Training Transfer: It's an Age-Old Problem With an All-New Solution

BY KEN PHILLIPS, FOURTH IN THE PLA SERIES

What if you could predict the future and know immediately after a training program which learners are most likely, at risk and least likely to apply what they learned? Now you can.

In the previous article, I described how Predictive Learning Analytics™ (PLA) is different from traditional learning measurement and evaluation and the five-level evaluation model. This article will explain how the PLA methodology allows you to predict learner behaviors and actions so that you can take targeted corrective measures to change them for the better.

If you are an experienced L&D professional, you probably know that much of the content delivered during a training program, whether classroom or technology-based, never actually gets transferred back on the job. You also understand it's a critical business issue because learning that is delivered but not applied wastes two precious organization resources – money and time. You also realize it reflects poorly on your professional credibility. What you probably don't know is how to fix it.

The answer is through PLA and an algorithm or mathematical model that is used to make training transfer predictions. The algorithm is the heart of the PLA methodology and sits on a foundation of three research-based training transfer components and twelve research-based training transfer factors. The three training transfer components are Learning Program Design, Learner Attributes, and Learner Work Environment (Baldwin & Ford 1988; Colquitt et al. 2000; Scaduto et al. 2008).

A list of the twelve factors and their relationship to the three training transfer components follows:

Learning Program Design factors:

1. Learners acquire new information
2. Learners view the program as relevant to themselves and their job
3. Learners regard the program as an important investment in their career development
4. Learners see a likely improvement in a vital business metric if new information learned is applied back on the job

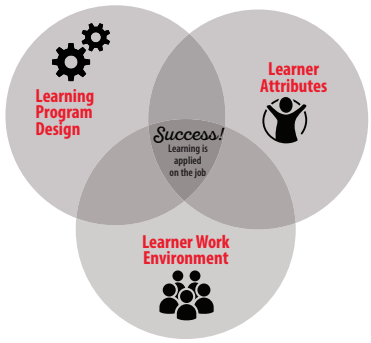
Learner Attribute factors:

5. Learners are personally motivated to apply what was learned
6. Learners are confident in their ability to use the knowledge, skills, and behaviors learned
7. Learners take time to reflect on the critical lessons learned and how they can help improve their performance
8. Learners view the program as an opportunity to learn challenging new things

Learner Work Environment factors:

9. Managers discuss the training program with the learners before attending the session
10. Managers actively engage learners post-program regarding the use of the knowledge, skills and behaviors learned in the program
11. Work colleagues support learners post-program when applying new things learned in the program
12. Learners have an immediate opportunity to use the new information acquired in the program back on the job

Three Training Transfer Components



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How does it work?

The twelve training transfer factors are converted into survey items and either incorporated into an existing Level 1 evaluation or administered as a separate questionnaire. Participants complete the survey immediately following their participation in a training program, and the results are summarized into a set of Individual Learner Application Index™ scores.

Next, the scores are sorted into numeric order from highest to lowest and then segmented into the top 15%, the middle 65% and the bottom 20% of scores. Learners in the top 15% of scores are identified as "most likely" to apply what was learned, learners in the middle 65% are identified as "at risk" of not applying what they learned and the bottom 20% of learners are identified as "least likely" to apply what they learned. These percentages align with training transfer research results found by Rob Brinkerhoff and Timothy Mooney in a 2008 study. The chart below illustrates the segmentation of learners into their respective groups.

Example: Learner Application Index™ (LAI) Scores

Most Likely to Apply		At Risk of Not Applying				Least Likely to Apply	
Learner PLA #	LAI	Learner PLA #	LAI	Learner PLA #	LAI	Learner PLA #	LAI
30904	6.92	34084	6.25	35709	5.92	45444	5.50	40432	4.92
46128	6.92	45000	6.17	46850	5.83	44059	5.50	40411	4.92
30518	6.83	46957	6.17	26298	5.83	46717	5.50	45135	4.92
46728	6.75	45373	6.08	40931	5.75	22997	5.50	45348	4.92
30867	6.64	35277	6.08	45813	5.75	11124	5.50	45322	4.83
46066	6.58	44067	6.08	26605	5.75	46110	5.50	47025	4.83
32647	6.50	20523	6.00	23369	5.75	43924	5.33	43401	4.75
45805	6.50	41259	6.00	22218	5.67	46857	5.33	27865	4.67
40336	6.50	45406	6.00	37931	5.67	33129	5.33	39877	4.58
45347	6.42	34026	5.92	29449	5.64	20817	5.25	32699	4.50
44851	6.33	5163	5.92	46780	5.58	35123	5.25	31848	4.33
34118	6.33	26754	5.92	46802	5.58	44529	5.17	45811	4.33
44657	6.33	40086	5.92	34930	5.58	41580	5.08	45240	4.25
47026	6.33	37968	5.92	46609	5.58	31265	5.00	27216	4.17
				46944	5.58			46070	4.00
				(n=74)				39747	3.92
								43859	3.33

What does PLA mean for you?

Knowing which learners are "most likely," "at risk" and "least likely" to apply the training they received back on the job enables you to take targeted corrective actions with the at risk and least likely to apply learners to try and move them into the most likely to apply category. Actions you might take include email reminders, quiz questions, job aids, review modules, micro-learning segments, coaching or mentoring assistance, and so forth. These actions, referred to as "learning boosts", extend the training and help to mitigate the effect of the "forgetting curve" where research indicates learners forget 80% of what they learned in a training program within two days and 90% within 31 days.

With this information, you are poised to begin boosting training transfer in your organization and bolstering your professional credibility.

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