

Bookshelf Ambassadors

Energizing Training Means Better Learning and Transfer of Training

Boring lectures, lack of meaningful content in e-learning, training that doesn't give employees the opportunity to practice and receive feedback—all demotivate trainees and make it difficult for them to learn and use what they learned on the job. However, many companies are using innovative instructional methods to make training more interesting and to help trainees learn and apply it to their work.

At PNC Financial Services Group, PNC University provided web-based training to all its employees to aid in the conversion to a new HR system. The training was customized to the employee role and organization within the company to ensure that it was relevant and meaningful. An online help feature allowed employees to use their preferred method of learning through one of four approaches: "See it!" "Try it!" "Do it!" or "Print it!" "See it!" provided a short instructional video showing how a task is completed. "Try it!" let employees practice entering transactions with coaching, in a simulated version of the system. "Do it!" allowed employees to enter transactions in the live system with a Help coaching tool, going through the task step by step. "Print it!" allowed employees to print step-by-step procedures for completing transactions.

Feedback about a learning program at Mindtree Limited, a global information technology solutions company, suggested that trainees were not transferring learning to the job. The program was redesigned to ensure that employees would learn skills such as analyzing the impact of change and how to successfully integrate, review, and resolve coding problems. The new program includes four phases, each with clear objectives and expected outcomes. Trainees are actively involved in learning through the

use of project simulations in which they work in teams, under the supervision of a more experienced technical employee, to fix defects, address change requests, and implement new features. Trainees are evaluated and provided feedback throughout the program on their analysis, design, coding, and documentation skills, turnaround time, and collaboration skills.

Nemours Foundation, a children's health system, emphasizes family-centered care. Nemours partners with parents and children to help deliver care in both inpatient and outpatient settings, design facilities, educate staff, and develop and evaluate policies and programs. Nemours provides high-quality educational opportunities for associates: continuing medical education for physicians, nurses, and other allied health professionals through internships, residency programs, fellowship training, and graduate medical education. Its pediatric emergency medical skills course for first-year fellows involves role-playing. The role-playing scenarios often involve patient and family interactions. These can be difficult because they can be emotionally complex such as when difficult news must be provided to patients' families. Experienced clinicians observe and mentor the fellows and provide feedback on their communications and interpersonal skills.

Sources: Based on M. Weinstein, "PNC invests in excellence," *training*, January/February 2011: 48–50; "Mindtree Limited," *T+D* (October 2014): 46; "Nemours," *T+D* (October 2013): 41.

INTRODUCTION

Although they use different methods, the purpose of the training at the four companies just described is to help employees learn so they can perform their jobs successfully. Regardless of the training method, certain conditions must be present for learning to occur and employees to use what they learned on their jobs. These include (1) providing opportunities for trainees to practice and receive feedback, i.e., information about how

well people are meeting the training objectives, (2) offering meaningful training content, (3) identifying any prerequisites that trainees need to complete the program successfully, (4) allowing trainees to learn through observation and experience, and (5) ensuring that the work environment, including managers and peers, support learning and use of skills on the job. For example, feedback from trainers and mentors is provided at Mindtree Limited and Nemours. The meaningfulness of what is being learned is enhanced at both Mindtree Limited and Nemours by having learners work in situations (role plays and projects) that are identical to those they may encounter on the job. Recognizing that employees may¹⁵⁸ have preferences regarding how they want to learn, PNC allowed employees to choose how they wanted to learn about the new HR system.

As you may have recognized by now, this chapter emphasizes not only what has to occur during training sessions for learning to occur, but also how to ensure that trainees use what they have learned in their jobs. That is, this chapter discusses both learning and transfer of training. **Learning** refers to a relatively permanent change in human capabilities that can include knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviors, and competencies that are not the result of growth processes.¹ A key part of learning is that trainees commit to memory (i.e., remember) what they have learned and can recall it. **Transfer of training** refers to trainees effectively and continually applying what they have learned in training to their jobs.² As the organizations in the chapter opener illustrate, trainee characteristics, the design of the training program (or what occurs during training), and the work environment influence whether trainees learn and use or apply what they have learned to their jobs. Figure 4.1 presents a model of learning and transfer of training. As the model shows, transfer of training includes both the generalization of training to the job and maintenance of learned material. **Generalization** refers to a trainee's ability to apply what they learned to on-the-job work problems and situations that are similar but not necessarily identical to those problems and situations encountered in the learning environment, i.e., the training program. **Maintenance** refers to the process of trainees

continuing to use what they learned over time.

It is important to realize that for training to be effective, both learning and transfer of training are needed. Trainees can fail or incorrectly apply training content (what was emphasized in training) to their jobs, either because the training was not conducive to learning, the work environment provides them with the opportunity to use training content or supports its correct use, or both. Also, it is a mistake to consider transfer of training as something to be concerned about after training because it deals with the use of training content on the job. Instead, transfer of training should be considered during the design or purchase of training. If you wait until after training to consider transfer of training, it is likely too late. Trainees' perceptions of the work environment and its support for training have likely influenced their motivation to learn and what, if anything, they have learned (recall the discussion of motivation to learn in [Chapter Three](#), "Needs Assessment").

159

This chapter coverage is based on the model shown in Figure 4.1. First, we discuss learning. We begin by identifying what is to be learned—that is, to identify learning outcomes. Learning outcomes should be related to what is required to perform the job successfully. As the chapter opener illustrates, this may include selling products, providing services, working with operating systems, or developing and fixing software. As a student, you are familiar with one type of learning outcome: intellectual skills. We also discuss how trainees' learning style may influence the way they prefer to learn. The influence of other trainee characteristics, such as basic skills, cognitive ability, self-efficacy, age and generation, and interests on motivation to learn and learning, was discussed in [Chapter Three](#).

FIGURE 4.1 A Model of Learning and Transfer of Training

Next, we consider training design. Training design includes consideration of how to create a learning environment to help the trainee acquire the

learning outcomes. We discuss various learning and transfer of training theories. Last, we look at how these theories are used to create a learning environment and supportive work environment designed to help the trainee learn the desired outcomes and apply them on the job.