

Transfer of Training and Adult Learning (TOTAL)

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Social work training frequently fails to enhance job performance because it is not viewed as a collaborative process involving factors that affect the social worker before, during, and after training. This article explores the variables that affect transfer of knowledge and introduces a model to assess and intervene in the learning and transfer process. By assessing the forces that promote or inhibit transfer, social work trainers can provide direction for transfer intervention and help transform training into effective social work performance.

Transfer of training and adult learning refers to the application of learning, knowledge, skills, and attitudes acquired in a training setting to the job. Seldom do providers of social work training evaluate the amount of knowledge transferred through training. There seems to be an implicit assumption that training is valuable, yet evaluations of training rarely go beyond the typical "reaction/satisfaction" questions that participants complete at the end of training sessions.

Although the human service sector has not emphasized transfer, much has been learned from training in the private sector and from the fields of educational psychology, organizational psychology, and instructional design. This article integrates information from the aforementioned fields with our child welfare training and evaluation experiences at the Northeast Ohio Regional Training Center and Summit County Children Services Board. It explores the variables that affect the transfer of learning to child welfare social workers and introduces readers to a basic, yet comprehensive model of transfer assessment and intervention.

Factors That Affect Transfer

Application of social work training in child welfare agency settings involves numerous factors. By identifying key transfer elements, however, social workers can devise training interventions that can have a positive impact on complex and often confusing child welfare situations. Baldwin et al. (1988) found three major transfer components: trainee characteristics, training design, and the trainee environment.

Individual trainee characteristics include skill and motivation level, ability to learn and apply knowledge, learning styles, personality factors (attitudes and values), level of education, age, life experiences, degree of burnout, and training expectations. A transfer-oriented training design must consider both these characteristics and the trainee environment.

The trainee's environment includes the degree of support or interference the supervisor shows toward learning, coworkers, technology, training, personnel, and administrators. The organization's leaders and the behavior they exhibit can influence what knowledge is transferred, and what stays in the classroom. The value placed on training by the organization conveys strong messages about how seriously employees view training, and whether knowledge transfer is enhanced or impeded. The importance of training is communicated in many ways, such as the physical location of the training department and who is hired as the training director.

Time is another important transfer element. Due to time constraints, the priority level given to training and transfer efforts often is lower than direct client service delivery efforts, or other mandated activities with strict timelines. For example, when court summaries are due by the end of the workday, it is difficult to maintain worker attention during training.

The opportunities workers have to apply newly learned skills represent another critical factor affected by time. Unless workers can use new skills in a timely manner, learning often is lost. Time elements, therefore, must be a prime consideration in designing training.

An assessment of an organization's environmental factors can be enhanced by examining the agency's goals, roles, rules and interpersonal expectations. Individual, team, department, and agency goals influence the relevance and value given to training and knowledge application. Clarifying these goals, as well as the organization's overall goals, can lay the foundation and provide direction for transfer interventions. Conversely, transfer failure often can be traced to a lack of clarity in the organization and its subdivisions' training goals, roles, and rules.

Transfer can be promoted or impeded by assigning individual roles within the organization to handle specific training and transfer responsibilities. Placing supervisors or coworkers in the role of "transfer coach" can underscore the importance of applying learning in the workplace. Once training goals are established, transfer potential can be enhanced by clarifying these roles.

Formal and informal agency rules regarding training and transfer also help to clarify and solidify transfer responsibilities. For example, rules requiring trainees to provide post-workshop reports to teammates or attend "booster shot" training reviews can help to routinize the application of learning.

When transfer goals, roles, and rules are clear and understandable, one of the positive side effects can be the promotion of interpersonal behavior to encourage active participation in

the learning and transfer process. When participants feel mutual respect and trust, they will be more likely to take appropriate risks to enhance their self-awareness, motivation, and skill development in the classroom and at work.

The child welfare social worker's "work space" extends beyond the agency setting to client homes and neighborhoods, and to juvenile and domestic courts, school systems, and other agency settings. Each of these systems maintains its own set of goals, roles, rules, and expectations of interpersonal behavior. The training design must consider interventions that can be effective in these multiple environments.

Training Design and Needs Assessment

The training design includes factors such as training content, principles of learning, and sequencing of training activities (Baldwin et al. 1988). Parker's training cycle (Ulshak 1983) provides a useful model for viewing the training design, it consists of the following sequence: conduct needs assessment, develop training objectives, design curriculum, design/select training methods, design evaluation approach, conduct training, and measure results.

Transfer considerations need to be integrated into all phases of the cycle. The needs assessment stage must tie training to social work performance. An important step in the cycle is to identify social worker competencies that lead to successful performance. Several states, including Ohio, Oklahoma, and Pennsylvania, use competency-based needs assessments in their child welfare training programs. Recently, states have placed much emphasis on identifying essential competencies for child welfare caseworkers and how competency-based standardized training is developed (Hughes et al. 1989).

Using multiple methods to assess needs can ensure that training is properly targeted. Agencies routinely collect needs assessment information, such as critical incident reports, state monitoring findings, turnover rates, and exit interviews. However, this information seldom is systematically reviewed for its needs assessment value. These questionnaires and interviews can help to determine essential training competencies. When training need is indicated by more than one assessment method, there is a greater chance that training can have an impact in the workplace.

Identifying the barriers and facilitators to transfer should be a routine process that occurs during the needs assessment stage. A comprehensive approach would assess individual trainee characteristics and the trainee's environment. Examining trainee characteristics, such as skill and motivation levels, can help provide early information to determine when training can aid in solving a performance problem (Stewart 1986).

Social workers who show limited skill, but high motivation to learn a particular competency, are probably appropriate for training and application: it is easier to teach and reinforce applications if the worker is highly motivated. If motivation is low, however, training may not be a solution, and other performance solutions may be more effective. Training is more appropriate where there is a skill deficiency, rather than a lack of execution (Mager 1970). Workers who possess both high skill and high motivation levels need to be reinforced for their efforts, too. These workers may be good candidates to facilitate transfer by coaching less skilled workers.

Workers with high competency and low motivation levels may not be performing up to par, possibly due to the presence of performance barriers unrelated to training. In these cases, self-awareness and stress management training may be more appropriate. Other needs assessment implications that go beyond the scope of this article may be ascertained through a grid analysis of these two transfer factors. The authors hypothesize that workers who, before training, exhibit little skill but very high motivation to master a certain competency, are most likely to derive optimal transfer, given equal environmental forces and opportunity to apply. A certain level of familiarity or competence, combined with very high motivation, facilitates transfer. Some degree of competence may alleviate anxiety and also give workers a knowledge base to relate to the training.

"Transfer thinking" requires redefining the needs assessment process. Factors to be measured should include the worker's environment--the work team, department, and other systems--and the worker's opportunities to use new skills, along with individual trainee factors such as skill and motivation levels and learning style. A transfer approach suggests the need for involvement of various key players in the needs assessment process.

Designing Transfer Objectives and Interventions

The objective development stage must emphasize retention and application of newly learned skills within the social worker's multiple environments. Learning new skills is not enough. Performance objectives also should be devised in the needs assessment stage. The curriculum, methods, implementation, and evaluation must emanate from these objectives. To devise transfer-oriented objectives, it is necessary to form a transfer design that involves intervention efforts before, during, and after the training session (Beauding 1987).

Intervention methods for before, during, and after the training should be included when designing, and developing, a TOTAL (Transfer of Training and Adult Learning) model. One mistake commonly made by training personnel is to provide too much information in a training session, compared to the number of interventions undertaken before and after a training session. In these situations, the amount of time, effort, and money invested in the

"before" and "after" stages needs to increase, in relation to the investment made in the workshop session itself.

Methods also should take into consideration participants' learning styles, possibly through using learning style assessment inventories (Kolb 1979: Gordon 1990). While integrating individual learning style approaches into group training can be difficult, different learning styles can be accommodated through a variety of methods. McCarthy (1985) suggests using an eight-step approach that integrates Kolb's learning style approach with right- and left-brain techniques. Individual learning styles should be considered for each of the "before," "during," and "after" workshop stages.

Applying learning style methods to learning on the job appears to be a promising approach. Although supervisors seldom consider this educational function part of their supervisory role, they should recognize that everyone does not learn in the same manner (or in the manner by which the supervisor learns). Recognizing learning style differences between workers, and between supervisors and trainees, can help to facilitate the learning and transfer process. Effective trainers are able to recognize learning differences, and to develop training approaches that emphasize a variety of methods. In this way, they can tap into predominant learning styles and help workers to use their less developed learning patterns. However, the use of learning-style approaches for "on the job training" is much less developed.

Figure 1 illustrates an approach that combines the methods stage with the objectives stage. There are three general goals in social worker development-increasing skills, self-awareness, and motivation-and four common ways to learn--thinking, feeling, doing, and environmental changes. Combining learning goals and learning methods can suggest training and transfer approaches. Traditional training approaches often overemphasize cognitive strategies to increase social worker skills. However, learning retention and transfer is increased when the affective, behavioral, and environmental methods are implemented to expand the boundaries of the training environment.

Figure 1: Goals and Strategies for Social Worker Development

	<u>Self-Awareness</u>	<u>Knowledge & Skills</u>	<u>Motivation</u>
Cognitive	Information on adult development. Information on use of authority.	Information on case management techniques.	Information on goal setting and career development.
Affective	Guided imagery; evoking feelings to explore self.	Simulating feeling situations through role play.	Positive professional identity "pep talks".
Behavioral	Completing a learning style inventory.	Rehearsal of skills.	Mutual goal setting and creation of an action plan.
Environmental	Placing social workers in new roles (e.g. substitute team leader).	Review of training in team meeting. Signs as reminders. Coaching.	Job rotation. Removing barriers and reinforcing new skills.

Adapted from *Developing and Training Human Resources in Organizations*, by N. Wexley and Gary P. Latham, Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman and Company (p. 7).

When training is conducted, the "methods design" is implemented. Again, training should be viewed as a series of interventions that occur before, during, and after the formal workshop. The timing of training interventions is a critical variable. The rationale for training can be provided by looking at when social workers should be trained. According to O'Connor (1988), there are certain critical types of training and times for training:

- *Initial* - Upon entering the job; orientation, preservice, and early core training.
- *Remedial* -- To overcome poor performance or when performance is less than desired, if caused by a skill deficiency rather than worker execution.
- *Job changes* -- When tasks are added to a job. Political, legal, and other societal changes continue to alter the job duties of the child welfare worker.
- *Skill renewal* -- To refresh seldom-used skills (e.g., when skills for investigating abuse are "rusty," following years of specialization in a non-investigative role).
- *Developmental* -- When preparing for new responsibilities. Our profession needs to do a better job of identifying the developmental training needs of social workers throughout their careers. Several developmental models are available that could be adapted for training interventions in child welfare settings (Taibbi 1990; Drews et al. undated; Schmidt 1973).

Conducting training at the appropriate time is a critical task. The relevance of the training to the work situation, a crucial factor, often is influenced by the timing of a training intervention.

Designing Evaluations and Measuring Results

One useful way to evaluate training is through a four-level approach designed by Kirkpatrick (1975). Level I focuses on the participants' reaction, typically the kind of evaluation that trainees complete at the conclusion of training. Level II emphasizes the amount of learning that occurs, which often is evaluated by pre and post-testing. Level III focuses on the extent to which behavioral changes are transferred to the work situation. Level IV evaluates the amount of impact on the clients, or the results of training and transfer. Three possible outcomes exist:

- Positive transfer -- Learning in the training situation results in better job performance.
- Negative transfer -- Learning in the training situation results in poorer job performance.
- Zero transfer -- Learning in the training situation has no effect on job performance.

Although the impact of training may be difficult to gauge, efforts should be made to examine a variety of indicators. Sometimes existing training designs do not need to be altered much to be evaluated. For example, the Northeast Ohio Regional Training Center often schedules separate series of core training for new social workers at approximately the same time. While all factors cannot be controlled, maintaining the same curriculum and the same trainer are two important factors. Through the use of naturally occurring control groups, we can explore trainee satisfaction, learning, transfer, and client impact. It also is useful to examine events used in needs assessments such as turnover, critical incidents, accreditation reviews, and exit interviews. It is important not to overlook data that are easily acquired.

While it may be difficult to determine the exact impact of training, obtaining a ballpark estimate of the amount of transfer is more feasible. Developing a database of transfer information thus should become a priority of training and administrative personnel. Simple approaches, such as sending a "transfer postcard" rating scale to trainees several months after training, can yield high return rates and useful information on the amount of transfer achieved. Observing a trainee's performance on the job is more difficult, but still feasible. Transfer information should be conveyed back to appropriate individuals, such as the trainer. When trainers realize that they are being evaluated by the amount of transfer that occurs, their training strategies will change--and they will strive to transfer knowledge, rather than simply to entertain trainees. Evaluation efforts thus become transfer interventions.

The TOTAL Model

A review of the literature indicates that human service transfer interventions have been limited to the use of action plans and attempts to involve supervisors in the training process (Weissman 1987; Delewski et al. 1986; Mueller 1985; Tracy et al. 1988). A systematic approach to assessing and intervening in the transfer process, using a model such as TOTAL, has not yet been developed (Baldwin 1988).

A TOTAL approach examines the positive and negative transfer forces affecting all three of Baldwin's factors--before, during, and after a training workshop. Transfer will occur if the total number and strength of the positive transfer forces is greater than the total number and strength of negative forces. Zero transfer will occur if the total number and strength of the positive transfer forces is less than or equal to the total number and strength of the negative transfer forces. The transfer barriers and forces identified suggest that, by intervening, we can increase the transfer forces and/or reduce transfer barriers.

Transfer Forces

Since transfer is affected by the action or inaction of certain individuals, their identification is a crucial step toward increasing transfer. Some of the critical actors in the transfer process are the individual trainee, supervisor, training personnel, coworker, and administrator (see *Figure 2*). Transfer can be facilitated by **all these** individuals before, during, and after **training workshops**. *Figure 3: TOTAL Intervention Steps* presents a flowchart of the overall TOTAL process, from assessment to evaluation of transfer.

Figures 4-7 illustrate some suggested methods that individuals can use to increase transfer forces; and decrease barriers before, during, and after training workshops.

Suggestions for Further Development

The TOTAL model provides a general framework for assessment and intervention in the transfer process that is comprehensive, yet easy to understand and implement. It suggests numerous areas for further transfer research. By determining which individual - trainee, trainer, supervisor, coworker, or administrator - has the most positive impact on transfer before, during, or after the training workshop, we can recommend programmatic changes. Training personnel and administrators should try to establish a training database, which can provide information on norms and deviation from norms. Currently, we have very little idea of what constitutes an acceptable transfer level. Studies from the private sector indicate that only 10 to 13 percent of learned skills are transferred (Baldwin 1988; Rackham 1979)--that translates to a "skill dollar loss" of 87 to 90 cents per dollar.

It is also probable that different transfer curves - the extent of transfer over time - exist, as Baldwin suggests (1988). The number and strength of positive transfer forces and barriers in the different stages of the TOTAL model may produce different types of transfer curves.

Rackham states that a phenomenon called the "results dip" occurs shortly after learning a new skill. Trying out new skills may produce an initial decrease in performance results. A worker may initially have a lessened impact on clients while implementing a newly acquired skill. Rackham further recommends coaching as a means to provide support during this critical period, so worker behavior does not regress to the pre-training level. Measuring satisfaction, transfer, and perceived client impact at different times after training can give trainers an estimate of the transfer curve. "Critical times" for transfer can then be ascertained and used to make important programmatic changes.

Utilizing transfer of training concepts in all phases of the training cycle can help to ensure that workers receive the right social work training, with the right supports, and at the right time to facilitate transfer and client impact. These three should be the bottom line - the "three R's" of social work training.

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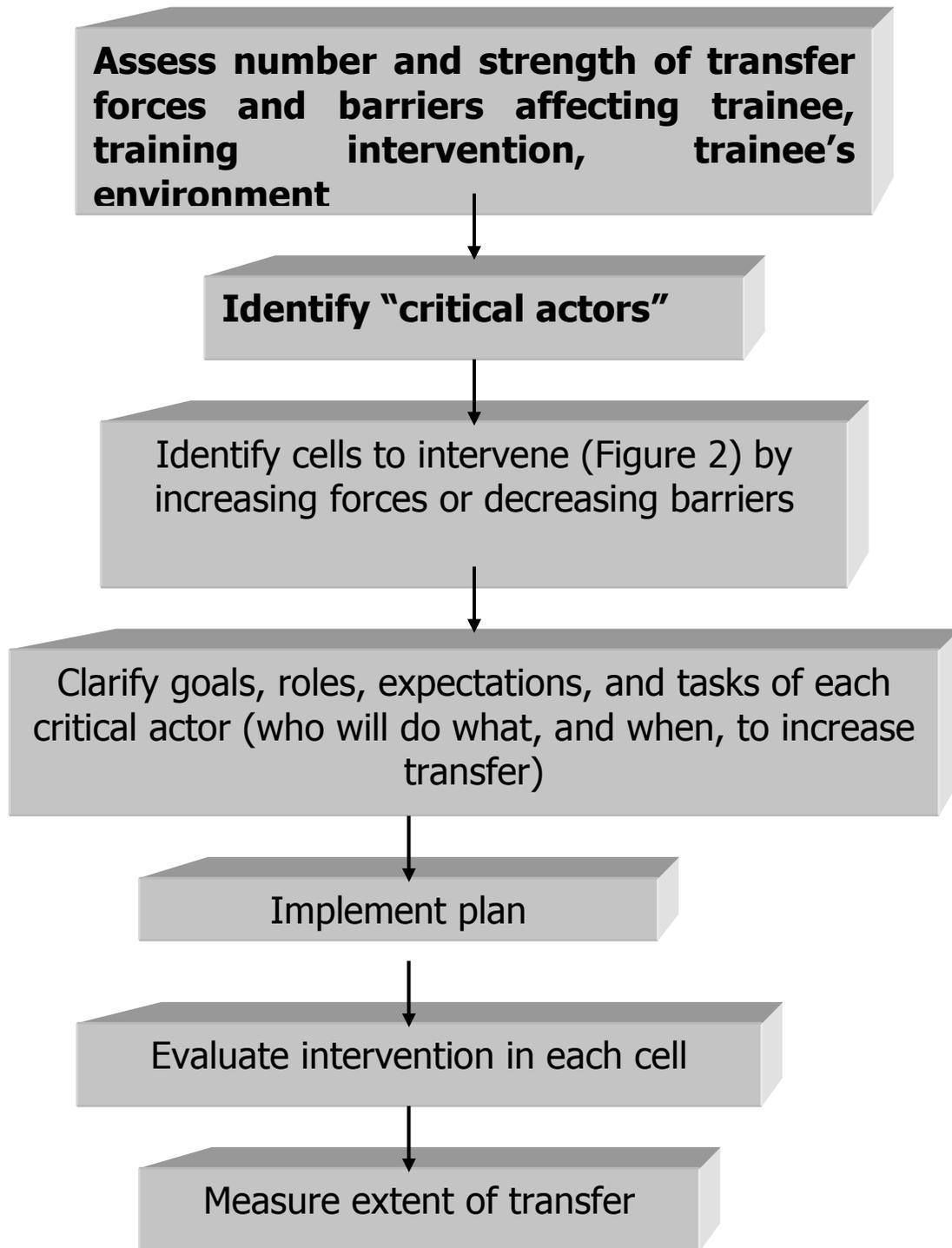
Figure Two

	BEFORE	DURING	AFTER
Trainee			
Trainer			
Supervisor			
Coworker			
Administrator			

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THE TOTAL MODEL

Figure Three



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THE TOTAL MODEL

Figure Four

Figure Five

	Trainee Transfer Interventions			Trainer Transfer Interventions		
Step	Before	During	After	Before	During	After
1	1. Plan for coverage of cases/unit while in training	1. Identify barriers and facilitative forces for application	1. Hold a timely meeting with supervisor to discuss importance and application	1. Conduct a multi-measure needs assessment	1. Set the stage for focusing on transfer	1. Offer reminders of commitment to action plan
2	2. Identify cases to keep in mind	2. Ask, "How can I apply this to my caseload?"	2. Share information with coworkers	2. Provide information (e.g., objectives and outline of training) to administrators, supervisors, and trainees	2. Learn retention strategies (identical elements, general principles, stimulus variability, and conditions of practice)	2. Use "booster shot" training sessions
3	3. Begin to formulate objectives for action plan	3. Identify key individuals who can have an impact on barriers and facilitators	3. Follow through with action plan	3. Make transfer a priority in all phases of the training cycle	3. Focus on adult learning principles and trainee learning styles	3. Evaluate transfer
4	4. Foster mindset of getting involved in the learning and transfer process	4. Make a commitment with co-trainers to support each other	4. Place visual reminders where easily seen		4. Implement action plan	

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