Sustaining the Impact of Learning

Where does training end and learning begin? Contemporary scholars in the area of workplace learning suggest that traditional approaches to training are useless, and do not deliver the results that individuals and institutions aspire to. The ADKAR Model for Change Management provides a framework for managing change that can be applied to training for it to have its desired effect and create the learning and change that is required. Training is a series of activities aimed at transferring knowledge and skills to the trainee. Institutions budget and spend millions of dollars each year on training, but very little can be said about the actual learning that takes place.

Learning is therefore beyond training and does not necessarily take place within the confines of training alone. In fact, most of the actual learning that takes place is self-motivated, as people are faced with challenges and seek innovative and creative ways to solve their problems. In an ideal world, institutions will rather have their people learn by self-development rather than spend millions on training. But this has remained only an ideal for so long. In the last few years when I was responsible for our Learning Academy at Stanbic IBTC Pensions, many staff would approach and say they have not had sufficient training, or needed more training, and my typical response was - "but how much learning have you done". Making the distinction between training and learning in this way is very important, as learning it is that actually drives value, and not the act of training.

However, while the concept of an entire workforce of self-motivated individuals driven by a passion to learn continues to be an ideal, it may be

indeed possible to design training in such a manner that it will actually result in learning.

The objective of learning is to take the individual from her current state of competencies and capabilities to a higher or more advanced state. This transition, like the type that happens when a bank implements a new software, or a company introduces a new operating model represents a change. The research done by the Prosci Institute that came up with the ADKAR Model suggests that for change efforts (individual or organizational) to be managed successfully, the five pillars of ADKAR must be satisfied viz:

- The individual must be **A**WARE of the need to Change;
- The individual must **D**ESIRE the Change to happen;
- The individual must acquire the **K**NOWLEDGE required to Change;
- The individual must have the **A**BILITY to change; and
- There must be sufficient **R**EINFORCEMENT to support the Change.

It stands to reason therefore that since learning is aimed at changing individuals and organizations, then our approach to traditional training needs to be driven by a tested change management framework. It is evident that no matter the approach to training that is taken – self study, e-learning, facilitator led workshop, etc, or indeed the instructional design or media used, most of our training does not create learning and perhaps at its best deals with only two aspects of ADKAR's five pillars – KNOWLEDGE and ABILITY, leaving out the others that are critical in actually creating change.

Putting ADKAR into training

It means therefore that beyond the design of instructional materials, the application of different learning styles, use of multifarious media and methods, or even the quality of facilitation, organizations will have to review their traditional training philosophies, and ensure that they can actually create the change required in its people and the organization as a whole. Anchoring this philosophy on ADKAR and fundamental change management principles will drive the right behaviour and indeed ensure that learning occurs.

Training Today

Most organizations however operate a rather unsophisticated training model. The most primitive of these models use training as a means of rewarding their favoured employees. The obvious setbacks of this model, which hardly any organization will agree that they use is that firstly, this favoured employees think of the interventions as just that – a perk, an entitlement, and therefore see no reason to incubate or transfer knowledge within the organization. Secondly, such models create a huge gulf between the privileged few, and the rest of the pack. Over time, institutions then realize that their talent and leadership pipelines are non-existent, and they are continuously dependent on external mid and senior hires, which has implications for their financial resources, and worst still – organizational culture.

In the modern world of talent management, High Potential employees ("HIPOs") also receive this kind of special treatment. While in itself this may not be bad, the issue is simple – whether it is for HIPOs, favourites, or the rest of the pack, does our training philosophy or approach ensure that change happens in line with our ADKAR Model.

Some organizations create what they think are reinforcements for trainings like using attendance at a training as a pre-requisite for processing leave, or other entitlements or benefits. I have heard of organizations where your failure to attend a particular e-training, will prevent you from going on leave. There are others that set performance targets for Managers based on the number of training hours their subordinates get each year. All of these are clearly naïve attempts at driving learning and change through training interventions. Clearly, employees will log on to the learning portal, show up in class, and ensure compliance just for compliance sake. How does this drive the right behaviour or get the employees to even change or learn anything in the least?

Let's reflect on some of the things that typically happen when we go for training, and perhaps the inherent challenges will become more apparent. Before the training takes place, employees get an invitation, sometimes the trainings are motivated directly by their supervisors, and unfortunately employees hardly ever get a pre-training discussion from their supervisors. They show up at the training venue or log on to the learning portal (e-learning) and begin to get exposure to the new knowledge. If they think

about it, they can come up with a number of possible reasons why they are on the course – for example, they need it as a pre-requisite for leave, their manager needs to balance his scorecard, or it's just a break off work and an opportunity to travel, or the company has made significant investments in learning technology, and we all have to show our commitment to using those technologies. Against the backdrop of the appalling state of education in many developing countries, like Nigeria, and the pervasive certificate mentality that abounds, employees just rack up a lot of training certificates and testimonials which they believe look good on their CV. In all of these scenarios how much actual learning takes place, and indeed to what extent have the employees and the organization's change readiness been increased. NONE! Exposure to new concepts or bodies of knowledge without being able to share them within your organization, and create a particular change is a complete waste of time.

Situating our training philosophy and approach within the ADKAR model will ensure that training activities create the desired outcomes for individuals and the organization. The next few paragraphs will be a modest attempt to highlight some policy recommendations for organizations that reflect ADKAR and fundamental change management principles.

Creating Awareness

Before getting into the classroom, Leaders, Managers and workplace learning professionals must create awareness about the change that is expected to happen after the training. This is beyond the training announcement and the details of the learning objectives. While these are useful, there are a few other issues that must be addressed. Finding out the why of the training is important, and employees will like to know – why is the training necessary; why is it happening now; what is wrong with our current level of knowledge; and what will happen if I do not learn and make changes. Individuals needs in this regard need to be addressed, and I doubt if a three-page information flyer sent by electronic mail will necessarily answer these needs. I have been on both sides before – sending the mails as a training manager, and receiving them as a trainee, and trust me, people hardly read the stuff. In fact, creating awareness is not just about communicating the responses to these needs. The individual recipient's awareness is often affected by a number of factors including:

- her view of the current state (I am a good leader, so why do I need leadership training?);

- how she perceives problems (some people are usually focused on internal problems, while others are more drawn to bigger picture issues. Training someone with a narrower focus on an issue that is not currently within his purview may be difficult to sell);
- the credibility of the person trying to create awareness – a boss or HR Manager with whom the relationship is already strained will not be very successful at creating awareness. Also, if previous trainings have been useless, employees will naturally tend to assume that this training will be similar

In trying to create awareness, Managers should focus on the actual change in behaviour or output required rather than the training alone. A lot of managers believe training is the solution to every problem. So, for example, once customer service ratings reduce, they motivate for customer service training, and try to build awareness around the need to attend customer service training. This is limiting, the actual focus of the training should not be the training, it should be the improved quality of service that needs to change, which the training will help facilitate.

To create awareness:

- Organizations must develop and institutionalize leadership competencies that include coaching and mentoring and require Managers to have a formal conversation with staff before they embark on training situating the context of the training and creating awareness for the need for the change expected from the training, and not necessarily the training itself.
- When organizing organization-wide training programs focused on specific areas (sales, new products, new staff induction, leadership, customer service etc), executive sponsorship is critical. This helps to deal with any issues regarding the credibility of the person creating awareness. The CEO should be at the forefront of driving such training campaigns with messages to staff, and actual attendance at the programs. There are many examples of CEOs who give a pep talk at the beginning of these sessions that create the awareness of the training. Many CEOs relegate training interventions to HR Directors or Training Managers. If indeed the critical changes an organization needs is to be driven by training, such interventions must receive executive sponsorship, similar to how they are visible sponsors at other major business projects (sales campaigns, etc).
- Communicate, Communicate…and Communicate some more. Creating awareness requires a consistent repetition of the messaging, all through the period leading up to the training and after. Leaders and managers must communicate continuously to create awareness, as a build up to the trainings.
- Organizations and institutions sometimes require external validation to create the context to change. Use external validation like a survey result that shows a performance gap in that area to support the awareness for learning and change. This will also help with the credibility of the sender, especially when there is mistrust within the organization.

The role of executive sponsorship cannot be over-emphasized in creating awareness about learning. According to research from the Prosci Institute, visible Executive Sponsorship is the number one factor that drives successful change programs. Institutions like GE have embraced this, and successfully implemented its leadership development programs with visible executive sponsorship from its CEO. A mid-sized Nigerian Merchant Bank in the early 2000s instituted a Graduate training program that was christened after its CEO – Funke Osibodu as "Funke's School of Banking", and when Nigerian bankers think of the Training School at Guaranty Trust

Bank, which is a leading example of New Hire Training in Nigeria, they think of the Bank's founding CEO (Fola Adeola) as the brain behind the Program and its major sponsor. A number of institutions and their executive leadership are yet to key into the benefits of visible executive sponsorship in learning programs, yet ever so often that business challenges occur – Training is often the recommended solution from those same leaders.

Building Desire

Every change effort including training requires participants to support and participate actively in the change. Employees nominated to a training program need to know the What's In it for Me ("WIIFM"), and this helps to create the context for the desire to change. Desire is driven by a number of factors including the individual's present situation; the nature of the change, and how it will affect the individual; and very importantly, what intrinsically motivates the person.

Organizations in the private sector today are so driven in their performance cultures to focus on immediate financial measures and operational efficiencies, and quite often sacrifice innovation and sustainability. It is no wander therefore that individuals tend not to be desirous of learning, supporting knowledge transfer or championing innovation, since their performance measurements do not really reflect these issues. The mercenary cultures that have evolved relegate learning activities to the background.

The desire to learn, innovate and change, can be enhanced by dealing with the intrinsic motivations that people have, and changing the hearts and minds of our people. This again is a critical role for executives and leaders to achieve. Leaders must lead by example – participate actively in training programs as trainees and where called upon as facilitators. The role of leaders as coach and teacher must be pervasive throughout the organization. Imagine your CEO taking a course each quarter for the top management and ensuring that this cascades downwards. Better still imagine the CEO and the executives actually facilitating at your Sales Academies, Leadership Academies, etc. Talk about driving the right behaviour and creating a desire to learn. There is a preponderance of evidence to suggest that children whose parents spend lot of time reading, have a higher propensity to develop an interest in learning, than those whose parents are more drawn to watching movies. Leaders must lead by

example and show their visible commitment to learning for individuals and the entire organization to desire learning.

Knowledge & Ability

Individuals need to learn how to learn. Again, the organizational culture about learning and innovation is very important. The training materials and teaching methods will provide the knowledge required for learning to take place, but beyond this, individuals and organizations must learn to learn. The acquisition of knowledge through a training is not enough. For many trainees it is, especially if the context of the learning is too ensure certification or meet a compliance requirement. The reason for training is to ensure change, and change we MUST.

Organizations must develop a culture that encourages firstly the incubation and transfer of knowledge throughout the organization, through knowledge transfer interventions, communities of practice, etc, where delegates are required to share their new knowledge with colleagues in a structured manner. Also, a culture of self-development must be encouraged. Individuals and entire organizations have self-limiting beliefs about themselves, and their ability to transfer their newly acquired knowledge into change. Organizations are massively dependent on external consultants, even when their own employees have received significant training on the same subjects. Obviously, the trainings were either just a part of an inflexible learning road map, a pre-requisite for a promotion or a compliance requirement.

Leaders and workplace learning professionals have to drive the right behaviour about learning, and help the organization learn and innovate. I developed a simple model for learning and innovation, which I have used successfully for myself, and teams that I have managed: C-L-I-C-K, which encourages individuals to CLARIFY, LEARN how to deal with the challenge, create an INNOVATIVE way of dealing with the challenge, CHANGE the way we handle the situation, and finally build KNOWLEDGE that can be incubated and shared throughout the organization. This model was specifically designed to counter psychological blocks and self-limiting beliefs that people, and organizations have about their ability to learn and change.

HR Managers and Workplace Learning Professionals must bring their expertise to bear in driving the right culture for knowledge and ability to be harnessed to create learning and change within organizations.

Reinforcement

Once a journey to change has begun, it must be sustained. Reinforcement ensures that learning outcomes are sustained, and create the transformation required. However, most trainings end up with a smiley-sheet, and at best a follow-up "hello" email a few weeks later. At GE, for example, training sessions were reinforced with a meeting with the CEO and the sign off of a commitment sheet which was project managed and tracked for execution. A crack team of learning professionals mystery-shopped and reported on service levels to institutionalize the service orientation that the trainings had taught. For change to occur after training, there needs to be accountability around the subject matter of the training. Isn't it a complete waste to for example have people certified in Lean Six Sigma, and still employ external consultants to handle process re-engineering?

Learning systems must be integrated and include reinforcement back at work. Many institutions today are moving towards the use of balanced score cards to manage organizational and individual performance. These scorecards include the critical component of People, Learning & Innovation, which many scorecard designers have not been able to get their heads around. The performance management system and the balanced score cards are a great way of creating reinforcement. Learning activities and leadership involvement in driving learning must be incorporated into the score cards, to drive the right behaviour. Organizations also deploy 360-degree appraisal tools that seek to measure Managerial and leadership competencies. These tools must also include tracking and measuring the extent to which Managers ensured that learning was translated to innovation and change, and everyone in the organization must be accountable for this.

The use of the Learning Impact Model ("LIM"), and a deliberate focus on driving Learning Impact throughout the organization will help to address this. The LIM is simply a policy framework that leverages ADKAR and institutionalizes a set of disciplined pre-training, and post-training activities including alignment with the Balanced Score Card to drive learning impact

and create reinforcement. I have heard business leaders say that issues about learning are "weekend" issues, and not serious stuff worth considering for the purpose of measuring performance. I have also heard the same people refer every single organizational challenge to the Training Department for a solution and blame business setbacks on "staff that are not well trained". There is obviously a lot of double speak from leaders about the importance of training, and their role in ensuring this. My guess is that a lot of leaders because of their personalities do not have the patience and discipline to institute learning cultures, even though they wish that people do learn and change.

ADKAR in Action

The ADKAR model can transform a lot of our training programs into real opportunities to learn and change. The CLICK and LIM are also useful tools to support Knowledge, Ability and Reinforcement that are critical to creating change through learning. Most importantly, the role of executives and leaders in visibly sponsoring training activities to create the desired learning and change is critical. Leaders play a critical role in driving successful change efforts, especially in creating awareness, desire and reinforcement. There is an obvious need for more leadership participation in learning activities, if truly organizations agree that training is expected to result in a change and are willing to jettison some erroneous beliefs about what training is actually meant to deliver. Jeffrey Hiatt who created ADKAR mapped the major payers in a any successful change effort based on the ADKAR model, and clearly showed the importance of executive and leadership in this process (see below, as adapted), and the sidebar on ADKAR. If there is any message I must reinforce it is that leaders must provide the context to create awareness, desire and reinforcement to transform mere training programs into learning opportunities and create real change in their organizations.

Figure: Mapping of Key Change Management Players in Training

Training Players	A	D	K	A	R
Executive Leadership	●	●			●
Managers & Supervisors	●	●	●	●	●
HR & Training			●	●	

Factors that influence each element of the ADKAR Model (adapted)

ADKAR Elements	Factors Influencing Success	Best Practice
Awareness of the need to learn and change	• Individual's view of the current state • How the individual perceives challenges • Credibility of the sender of the awareness messages • Contestability of the reasons for learning	Executive Sponsorship and Participation in crafting and disseminating awareness communications Use external validation in messaging Focus messaging on the outcomes expected, and not necessarily on the training.
Desire to support and participate in learning and change	• The nature of the learning and change required • Individual's personal situation • Intrinsic motivation of the individuals	Executive participation in training activities Institutionalization of a learning culture Show the relationship between the learning culture and the individual's development.
Knowledge on how to learn and change	• Attitude towards learning • Current organizational view on learning and change • Current knowledge base and experience with self-learning	HR and Learning Professionals to engage and motivate employees to pursue self development and deploy tools like CLICK.

Ability to transform learning into actionable change	• Psychological blocks • Physical abilities • Intellectual capability • Time	Experiential training that provides a variety of practical tools like job aids that learners can take back to work and immediately start to apply. Building the performance of tasks around these "job aids" that codify the "XYZ Company way of doing things.
Reinforcement to sustain the learning and change	• The degree to which reinforcement is useful • The association of the reinforcement with actual demonstrated progress • The accountability system that exists to support reinforcement of learning and a learning culture	Link learning and innovation to performance measures. Deploy deliberate policies and learning philosophies like a LIM Executive support and participation in policy initiatives

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