

A new approach to training and development

Much of the issue with traditional style training events is that, no matter the quality of the input, content and delivery, a large percentage of that learning gets lost¹. In other words, it doesn't get transferred into real world practice. And if this is case, then CPD delivered through traditional style 'events' becomes a very expensive and inefficient way of developing staff knowledge and skills.

A new approach – ENGAGE; PARTICIPATE; ACTIVATE²

For learning to be effective it needs to be acquired and used. This happens most effectively when learners believe that the learning is of relevance to them, will support them in their current role/position, and there will be opportunities to practise (embed) the new knowledge and skills acquired³. Further, that this learning is valued by the context and organisation in which they function.

This approach focuses not only on helping people to learn but also on helping them apply this learning in the real world. There is also an emphasis on including managers, senior leaders, peers and colleagues too so that supportive social networks exist that can enhance learning transfer.

- **ENGAGE:** learners who are psychologically engaged, because they can see the value and relevance of the learning, are much more likely to take in the learning and apply it.
 - *Engagement is an essential factor in learning, without which there is no deep learning⁴, effective teaching, meaningful outcome, real attainment or quality progress.*
- **PARTICIPATE:** delivery of content in a meaningful way so that participants can get an immediate sense of how it would make a difference to their practice. And further, participants can help shape the content through their engagement with it.
- **ACTIVATE:** the important bit – transferring learning into practice. This requires not only individual motivation to do so but the context to be supportive too. Setting clear goals; establishing collaborative feedback teams; supportive managers; observations of practice all contribute to and enhance the possibility of successful learning transfer.

¹ Brinkerhoff, R. O., Apking, A. M. (2001). *High impact learning: Strategies for leveraging business results from training*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus.

² Bailey, S. (2012) Maximising Transfer of Learning in Organisations.

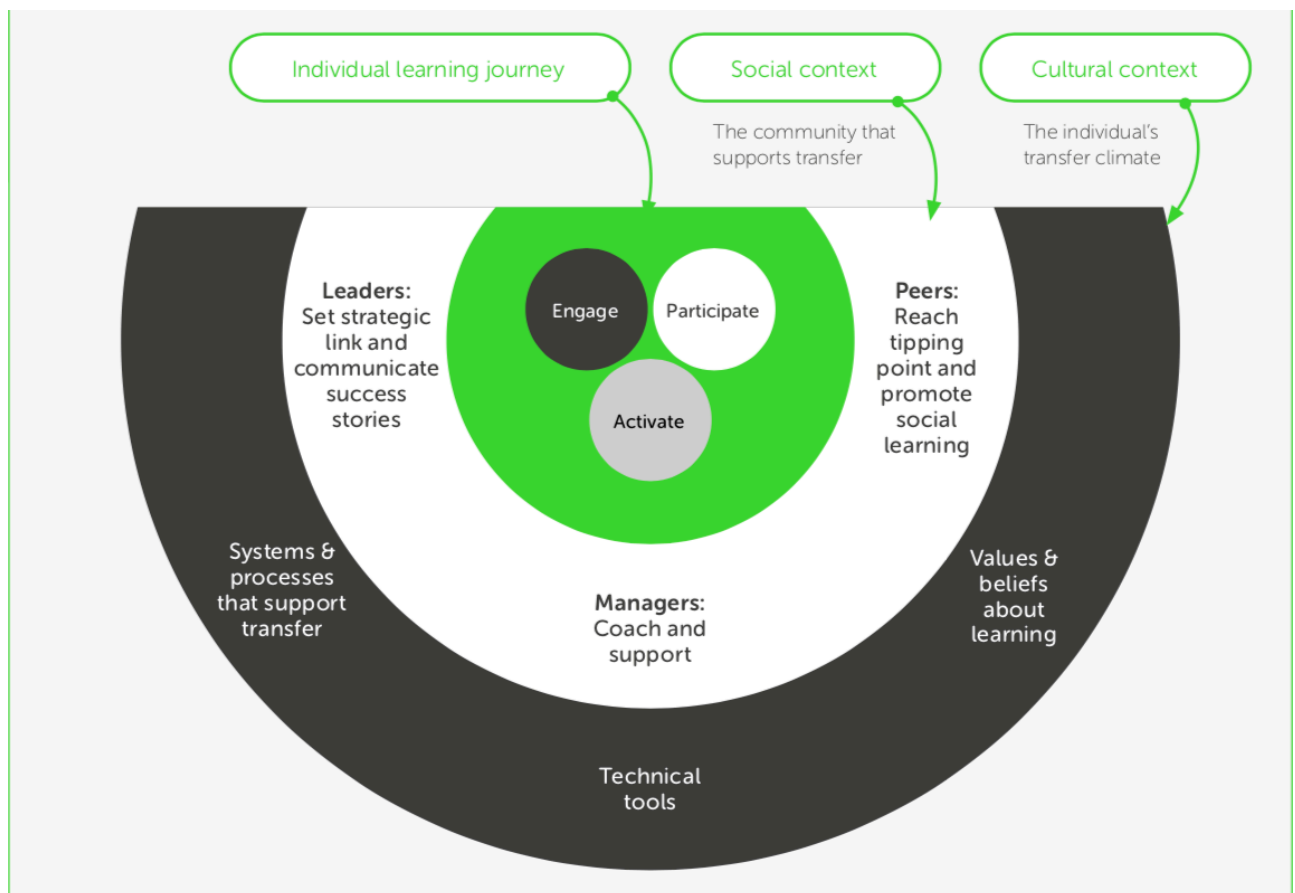
³ McLeod, S. A. (2013). *Kolb - Learning Styles*. Retrieved from www.simplypsychology.org/learning-kolb.html

⁴ Hargreaves, D. (2004) *Learning for life: the foundations for lifelong learning*, Policy Press.

Making learning stick!

Two key components: the individual's learning experience and the social and cultural context in which the learning and application, thereof, takes place. See illustrative figures below.

Figure 1⁵. Social and Cultural Context



To make learning stick, there needs to be active engagement from not just learners, but peers, colleagues; and senior leaders.

Senior leaders: adopt a supportive, non-judgemental role. They provide encouragement and help participants to identify opportunities to use their new skills. Simply being interested and supportive helps: research found that the perception that managers support learning has a greater impact on transfer than individuals' personal motivation.

Peers: if those around you are practising and getting better you are much more likely to

⁵ Mindgym publication, *The Bite-sized Revolution: making learning stick*. Retrieved from www.themindgym.com/resources

join them – social learning theory in action! So, peer support has a direct impact on people putting their learning into action.

Senior leadership team and head-teacher: making and communicating clear links between the learning and its overall impact at an organisational level helps to promote a sense of purpose: answers the *'why are we doing this?'* question.

Cultural context also important: attitudes towards learning, systems and policies that support learning and transfer are key to promoting learning and engagement. In these cultures, staff believe that learning is essential to them and their work. In other words, it can have a direct impact on their effectiveness at an individual and organisation level.

Figure 2. Engage – Participate – Activate cycle of learning

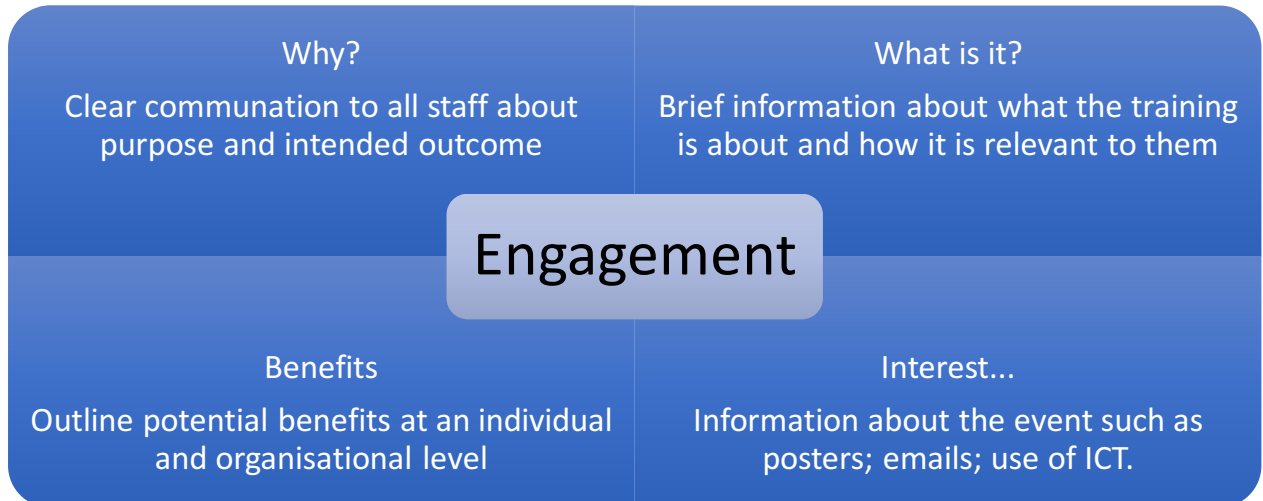


This is a continuous learning cycle reflective of the notion that learning is a continuous activity. From research conducted by David Kolb⁶ into adult learning, we know that adults like to be self-directed and learn best when a learning experience relates to goals that matter to them⁷.

⁶ McLeod, S. A. (2013). *Kolb - Learning Styles*. Retrieved from www.simplypsychology.org/learning-kolb.html

⁷ Adams, M (2016). *Coaching Psychology in Schools: Enhancing Performance, Development and Wellbeing*. Routledge

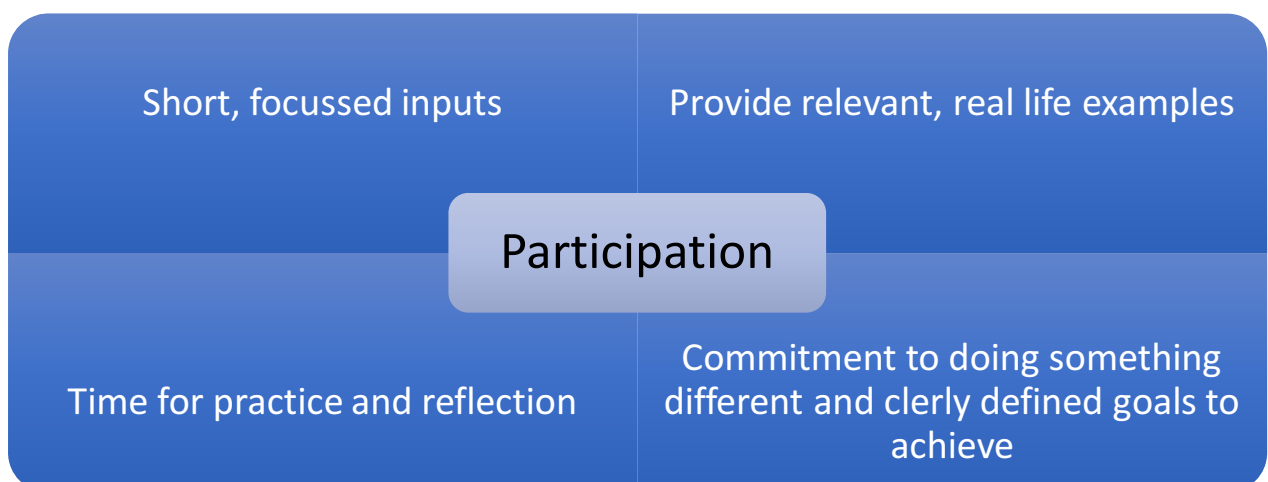
ENGAGEMENT



Engagement is not only about getting people interested in the training but ensuring that engagement is sustained as this will drive continuous learning.

- Ensure learning remains relevant to the individual
- Provision of feedback to support development: adopting a coaching style is particularly valuable and effective in supporting this.
- Keep people invested by providing space for the learning to be applied.
- Focus on skill *mastery* rather than performance: as such the type of feedback given and how it is given is crucial. A coaching approach is very helpful here.
- Use of 'stories' (in effect, case studies of success) help create emotional engagement and motivation and so in turn drive continuous engagement.

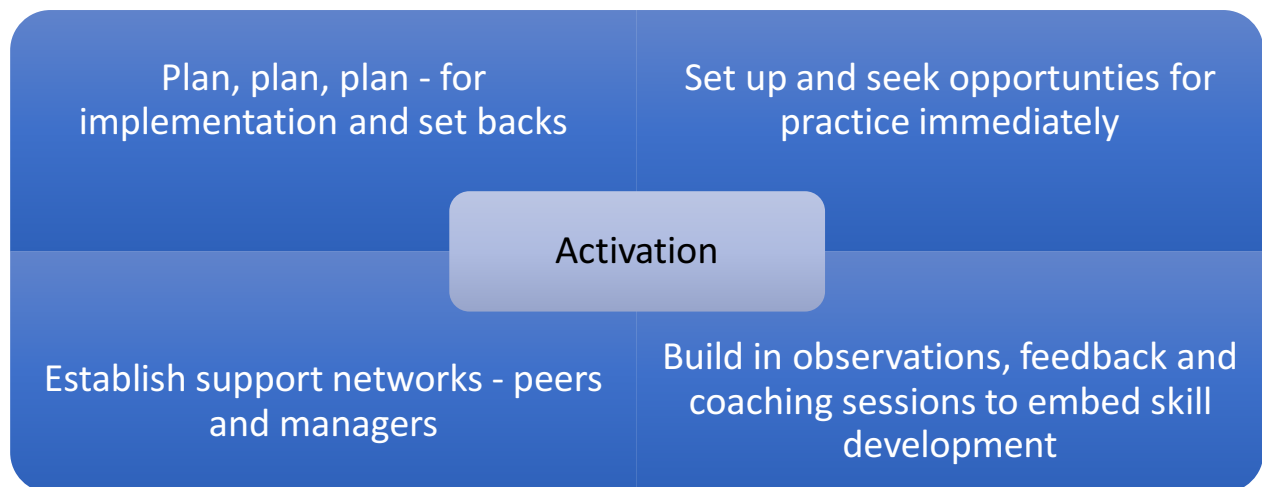
PARTICIPATION



Deepening participation by providing time and space for new material to be absorbed, reflected upon and tried out.

- In order for the learning to stick people need to know and see how it can be useful to them ‘tomorrow.’ Thus, time needs to be given to allow for real-life scenarios to be thought through where new knowledge can be applied.
- A commitment to do something different is enhanced if made ‘public.’ Asking learners to anticipate how and when they will use their learning and make a commitment that’s real to them greatly increases the chances that learning into will be put into action⁸. In short, when people commit to doing something in front of peers, they’re much more driven to achieve it.
- Sessions that last between 90 – 180 minutes are maximally effective as they advantage of people’s natural attention spans and ability to acquire new knowledge, thus enhancing the chances for both retention and transfer of newly learned material.

ACTIVATION



Managers and senior staff have a key role here in ensuring that systems are established that allow for continuous skill development.

- It is helpful at this point to link back to the purpose of the training in the first place, at both an individual and organisational level.
- It will also be helpful to set up opportunities for feedback back success stories. For example, use of time during staff meetings to hear and reflect on how well things are going.

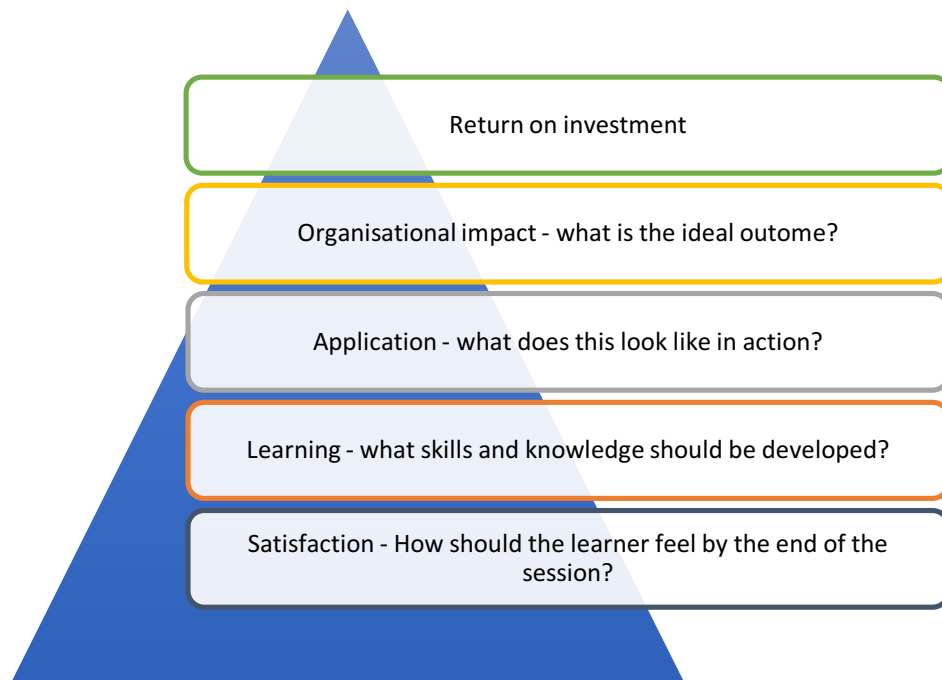
⁸ Fishbach, A., Henderson, M. D., Koo, M. (2011). Pursuing goals with others: Group identification and motivation resulting from things done versus things left undone. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 140(3), 520.

- Ensure practice in terms of the skill targeted is built into day-to-day routines and not seen as something additional or extra.
- Establish a system of 'after-action' reviews. Reviewing recent learning through structured reflection leads to increased sense of competence⁹.
- Further, set a date and time for a review as a whole team and smaller teams, approximately 3-6 weeks after initial training. Such sessions encourage peer support and can enhance skill transfer. Also, knowing that a review is coming up motivates people to attempt the skill in the first place.
- Recognise and acknowledge early and successful adopters of the new approach/skill and appoint them as *champions*.

How will we know if this training has made a difference? Developing an understanding of the impact of training

This is important as it recognises that there is not only a financial investment but also 'human' investment in this activity. So, it is imperative that there is clearly defined outcome, applicable at an individual and organisational level. The following figure helps us understand how we can understand impact.

Figure 3¹⁰. Desired impact of training at different levels



⁹ DeRue, D. Scott; Nahrgang, Jennifer D.; Hollenbeck, John R.; Workman, Kristina (2012). A Quasi-Experimental Study of After-Event Reviews and Leadership Development. *Journal of Applied Psychology*.

¹⁰ Phillips, J. (2003). *Return on Investment in Training and Performance Improvement Programmes*, (2nd ed.) Woburn, MA: Butterworth-Heinemann.

In terms of designing training, it is a helpful starting point to think about the above. Whilst not easy to calculate the return on investment (how much 'performance' gain might we expect from 'X' level of financial investment), this can be calculated post training as an evaluative measure. However, time spent considering answers to the other questions will be important in terms of designed training and supporting an evaluation of impact.

Let's take a look at an example.

The Challenge: a school is facing a difficulty with behaviour of pupils at break and lunchtimes, which can negatively impact on children's engagement in learning when returning to the classroom.

The Solution: whole staff training on an approach to support children's emotional regulation – emotion coaching, plus clearly defined policies and procedures that are consistently adhered to.

- **Organisational impact:** all staff consistently apply the approach and agreed policies leading to reduced numbers of incidents in the playground and reduced number of incidents requiring teacher intervention when children return to class. This will translate into more positive playtime experiences for both adults and children and quicker engagement in learning when returning to class.
- **Application:** all staff can be seen and heard to use emotion coaching 'scripts' with a transfer of this skill extending into class room use. Staff at all levels and visitors to the school can notice this language and, consequently, observe more settled playtimes.
- **What skills and knowledge should be developed?** Staff will have developed their emotional awareness and knowledge of emotional development, in addition to being able to confidently apply this new skill (of using emotion coaching scripts) in real-life situations.
- **Satisfaction:** it is hoped that participants will feel that the session has direct meaning and relevance to them in their role leading to an increase in *confidence* and *motivation* to tackle the issue at hand. And further that they will feel supported in their role to practise and develop this new skill.

SUMMARY

There is clear recognition that 'investing' in staff is key for myriad reasons. Benefits are reaped at an individual and organisational level. Indeed, there is very strong argument to be made that supporting an individual's sense of competence (e.g. skill development and practice thereof) enhances emotional wellbeing and self-esteem (based on findings from

self-determination theory¹¹): which leads to increased life satisfaction and greater resilience. The challenge, especially for school leaders, is to ensure that such training produces such these benefits, given the financial and human investment involved.

Following the principles of the models outlined above enhances the possibility that such benefits are reaped. These models are based on well research and validated psychological theories and approaches relating to learning and are proven to be effective if consistently applied.

In conclusion, learning that is relevant, activates interest, is aligned to individual and organisational goals and takes place within a positive learning culture is more likely to stick and provide value for money.

¹¹ Ryan, R.M., & Deci, E.L. (2000). *Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development and Wellbeing*, American Psychologist, 55 (1), pg. 68-78.