Managers as Developers

Taking the guesswork out of performance improvement

A distance learning resource pack

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How do people learn?

Although learning is a natural process, it is not an accident! There is a process going on in the background. If we learn about the process, it becomes much easier to learn from any situation.

A learning model

This model links learning **needs** with **methods** and **blockages** to learning:

Learning needs

- Knowledge
- Skills
- Values

Learning blocks

Learning style
Motivation
Beliefs

- Individual
- Support
- Culture

Managers
Peers
Organisation

Relevance
Opportunity
Fits values/norm

Learning methods

There are many. Training is only one of at least 57 varieties!

Learning outcomes

- Innovation
- Effectiveness
- Improvement
- Efficiency
- Competitiveness
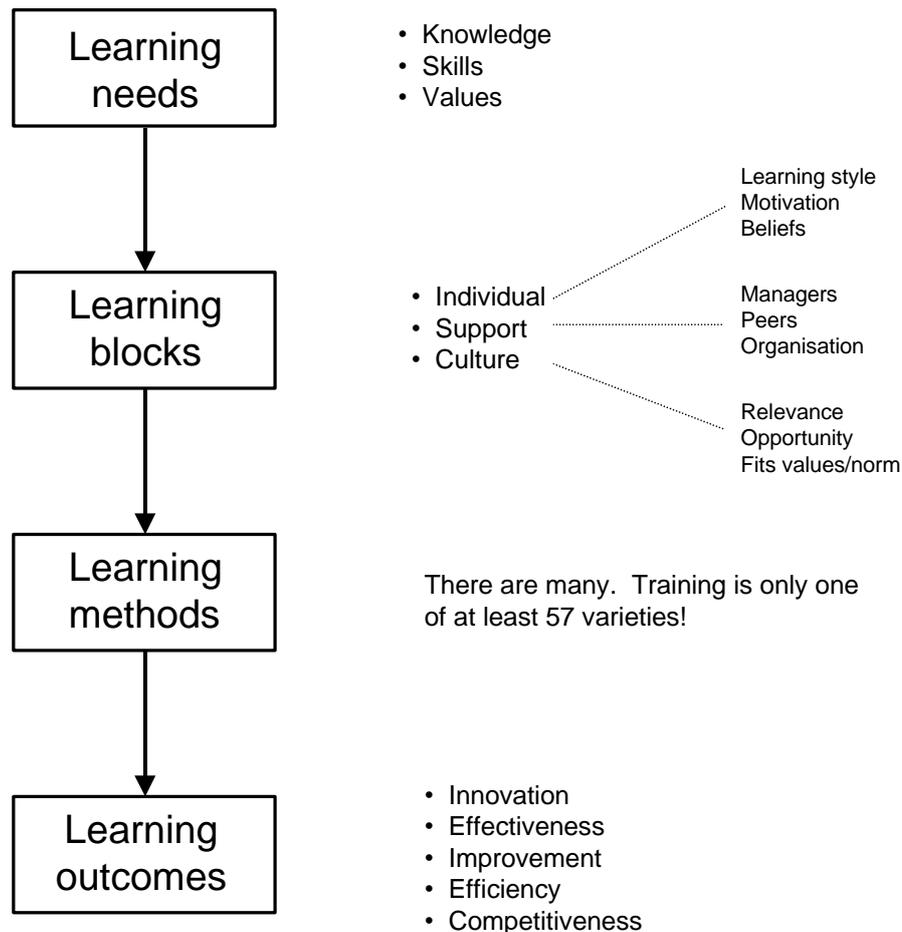
In choosing the best way to learn, it is vital to decide if a particular method:

✓ Can deliver the identified learning need.

✓ Removes or minimises blockages to learning.

The model systematically helps identify these factors, so that the most appropriate learning method can be chosen to suit the learning need. We shall go on to examine each element of the model.

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1. What is the learning need?

It is helpful to separate learning into three areas:

- **Knowledge**

- **Skills**

- **Values**

Dependent of the learning need, some methods are more or less effective. For example, skills are best learned through hands-on approaches e.g. keyboard skills training, whereas knowledge can be learned through cognitive processes, e.g. reading or watching a video.

2. What stops us learning?

A number of barriers to learning exist, which may be influenced if they are understood at the outset:

- **Individual**

- Learning style
- Motivation to learn
- Beliefs

- **Support**

- Manager
- Peers
- Organisation

- **Culture**

- Relevance to the organisation
- Opportunity to use learning
- Fit with values and norms

| **Five blocks to developing people** |
| --- |
| *'My staff don't want to learn'* |
| *'We don't get sanctioned for not doing it'* |
| *'I didn't get where I am today by being developed'* |
| *'Not my job, Guv'* |
| *'What's in it for me?'* |
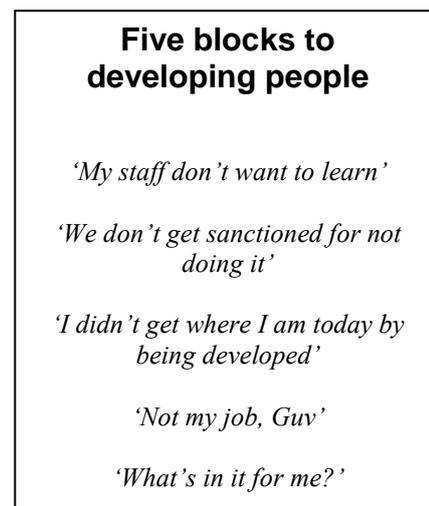
All of these factors are controllable. Examples include:

- ✓ Lack of motivation to learn may be addressed by clarifying **outcomes** before the learning takes place.

- ✓ Lack of opportunity to use learning may be addressed by improving the **timing** of learning, or to build-in a work-based **project** to ensure that outcomes are fully realised.

A classic example where this was not applied was in a private organisation that had arranged a programme of keyboard skills training for managers who were not to receive a personal computer for another 12 months!

The question of individual **learning style** is worthy of a few more words.

The basic learning cycle can be represented as shown below:

ACTIVIST

Have an experience

PRAGMATIST

Test implications of concepts in new situations

Reflect on the experience

REFLECTOR

Formation of concepts and generalisations

THEORIST
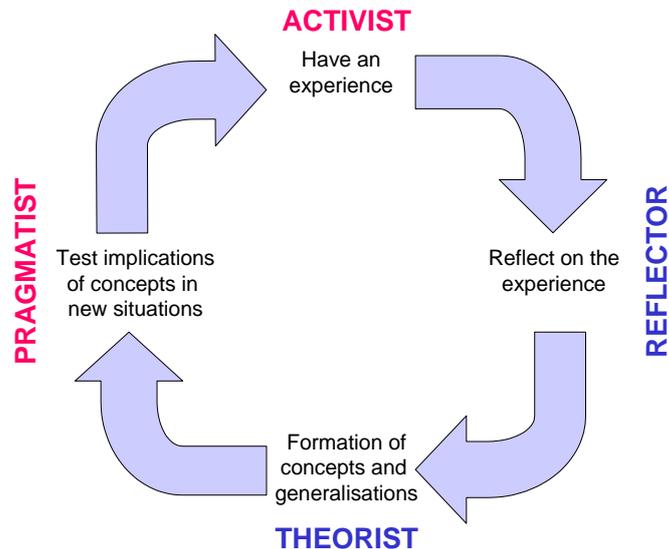
An everyday example:

A child touches an electric hotplate momentarily (has an experience)*, says 'ouch'* (reflects on the experience), *thinks 'all red things must be hot'* (forms a generalisation) *and decides to touch a red nose to check this out* (tests theory in new situation).

Adult learning may be more complex than our example, yet the same processes apply.

However, not all of us have strong suits in all four learning styles.

Some of us are particularly good at certain learning styles and this means that we learn best in a limited range of situations. This is well illustrated in the examples opposite.

Each of us has a preferred range of learning styles. You can check this out by completing a simple inventory to determine your own learning style. This is available via Human Dynamics.

The impact of learning styles on our learning potential

A sales executive in a major plc gave one good example of how learning styles affect learning. Her predominant learning styles at that time were activist *and* pragmatist*. She complained that she could not see the point of 'thinking'* (reflector) *and was tired of 'models'* (theorist)*. Moreover what she wanted was advice* (pragmatism) *on how to sell more products.*

A University manager described his style as follows: 'I'm a Myers Briggs 'ESTJ'. This means that I learn best in 'big chunks', a lot more from interactions than lectures and rather little from computers. A consequence is that I need an expert computer coach rather than a long course if I'm to improve my IT skills'

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3. What methods of learning are available?

There are at least 57 varieties of learning:

Learning options

57 varieties

Contents

Coaching, Mentoring, Job redesign, Reading, Rewards, Training, Visits, Trial and failure, Trial and success, Secondments, Seminars, Job growth, Re-engineering, Goal setting, Projects, Networking, Benchmarking, Open Learning, Deputising, Delegation, etc.
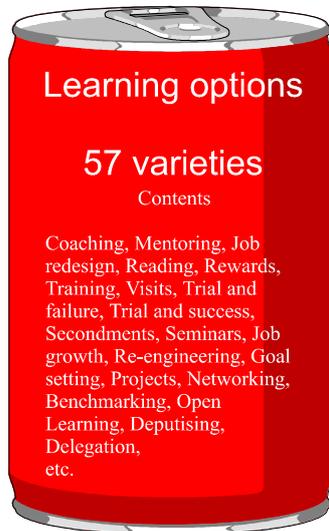
Some methods are best for transferring **knowledge**, others good at developing practical **skills** and others reserved for challenging and modifying **values**.

The key point is that many of these have nothing to do with training! Many of them are clearly more under the control of line managers than the HR Department.

4. What are the outcomes of learning?

Translating learning into purposeful results can take an instant or a reasonably long time.

Consider the following examples:

✓ Keyboard skills training may be instantly transferable to work. Once you have learned the skill, it will be directly usable, and will get better with further practice.

✓ Using knowledge and values gained on a leadership development programme may only show themselves some time after the learning has been acquired. Once again, practice and reinforcement will help you harvest the full benefits.

It is vital to build in opportunities to practice learning and make the learning relevant to the goals of the unit if the maximum benefits are to be gained.

How learning leads to results in the Open University

The role of developing others has come out of my own impetus to learn, fuelled by the 360-degree feedback process and the completion of my OU MBA.

I look after a group of staff that are involved in course production. This often involves negotiating with course teams and trying to squeeze production times to meet project timelines. In the past, team morale had been compromised by having to offer deadlines that could not subsequently be realised.

After studying the OU Creative Management course, I sent the team to the printing shop we use in Oxford. The team is now much better able to negotiate with course teams, since they know the implications of changes, and they have 'insider knowledge' regarding what can be delivered. This has also raised the team's confidence and has gained it respect.

Anne Howells, Deputy Project Controller