the job.

Follow-up covers actions which provide ongoing reinforcement on the job for use of new behaviors learned during training. These actions support the incorporation of new trainee behaviors into the ongoing processes of the organization.

5. Educate supervising members of the work environment to see that there can be problem with the transfer of learning without his or her active support (Beaudin, 1987).

Ultimately it is the supervisor who must be responsible for the work performance of his or her employees. Supervisors can increase the impact of training dramatically by: 1) conducting brief pre- and post-course discussions with employees where they agree on how the skills learned in the program will be

applied on the job and, 2) making specific follow-up assignments after the employees returns to be sure that the skills are applied (Clark, 1986).

6. Communicate with participants and have them meet with supervisors to establish what would work best to ensure retention after returning to the worksite. This is a good opportunity to work on developing positive expectations for what the learning event will do for job-related performance (Beaudin, 1987).

When supervisors assess and track employees' skills by providing a records system, they can more easily make systematic training plans based on both the requirements of the job and individual assessments of employees skilllls (Clark, 1986).

Gass' (1985) suggestions deal with trainee characteristics as prescribed by Baldwin and Ford (1988) in the Model of the Transfer Process (Figure 1 on page 5) and deal with creating favorable conditions for transfer before the course/program/learning activities include (a) identifying, developing, or establishing a committment to change in the trainee, (b) having the trainee set goals for the training experience, (c) writing and setting tight learning objectives for the trainee, and (d) placing the plans

and goals made by the trainee in writing to create a stronger commitment for transferring the learning.

Include during-training strategies. The during-training phase contains the most popular and often cited strategies. The following are generally accepted as being effective when used during the learning event:

Provide natural consequences for learning experiences whenever possible (Gass, 1985). Otherwise once the course is over and the reinforcer (instructor) is removed from the trainee, learning behavior is severely hampered or terminated. In this way, with artificial consequences the result of learning, transfer is extremely limited.

In an ideal program (Ehrenberg, 1983), application of learning is never left to chance. Participants, under the guidance of their instructor, follow a "cumulative-rotation" process. They rotate between learning and application so that as each new task, procedure, strategy and concept is learned, it is applied cumulatively in the real situation until the total desired outcome is produced. In this way, not only does guided application take place, but needed attitudes and teamwork can be built or reinforced,

because the focus is on the end result rather than on each isolated specific learning.

According to Ehrenberg (1983), that although many training situations lend themselves, with proper planning, to create the type of cumulative-rotation instructional process described above, there are many situations in which simulated application is the only feasible means to create such a process. With the advent of sophisticated technology, remarkable simulations of real situations can be and have been developed.

The use of innovative training strategies that approximate real life situation increases the probability that the new skill will be learned. The way the use of the skill is reinforced in the actual workplace will determine if the skill will be used (Wehrenberg, 1983b).

Another strategy discussed by Gass (1985) is developing focused processing techniques that facilitate the transfer of learning to occur. Certain techniques in processing/debriefing/facilitating/evaluating learning activities lead to a more positive transfer of learning than others. Debriefing throughout the course allows the trainee to continually

focus on the learning that had taken place and how they could utilize this learning in the future. By using processing techniques, trainees could link the experiences from the present and future environments together.

Involving participants in the learning process will help them integrate behaviors into their everyday actions (Beaudin, 1987).

Practice and feedback need to be an integral part of learning (Beaudin, 1987). According to Ron Zemke and John Gunkler (1985) in their article "28 Techniques for Transforming Training into Performance", the ingredient most frequently shortchanged in training is practice. Knowing about something is quite different from being able to do it.

Practice is often kept to a minimum for reasons of money especially in off-site training. One way around the problem is through planned rehearsal. If the training is being held near the trainees' actual work site, setting up a laboratory is a possibility. In the case of trainees who are from remote areas, it may be possible to set up a situation where off-line and out-of-production equipment is designed for practice work.

Incorporate real work as part of the session in place of case studies (Beaudin, 1987). By teaching skills what will be relevant and readily applicable to the trainee's future learning experience, there is a greater potential of transfer of training (Gass, 1985). The best training programs are doomed to failure if the new skills do not fit in the workplace (Wehrenberg, 1983a).

Allowing time for participants to maintain a notebook of key ideas learned and possible on-the-job applications and also developing a backsliding prevention program. (Beaudin, 1987, Zemke & Gunkler, 1985). Encouraging co-workers to attend a learning session promotes colleague reinforcement at the worksite (Beaudin, 1987).

Include after-training strategies. Since learning experiences are provided to help improve performance on the job, the trainer is usually confident that the trainees are competent when they leave the controlled environment of the learning event. However it is impossible for the learning specialist to be on hand to guarantee transfer of training and maintenance of behavior on the job. But there are certain strategies

that can be used by employees, managers, and HRD personnel.

In the article, "Nine Ways to Make Training Pay Off on the Job," Ruth Clark (1986) suggests that training intact work groups benefits the organization when the training session concludes and the trainees are back on the job. Peer group support is a major factor. People are more likely to do things the new way if nearly everyone in the work group is trying to do them that way at the same time. Hence there forms a "critical mass" of commitment to the new skills. Without that critical mass, the status quo tends to defeat change. Furthermore, if people aren't called upon to use new skills immediately after they learn them, the skills tend to atrophy.

Beaudin (1985) suggests that participants can establish a "buddy system" to get support for maintaining new behaviors. Participants can refer to job aids introduced during the learning event. Progress can be graphed or monitored in activities in which difficulties are anticipated. Managers can regularly reinforce positive behavior, use jargon presented in the learning event when communicating with

employees, and incorporate the results into individual performance appraisals.

Trainers can extend the program into the trainee's "home" environment. By incorporating the environment that the trainee will be working in at the end of a course has been found to assist in the transfer of the goals and aims of many programs (Gass, 1985).

HRD personnel/trainers can send out letters to participants highlighting strategies and perform follow-ups to check the usefulness of strategies introduced during the learning events (Beaudin, 1985).

Zemke and Gunkler (1985) emphasize that the follow-up does not provide new material; it refines and polishes skills learned in the original training session and encourages continued use. Periods from four weeks to four months are commonly recommended as the proper interval between training and refresher.

Scheduling different time spans for follow-up activities, both short-term and long-term, reinforces the goals of the program (Gass, 1985). According to Clark (1986), follow-up training is essential to transferring the skill. Program graduates should be required to work on a regular project assignment using the techniques they learned. The instructor or someone

competent in the new skills should provide follow-up consultation, visiting the trainees and helping them apply the techniques to their unique job assignments. Or, as an alternative, give the graduates an assignment to work on for two weeks on the job. Then schedule transfer sessions where they meet as a group with the instructor, compare results, and discuss problems.

According to Kelly, Orgel and Baer (1985) transfer of training requires more than momentary mastery. More material is learned and retained if training is to spaced over time. The goal for follow-up training is to verify mastery of basic skills so new problems can be mastered when trainees encounter them on the job.

Levels of Transfer

In the paper "Ability to Transfer Skills and Knowledge to New Situations" that was presented in England in 1986, David Mathews states that transfer is not some magic or extra-sensory facility to undertake new tasks or jobs unaided. Generally stated, it is the phenomenon of learning more easily or more effectively than otherwise in a new situation as a result of the learning which has taken place. Transfer does not have to be seen as simply present or absent. It is demonstrated to a degree.

According to Mathews, transfer of training is also demonstrated as much in the little things of work as in the major events. Transferring skills to a new job, evidenced by a short training time, is valuable, both for the individual and the employing institution. This is not necessarily more important than the transfer that enables someone to cope with a change in the tasks they are carrying out each day or with a change of routine or an adjustment in the priorities.

Mathews proposes that ability to transfer should be seen as a component of occupational competence. It can be achieved in ways that are sufficient or insufficient for the individual jobs or movement

between jobs. The different levels of ability suggested by Mathews can be identified as insufficient within the job; sufficient within the job; sufficient for the occupational area; and sufficient beyond the occupational area. Mathews also proposes that the degree to which transfer takes place is also influenced by motivation, expectations, a trainer's intervention, and a range of pressures in the working environment.

Chapter III

Summary

Transfer of training should be a major concern to human resource development professionals. Particularly in today's economy, the bottom-line cost results are linked with good training procedures. Sound training programs are only the beginning. The trainer's impact must extend beyond the classroom: it must be integrated with actual on-the-job conditions. We cannot afford to ignore the work climate in the design of our training efforts. A clearly defined system should be initiated which unites the trainer, trainee, and manager, where possible, in the transfer process.

In summary of this research paper, steps have been suggested that will increase the likelihood that skills taught in the training classroom will be transferred to the work environment.

Before training takes place, we must strive to create clear and positive expectations, both for the potential trainee and the manager. We must facilitate open channels between trainees and their trainers. During training, we must use every means to relate the training examples and principles to the work

environment. We must make the trainee aware of the obstacles to transfer and provide strategies for overcoming these problems.

After the training, we must make every effort to provide application opportunities, as well as a feedback and reinforcement mechanism that supports immediate skill use and rewards desired performance.

By putting these steps into the design of our training programs, we can work toward solving the transfer of training problem.

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