

RESEARCH-TO-PRACTICE WHITEPAPER SERIES

INTRODUCTION

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Improving Learning Transfer in Organizational Training: Research-to-Practice Strategies

As a part of the LTS effort to revolutionize learning transfer in organizations we are introducing a series of “white papers”. The purpose of the white papers is to promote and improve learning transfer in organizational training by advancing evidence-based strategies and practice. It is anticipated that a broad spectrum of issues will be considered in these white papers ranging from training design factors to work environment and other factors relevant to fostering learning transfer.

We are motivated in this effort by what appears to be a faulty research-to-practice linkage in the training and development/human resource development (T&D/HRD) fields. Studies have shown that research is not being accessed and used by T&D/HRD practitioners because it is neither problem based nor useful to the day-to-day problems they face (Hutchins & Burke, 2007). Our goal for these white papers is to reach into scholarly research and literature for information that addresses real problems related to learning transfer, interpret that information in ways practitioners can use in their work and decision making and, in so doing,

promote evidence-based practice as it relates to training and learning transfer in organizations. In short, the goal is to translate the juicy bits of research into understandable, evidence-based solutions that can be readily applied in practice. Therefore the white papers will not provide a comprehensive, integrated literature review of focal topics. Rather, the intent is to summarize and report consistent research findings and to suggest practical, plain-language, evidence-based strategies and guidelines that have the potential for improving learning transfer. It is hoped that the white papers will offer organizational training practitioners with new, usable guidelines, strategies or tools to better design training for transfer and improve workplace conditions to facilitate learning transfer.

We recognize this is a lofty and perhaps risky goal and that there are potential pitfalls to this kind of effort. One is the possibility of “over-cooking” or trying to summarize too many diverse research findings and studies into a digestible capsule. A related issue is the potential for trivializing the findings of complex empirical studies. To address these issues, an effort will be made to provide a sound, logical

rationale for each guideline or suggestion that is offered.

Also, the white papers are intended to serve as guides and grist for thinking about how to improve learning transfer rather than as prescriptions to be followed strictly. The hope is that the strategies offered are solutions to everyday transfer problems based on the best available evidence. The goal is to try to make the best of theory and research accessible to practitioners and, where needed, to decipher complex jargon and describe solutions in terms that are straight-forward and concrete enough so that practitioners can apply them in developing or modifying their own transfer-related practice.

At the same time, the intent is not to detail fully everything there is to know or do, nor to guarantee success in all situations. Some problem solving and adaptation will almost always be needed. As environments, programs, audiences, and purposes of training vary, there will always be a need to adapt the guidelines and solutions to particular situations, to incorporate other, new ideas, and disregard some of the suggestions. For this reason, the white papers will be oriented to principles and heuristics rather than to norms, standards, criteria, rules, or prescriptions. If and when there are holes in the research, efforts will be made to point them out. But again the purpose of these white papers is not to introduce practitioners to things they already know and use but to introduce new, potentially more effective tools. So while there is no guarantee that everything will work in every situation there is the possibility that the strategies will provide more effective solutions to the

everyday transfer problems facing T&D/HRD practitioners today.

One of the biggest challenges facing trainers concerned with learning transfer is preparing learners for what is called “adaptive” transfer. Adaptive transfer is when learners are faced with applying the KSAs acquired in training to tasks that go beyond and are often substantially different from the tasks and applications covered during training. These “far transfer” tasks contrast with “near” or “analogical” transfer tasks (transfer tasks similar to those taught in training). Adaptive transfer has become increasingly important because of dynamic

Hutchins, H. M., & Burke, L. A. (2007). Identifying trainers' knowledge of training transfer research findings – closing the gap between research and practice. *International Journal of Training & Development*, 11(4), 236-264.