

Support

Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about growing others.

Jack Welch

Given what you have read in the book so far, you are probably thinking that creating habitual behaviour change so it continues over the long term following a training course is difficult to do. And you are right; it is difficult to do. And that, of course, begs the question, 'Who is doing it?' If we want it to happen, who do we need to help? Ultimately, the person doing learning transfer is the course trainee, and if they are going to succeed at this difficult task of behaviour change, they need support. Without enough of the right kind of support, they will mostly fail to transfer and implement their new learning, and the training course is therefore mostly wasted. Mostly wasted training courses means mostly wasted training budget. If we want to avoid that wasted budget, we must support the trainee through the entire programme.

There is a commonly held myth that limits us, which is that our success is due to our individual skills, attributes and knowledge. This is especially true for those with a fixed mindset, if we relate this to Carol Dweck's model. We are taught this lesson in our formative years by the education system, and often by well-meaning parents. We are judged on what we can do as individuals, and on how we compare with others. But our real potential lies in what we can do together and what we can do when supported by the people and the ecosystem around us.

So what sort of support is needed for the trainee, and where should it come from? There is obviously direct support, perhaps from their manager, to help prepare the trainee for the programme and then help them stay focused and motivated while they implement change. There is the indirect support from the way the programme is structured and designed so it has relevant content and structured opportunities to experiment and practise. And then there is support from the organisation and the environment, including colleagues, that surrounds the trainee as they are putting learning into practice. Together, they all form a scaffold within which the trainee can build their behaviour change out of the learning from the training course. If parts of the scaffold are missing, it becomes much harder for the trainee to achieve the change.

When thinking about how to provide the supporting scaffold for learning transfer, it is important to realise that the phrase 'learning transfer' is a nominalisation. In fact, it's two of them together. A nominalisation is a noun that is generated from a verb and hides the real action because it becomes a concept rather than an action. Linguistically, it seduces us into thinking of learning transfer as a thing that exists (or doesn't) as an abstract and passive idea, rather than the sequential actions of 'learn' and 'transfer'. Learning transfer is definitely not passive. It requires action, and lots of it, on an ongoing basis, from the course trainee and many others, and it requires ongoing commitment.

Whenever I run workshops on learning transfer, I tell people their biggest challenge is going to be... you guessed it, learning transfer! I am continually amazed at how many L&D professionals think that because they have attended a workshop and know a bit more about the subject, learning transfer will somehow magically start happening. They still see, perhaps at an unconscious level, a training course or workshop as a self-contained event that provides a complete solution. You will have the same challenge with this book. How are you going to set up a support structure for yourself so that you can implement at least some of the ideas you are learning about? Learning transfer is much more than just knowledge acquisition, and it is much more than just reading this and other books on the subject.

One of the things that seems to stop people designing and delivering their programmes with an emphasis on supporting the trainee to achieve learning transfer is that they don't know where to start. Out of all the things they could be doing, they don't know which ones are important and will have the most impact. Luckily, there is a considerable body of research that can point us in

the right direction. One person who has investigated all the studies, papers and academic articles on learning transfer is Dr Ina Weinbauer-Heidel.

I interviewed Dr Weinbauer-Heidel in April 2018 and this is her story. Eight years earlier, she was designing successful senior leadership programmes for a business school in Austria, and at that time her definition of success was that the courses were well subscribed and generated repeat business. Everything was going well, and then she read a book called *Die Weiterbildungslüge*, by Dr Richard Gris. The book caused quite a stir in the German speaking L&D world as it challenged the status quo with a title that translates roughly as *The Continuing Education Lie*. Dr Weinbauer-Heidel said her first reaction was denial: “How can that book be right when what I am doing here at the business school is successful?”, but the idea of the systemic failure of training to generate acceptable business impact wouldn't go away. Her response was to look at the research and she was surprised to discover that there was so much of it, and that it stretched back over 110 years. Also, despite so much published information, what it didn't seem to have was any unifying or practical solution that would solve the learning transfer issue she now knew existed. At the time she was looking for a project for her PhD and chose to review the literature and find the ‘holy grail’, the ‘secret’ of learning transfer.

Her research over several years identified more than 100 determinants of transfer, and so her project changed from finding the ‘holy grail’, which seemed characteristically elusive, to finding a way to simplify what she had found and make it practical and useable. The simplification process focused on three main areas. One was to remove from the list the transfer determinants that were only mentioned in one study. Another was to remove those that had a low level of correlation with transfer; in other words, they were a factor, but not a significant one. The third was to remove those determinants that could not be controlled or utilised. An example of these is the intelligence of the trainee. The higher the trainee IQ, the more learning transfer occurred, but testing for intelligence before allowing someone onto a training course has some ethical and practical considerations.

She ended up with a list of 12 determinants of learning transfer that are controllable and have a high impact on transfer. She called these the ‘12 Levers of Transfer Effectiveness’, and they give you a roadmap to follow when deciding what support will be required to succeed at enabling learning transfer. She

divided these into the three areas, which have become a de facto standard following the paper *Transfer of Training: A Review and Directions for Future Research*, published by Baldwin and Ford in 1988. The areas are training design, trainee and work environment.

She published her findings and recommendations in a book *Was Trainings wirklich wirksam macht: 12 Stellhebel der Transferwirksamkeit* in December 2016. The book was translated into English in 2018 and is titled *What Makes Training Really Work: 12 Levers of Transfer Effectiveness*.

Dr Weinbauer-Heidel has kindly allowed me to reproduce her summary of the 12 Levers of Transfer Effectiveness here. I would highly recommend her book as companion reading to this one.

THE 12 LEVERS OF TRANSFER EFFECTIVENESS

Dr. Ina Weinbauer-Heidel is CEO of the Institute of Transfer Effectiveness and developer of the 12 Levers of Transfer Effectiveness
www.transfereffectiveness.com

Levers for Trainees

1. Transfer Motivation – Yes, I want it!

Trainees say	“Yes, I want this!”
Definition	Transfer motivation is defined as the desire to implement what has been learned.
Guiding question	How can you ensure that trainees have a strong desire to put into practice what they have learned?

2. Self-Efficacy – Yes, I Can!

Trainees say	“Yes, I can!”
Definition	Self-efficacy describes the extent to which someone is convinced he or she can master acquired skills in practice.
Guiding question	How can you ensure that, after a training, participants will believe in their ability to apply and master the skills they have acquired?

3. Transfer Volition – Achieving Transfer Success with Willpower

Trainees say	“Yes, I’ll stay on the ball and follow through!”
Definition	Transfer volition is trainees’ ability and willingness to dedicate their attention and energy to the implementation of the transfer plan, even when there are obstacles and difficulties.
Guiding question	How can you help trainees to develop the ability and willingness to persistently work on implementing their transfer plan?

Levers for Training Design

4. Clarity of Expectations – Making Goals Transparent

Trainees say	“I know what I’m supposed to learn, and I want to learn it!”
Definition	Clarity of expectations is the extent to which trainees already know, before the training, what they can expect before, during, and after the training.
Guiding question	How can you make sure that trainees know what to expect before the training and what is expected from them as a result of the training?

5. Content Relevance – Learning What is Needed

Trainees say	“The content is practical and relevant to me!”
Definition	Content relevance is the extent to which trainees experience the training content as well-matched with the tasks and requirements of their work.
Guiding question	How do you ensure that trainees perceive the training content as relevant and important for their own day-to-day work?

6. Active Practice – Learning by Doing

Trainees say	“I have already experienced, practised, and tried it during training!”
Definition	Active practice in training is the extent to which training design provides opportunities to experience and practise new behaviours that are desirable in the work context.
Guiding question	How can you ensure that the action that is aspired to in practice is experienced, tried out, and practised as realistically as possible during training?

7. Transfer Planning – Step by Step to Implementation Success

Trainees say	“I know what I am going to do, step by step, after training!”
Definition	Transfer planning describes the extent to which the transfer is prepared in training.
Guiding question	How can you ensure that trainees prepare in detail while still in training to implement what they learn?

Levers for the Organisation

8. Application Opportunities – Everyday Work is Full of Possibilities

Trainees say	“It’s possible for me to apply what I’ve learned to situations in my day-to-day work.”
Definition	Opportunities for application reflect the extent to which the necessary situations and resources for application are available in the workplace.
Guiding question	How can you ensure that participants have the opportunity, permission and assignment, plus the necessary resources to apply what they have learned?

9. Personal Transfer Capacity – We (Don’t) Have the Time

Trainees say	“My working day allows me to take time to apply what I have learned.”
Definition	Personal transfer capacity is the extent to which trainees have the capacity – in terms of time and workload – to successfully apply newly-learned skills.
Guiding question	How can you help ensure that trainees have enough time and capacity to apply what they have learned to their daily work?

10. Support from Supervisor – the Boss and Transfer Success

Trainees say	“My supervisor demands and encourages implementation.”
Definition	Supervisor support is the extent to which trainees’ supervisors actively demand, monitor, support and reinforce transfer.
Guiding question	How can you ensure that supervisors support, promote and demand the application of what trainees have learned?

11. Support from Peers – Other People’s Influence

Trainees say	“My colleagues are backing me on implementing what I have learned.”
Definition	Support from peers is the extent to which colleagues help trainees with transfer.
Guiding question	What can you do to encourage trainees’ colleagues to welcome transfer and support it?

12. Transfer Expectations in the Organisation – Transfer Results as a New Finish Line

Trainees say	“People in the organisation notice when I (don’t) apply what I have learned.”
--------------	---

Definition	Transfer expectations in the organisation are the extent to which trainees expect positive consequences from applying what they've learned or the absence of negative consequences as a result of non-application.
Guiding question	How can you ensure that trainees' application (or not) of what they've learned is urgent, attracts attention in the organisation and has positive (or negative) consequences?

© Dr Ina Weinbauer-Heidel, 2018

Contact: ina.weinbauer-heidel@learning-transfer-at-work.com

Learning transfer is a complex system and Dr Weinbauer-Heidel's work distilling the research has helped us identify the significant levers in the system that we can pull to affect the system. As she says, "The model helps us know where to shine the flashlight". When you are convincing others of the best place to shine the flashlight, they may require evidence rather than an appeal to their common sense. Dr Weinbauer-Heidel's book is a rich source of academic papers and articles that will help you make your case for supporting learning transfer.

It's clear that providing a support scaffold using all 12 significant levers of learning transfer is not a trivial operation and involves more than just the learner and the course facilitator. Dr Weinbauer-Heidel's book focuses on what the facilitator can do and who they can directly influence to contribute to supporting learning transfer. It is a huge toolkit with which every course facilitator should become familiar. It has examples and checklists and a step-by-step approach, and I highly recommend it.

As well as implementing the 12 levers at the facilitator level, I think they can also be implemented at another level that is more strategic, and that means

getting those senior people involved who are not normally within the sphere of influence of the facilitator. You need to be able to connect the senior team's desire for effective execution of the corporate strategy with the fact that employees need to achieve learning transfer to make that execution possible. The vision of what the company can become, and the strategy to achieve it, will require employees to learn both formally and informally, and grow into people who can deliver that vision. If training is part of the learning required, and it's highly probable that it is, then without adequate learning transfer following the training, the strategy will not succeed, and the vision becomes just another dream of things that might have been. No executive wants that on their resume!

The senior team has an influence on the wider organisational culture that is unavailable to the course facilitator. The cultural environment is the context within which learning transfer takes place; the friendlier the culture is to learning transfer, the easier it will be to provide support for it. Another way to think of this is to use our scaffold metaphor. The cultural environment is the foundation on which we base our scaffold; if the foundation is insecure, it will limit the scaffold we can provide. In fact, some cultures are so unfriendly to learning transfer that we could say the foundations for any scaffold we erect are in a swamp, and our attempts to provide a scaffold will be ineffective. If the cultural environment is so inimical to learning transfer, how do we convince the senior team to drain the swamp?

Large-scale cultural change is beyond the scope of this book, but the 12 levers give you a way to define some aspects of the culture that would need to change to support learning transfer. Consider each of the levers in turn, starting with the ones related to your organisation, and look at how the current culture encourages or inhibits the use of that lever, and how you would like the culture to change so the lever is easy to apply. In effect, you are starting to create your own vision of a culture that totally supports learning transfer.

When you talk to the senior team about this they will want data that support your position and explains why you want the changes. You can get what you need from the Towards Maturity reports (www.towardsmaturity.org) and in particular the report *The Transformation Curve*, published in January 2018. It is free to download from their website. Donald H Taylor writes in the report introduction... "Towards Maturity have created something which I believe will be invaluable to the L&D profession – a model of maturity that relates

not only to the use of technology but to everything that L&D departments do on the road from being fulfilment houses of formal training to catalysts supporting an effective organisation. Individuals, as well as organisations, will recognise themselves in the pages of this report. Each one of the four stages described is a recognisable manifestation of how learning and development is approached today – from small to large organisations around the globe. The power of the research is to describe in six dimensions exactly what the stages look like and how to progress through them.”

The report gives you the hard data you need to open effective conversations with business leaders about the imperative to progress towards a mature learning culture. It lays out the journey in stages, with markers for each stage and details how to transition between them. This means you can assess the current stage of learning maturity of your organisation and what the benefits will be of transitioning to higher levels. According to the report, the companies with the highest learning maturity are three times more likely to achieve their business outcomes than those in the lowest quartile. The behaviours and cultural dimensions of those at the top end are exactly what you need to provide a sound foundation for learning transfer. As part of the blueprint for improving learning maturity, the report talks about the growing and changing role of L&D as an organisation grows through the four stages.

I can't do the 40-page report sufficient justice here as a summary, so download it and read it for yourself. You'll be glad you did.