

Achieving Lasting Change

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Studies show that nearly 90% of workplace change efforts fail to achieve their desired results*. This paper summarizes why this happens and what can be done about it. We believe that there are three main practices that, applied together, dramatically increase retention and performance.

These three practices are:

- 1) Actively engaging employees in the learning process;
- 2) Effectively engaging leaders and change agents who fully understand the change process;
- 3) Providing effective follow-up to support the learning and/or change you seek.

In this paper we explain how and why most training opportunities fail to result in changed behavior and how each of these three practices increase retention and application, and dramatically improve employee performance.

In planning a training/change effort, typically a consultant, in conjunction with management, defines the learning objectives and methods, with limited participant involvement. The majority of training curricula, regardless of the skills they intend to develop in participants use dated educational models based in antiquated learning theory. The leader imparts information, the flow of information passes in one direction from trainer to participant and participants, for the most part, are passive recipients of that information. During the training, participants discuss and practice the concepts presented to enhance their understanding of the information, but they are rarely provided with the necessary tools to integrate that information effectively, or transfer the learning so that it becomes part of their regular practice. It also does not take into account established **adult or adaptive learning principles**. Excluding these principles in the learning design and process of it dramatically reduces the likelihood of retention, and the actual changes in behavior that would reflect integration of the skills into the work environment.

Some core principles of adult learning are important here:

- ◆ Adults need to understand and want to learn. The goals and objectives need to be realistic and important to them, not imposed.
- ◆ Adults want to be the origin of their learning, not just reflective surfaces for the consultant's concepts. They want some control over their learning and are likely to resist learning that, consciously or unconsciously, appears to call into question their competence or that negatively affects their self-image.
- ◆ Adults want concrete experiences that they can apply in their daily lives. Theoretical constructs, at least in the workplace, have limited value.
- ◆ Learning is reinforced through shared experience and actually occurs over time through practice and self-reflection. Therefore training needs to allow for interaction with others in a safe environment where people can receive feedback and support.
- ◆ Learning has to take into account an individual's past experiences, so that it can when pertinent, be woven into their sense of reality/self-identity.
- ◆ Learning does not just happen; it needs to be effectively facilitated for optimal results.

These principles underscore the fact that in order to retain and apply new learning, training needs to do more than provide participants with access to information and opportunities to practice. First, learning needs to be subjective and personal. By this we mean that what is commonly referred to in academic educational jargon as the *affective* level needs to be engaged. Most education and training organizations neglect that more than the intellect needs engagement for true learning to take place.

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In addition, the way the participant defines a problem effects how effectively he/she integrates the information and, therefore, the degree of successful behavioral change that takes place. This is where **adaptive learning principles** play a critical role. Adaptive learning analysis involves determining whether problems are technical or adaptive challenges, or a hybrid of the two. Technical problems can be solved through the application of authoritative expertise. In cases such as these, the older contemporary educational models we mentioned earlier are adequate for learning to take place. Adaptive challenges, however, require a change in mindset, a change in how we define ourselves in order for change to take place. Often learning a new skill (technical), applying a new process or communicating information differently does not yield the desired result. This is because the *problem* has not actually been clearly defined. Often the problem is, in fact, adaptive in nature or, at the very least, could be termed a hybrid of a technical and adaptive challenge.

The following are examples of adaptive problems, which required more than “skills training” or any other kind of technical solution. One demonstrates an individual within an adaptive change process, the other an organization’s culture.

Example #1

Company A wanted to create a more collaborative culture that increased employee involvement and responsibility. Employees were taught leadership and coaching skills with immediate positive results, however the process failed when the general manager, who initially championed the change effort became moody and aggressive, compromising the change effort. What emerged in his coaching sessions was that he liked being the hero, the ‘go to guy’ to get things done. He was also preparing to retire and wanted to go out with a big “win”. But creating a collaborative culture where employees were involved in finding solutions meant forfeiting his previously self-perceived role. He did not initially perceive his behavior as unsupportive to the change effort. Often when people are promoted from ‘the ranks’ due to their technical skills they then need to change/reassess their role and their identity significantly, as their success depends on their capacity to develop and inspire others. They need to reassess their self-image and their view of themselves to be in alignment with the desired change.

Example#2

Often organizational cultures can inhibit successful change efforts. Mission and value statements look nice on the wall or on a corporate website, but often are not reflected in the day-to-day reality of the organization’s culture. For example, many organizations promote and espouse the advantages of teamwork and innovative leadership, but are highly risk adverse. People watch their backs so as to not be blamed or scape-goated. Information is often controlled giving an illusion of power. There have even been stories in the news of employee cell phones being tapped and emails read. This is an example of - ‘Actions speak louder than words.’ Is it any surprise why most organizational change efforts fail? Just stating values of integrity and openness isn’t enough.

In both these examples a broader more adaptive approach is needed. Powerful factors, personal perceptions and organizational culture needs to be addressed in order to successfully achieve the desired results. People naturally take on behaviors that protect them. Some are external adaptations based in current reality. Some result from past conditions, which often no longer serve us. Until we can develop awareness and make these part of the change/learning process then they will hinder success.

The third factor to increase retention is follow up. Learning and change happen over time, not in reading a book or attending a workshop. People need time to integrate and practice what they have learned. In a performance group or on a sports team, over 90% of the participant’s

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time is spent practicing - standardizing their routines or processes, identifying roles and responsibilities, improving communication effectiveness, working on their coordination, alignment or teamwork. They learn from mistakes until they are ready to perform for the audience or fans. In the corporate world, less than 5% of an individual's time is devoted to this kind of "off-line" learning. In fact, nearly all the learning in organizations happens after the fact and in front of customers, where mistakes are costly to an organization's reputation, bottom line and the individuals' career development. In today's organizational environment, it is not the norm for teams and individuals to take the same time which athletes, performers and teams do to practice their skills and improve their weaknesses.

Often what happens at workshops and retreats stands alone. Action plans get made, but not refinement of the plan. The conditions that helped create the learning in the workshops and at retreats are not mirrored back in the organization. As pointed out above, people are often left to perform on their own in an environment which is often less supportive than the one in which they learned. They are caught up in daily routines, both internal and external, that don't allow time to reflect and practice what made so much sense off site.

The good news is that there are solutions that address all these factors. The way to satisfy the requirements of adult learning is a blend of philosophical and experiential methods. Rather than just giving people information you need to involve them in the learning process. Learning like everything we do is personal. For learning to be effective, it must fully engage people at multiple levels of consciousness - mentally, physically and emotionally. If the learning involves working with others, as it does in leadership and team development, then the learning also needs to involve interacting and applying the concepts within a group environment. To some this may sound like a lot of extra work. But if you take the time to deliberately design the learning process to fully engage people and directly involve them, then the learning objectives have a far greater likelihood of being met... What takes a lot of time is compensating for the 90% of training that doesn't get used, along with the resulting resistance, frustration, loss of productivity and mixed cultural messages that get sent.

By including participants in the learning process you engage them. When people are engaged, they are paying attention, asking questions and contributing. This is how you know whether you're getting across to them, more than whether you complete your agenda, or they do well on your tests. What I'm talking about here is what is commonly called Experiential Based Training or Active Learning. These methods give the group a deeper experience, individually and collectively, of understanding and applying the concepts. After all, it is from experience that wisdom is obtained.

To fully address the problems we mentioned earlier we have developed the ARCTIC™ model, a precise sequential debriefing and learning model that integrates the three factors needed for success. It can be used before or after content with any training. After the Activity, which is used to highlight content the group Reflects specifically on what worked, what didn't, ... The method of debriefing uses the principles of Coaching, in that the facilitator guides the group to discover their learning, individually and collectively. The next step in the process guides the group to Transfer the learning to their work environment by finding correlations between their work behaviors and interactions that serve or don't serve them. After the Transfer comes the Integration phase, where the group can explore how to apply their learning to their work. It is in this phase that Coaching is most productive. The whole process helps the group not only practice 'content,' but helps them become aware of the often hidden factors, personally, as a group or externally in the organization or environment that support or don't support the desired behaviors or change.

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There is an activity we often use with groups exploring team dynamics where they are given a task to accomplish and ask them to agree on a goal for how fast they will accomplish it. By the end of the activity groups typically increase their speed a thousand fold. During the debrief process, we ask the group to examine the characteristics that helped or hindered their success from both a leadership and a team dynamic perspective. They are then asked to reflect on where these characteristics show up in their 'normal' work interactions and how they can change how they work together. This simple activity, approximately fifteen minutes in length accomplishes several things:

- It creates an inclusive environment where people are engaged, applying and contributing to the learning on both a personal and team level.
- They have a group experience, where they see the results of behaviors, assumptions, attitudes and beliefs on results. This gives them a common foundation on which to build.
- They are able to see how their behaviors aid or hinder their work environment and are then able to design systems to support positive change.

Another aspect of the experiential method we have developed is related to the proper definition or context from which to approach a problem. That is, most aspects of leadership and team development are adaptive in nature, in that they require a change in the mindset of those involved. As we all know telling someone the solution in not as nearly as effective as helping them discover the solution themselves. Our ARCTIC model helps people experience concepts and discover their own behavioral patterns (mindsets) in regard to the material.

In another activity we indirectly explore people's reluctance to work interdependently and ask for help. Even though the solution is readily apparent after the activity is completed, it is people's 'inherent' patterns and assumptions that keep them from finding it. People's experience with the activity opens them to exploring their own (often unconscious) beliefs about working together. While most people readily agree that working together in a supportive fashion yields superior results, their behavior often fails to reflect that knowledge. Part of the reason can be due to an organizations culture, but often has its roots in our individual personal history's and self-concept. Some of the common realizations people discover about what has kept them from working well with others is that asking for help is typically seen as a sign of weakness or incompetence. This goes deeper and points to our inherent fear of rejection and self-worth. From a leaders perspective it can go farther and threaten his/her often unconscious and unspoken as attachment to the idea that as a manager or leader they need to appear competent and knowledgeable. To need others' assistance is to be vulnerable and weak.

Through all this, participants experience leadership and team development dynamics with those they work with. They not only have a personal experience together, but a group experience upon which to draw.

Coaching is used in the follow up process to cement the learning and change in behavior. Often an experience by itself is not enough to bring about lasting change. Our patterns, personally and organizationally are strong and do not disappear because we develop a new insight. Coaching holds a unique high ground for leaders and the team. A coach helps us to stay aware and at choice of all the ways our patterns assert themselves.

We have a philosophy of how we work with clients that yields proven results. While we are experts in leadership and team development processes, our expertise is in involving participants in their learning so the insights they carry forth are their own. With the support of coaching, which deepens the experience; insights are integrated, applied and retained. In our

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work with managers and teams we apply the above concepts so that they are at the center of, and therefore, take responsibility for their own improvement.

In many ways organizations are families and communities with their own unique personalities and needs. They are always developing, growing and changing. They are not designed to be static. The methods that the team at the Next Level, uses understands and honors the individual as a key member in achieving organizational goals. We also have developed and implement processes in very diverse and dynamic environments whereby change is achieved and sustainable.