



Identifying Obstacles to Training Transfer

BY KEN PHILLIPS, SIXTH IN THE PLA SERIES

What if you had a way to pinpoint all the obstacles that are preventing learners from applying what they learned in a training program back on the job? Moreover, what if you had this information early in the implementation process?



In the previous article, I pointed out how managers play a critical role in determining whether or not the employees they send to training apply what they learned in the program back on the job. I also discussed how the Predictive Learning Analytics™ (PLA) methodology predicts which managers are likely to do a good or a poor job of supporting the training.

However, we know managers alone don't determine whether employees are likely to apply back on the job what they learned in a training program. This article describes how the PLA methodology enables L&D professionals to identify a comprehensive list of obstacles preventing learners from applying what they learned in a training program. Moreover, it describes how to do it in near real-time so that corrective actions can be taken to mitigate or eliminate the obstacles.

What factors lead to training transfer success?

You may recall from article four, "Training Transfer: It's an age-old problem with an all-new solution," that training transfer is a function of three components: Learning Program Design, Learner Attributes, and the Learner Work Environment. You also may remember that these components have a multiplicative relationship, and only when all three are addressed simultaneously is maximum training transfer achieved.

For example, consider the following situations and how each obstacle represents a different training transfer component.

- Learners don't see a learning program as relevant to themselves and their job (a program design obstacle).

- Learners aren't confident in their ability to apply what they learned in a training program back on the job, (a learner attribute obstacle).
- Managers don't actively engage learners in a pre- and post-program discussion regarding the training (a learner work environment obstacle).

As you can see, the common denominator in all three situations is that training transfer is going to be negatively affected.

Now imagine if you could identify all the obstacles that learners see getting in the way so that you could take corrective actions to either mitigate or eliminate them.

Sound too good to be true? It's not!

How does it work?

Step 4 in the PLA methodology is to calculate the amount of scrap learning associated with a training program and to identify obstacles preventing participants from applying what they learned. This step is carried out 30-days post-program using either a survey, focus groups, or interviews, and involves asking the participants (or a random sample) three questions:

1. What percent of the material covered in the training program are you applying back on the job?
2. How confident are you that your estimate is accurate from zero to 100 percent?
3. If you're not using 100 percent of the program material, what obstacles prevented you from utilizing all that you learned?



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The rationale for waiting 30 days is two-fold. First, it allows the “forgetting curve” effect — the decline of memory retention over time — to take place, and second, it allows for the full range of training transfer obstacles to emerge. For example, some obstacles are likely to occur almost immediately (e.g., “My workload got in the way”), whereas others are likely to occur later (e.g., “I never had an opportunity to apply what I learned”).

Collecting a list of obstacles (question 3 above) is only half the job. Making sense of them is the other half. Follow these three steps to turn the list of obstacles into something that can help you prioritize where to focus your efforts on taking corrective actions to increase training transfer:

1. Review the entire list of obstacles with an eye toward identifying common themes and patterns.
2. Organize the obstacles into groups that represent the themes and patterns you identified.
3. Count the number of obstacles in each group and place the groups into numeric order from most to least. You now have a prioritized list of obstacles that will help you determine which obstacles to address first, second, third, and so forth.

The obstacles data, combined with the Learner Application Index (LAI), Manager Training Support Index (MTSI), and Training Transfer Component Index (TTCI) data previously discussed, provides a clear picture of the underlying causes of scrap learning associated with a training program.

However, one additional piece of data is needed to measure, monitor, and manage effectively the amount of scrap learning associated with a training program. The missing piece of information is a measure of the actual amount of scrap learning associated with the program. The next article in the series will discuss how to calculate the amount of scrap learning using the data collected with questions one and two described above.

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