

# Chapter 2

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## The Transitional Learning Model

### 2.1 Key Concepts

Learner-centred perspectives were introduced in Chapter One and merged into learning practice. The Learner/Participant Paradigm exposed the perspective of learner and facilitator as objects of learning as well as agents of learning. But we also saw the need of training methodology to conform to individual, vocational and cultural learning patterns.

Understanding learning perspectives is one thing. To operationalise or implement them, is something else. A glass crystal, a souvenir from a Chinese jade market, hangs in a window of my study. One of the simple pleasures of my life is to be at my desk at sunrise when the glass captures the rising sun, diffracting the rays into flashes of light and colour on the walls. There's an analogy here of the interface between training principle and practice. In the same way that the glass crystal diffracts natural light into an observable spectrum of colour, a transitional framework gives shape and direction to the training process.

The purpose of this chapter is to explain how the Transitional Learning Model negotiates the learning interface to manage training.

### 2.2 A Transitional Framework

As a prism diffracts light into observable beams, so the Transitional Learning Model negotiates the learning interface between principle and

practice (Fig. 2.1). The model operates on the assumption that, if learning is to be instrumental for learner and facilitator (i.e., transformational) then the approach should be conducive to both learner and facilitator alike. The Transitional Learning Model captures this principle and redistributes it throughout six transitions.

		<b>Principle</b>	
		<b>Transitions</b>	<b>Learning Goals</b>
<b>Practice</b>	<b>Performance Conditions</b>	<b>Projective</b>	Attitudes (dispositions, feelings, position) and aptitudes (tendency or inclination, and state of readiness, capacity and ability)
		<b>Cognitive</b>	Theoretical framework
		<b>Application</b>	Performance of behavioural skills: competence in communication, decision-making and psychomotor skills
	<b>Workplace</b>	<b>Synthesis</b>	Anticipation and resolution of problems that may influence performance related to values, ethical and moral dimensions, available resources, the workplace setting and conditions etc
		<b>Group-reinforcement</b>	Collaboration and teamwork, networking and partnership
		<b>Self-direction</b>	Initiative and self-responsibility for problem-solving and continuous learning

**Figure 2.1 The Transitional Learning Model: Principle Merges into Practice**

Incremental shifts in the learning experience for learners and facilitator are shaped by performance conditions, six transitions and their associated learning goals.

## **Performance Conditions**

The model is conceptually divided into two performance conditions—ideal and workplace. The Projective, Cognitive and Application transitions approach the learning of skills as if conditions were relatively perfect. In other words, we assume that factors of equipment, circumstances, time and people will consistently remain ideal and that there will be no problems. Of course, in the workplace, the real world, this is not so. The Transitional Learning Model shifts from ideal to workplace conditions in the Synthesis, Group-reinforcement and Self-direction transitions. Learning in these transitions strengthens problem-solving skills and continuous learning disciplines with an emphasis on a range of conditions that impact work performance and standards. As we shall see, acknowledging performance conditions is an important component of the Transitional Learning Model.

## **Transitions and Learning Goals**

Knowledge (Cognitive transition) builds on reflection and the affective (Projective) and the Application transition integrates behavioural skills with learning from the previous two transitions. The fourth transition, Synthesis, places the learning in an operational context to establish problem-solving skills. The next transition, Group-reinforcement, builds teamwork skills while the final transition, Self-direction, provides the opportunity to strengthen individual skills.

In the Transitional Learning Model the learning goals give direction for the training design and learning.

## **An Example . . .**

Clarify the synergy between the performance conditions, transitions and the learning goals by referring to Figure 2.1. The chapters in Part B are devoted to amplifying this overview.

The Projective transition begins the process. If the course is about conducting a radio program interview, the learning goal would promote

attitudes and aptitudes necessary for competently conducting an interview. The transition is a framing device to establish an overall direction for both learners and facilitator.

A theoretical framework is the learning goal of the Cognitive transition. The facilitator lays down a foundation of background technical information before moving on to practical application. In the case of a radio program interview it would be the information related to the process of preparing for, conducting, editing and broadcasting an interview.

The next transition is from a knowledge foundation to practical, behavioural-intensive application. Abbatt (1980) categorises behavioural skills into

- decision-making (thinking) skills,
- communication skills (the ability to explain and persuade),
- and psychomotor skills (the ability to use equipment).

In our training course on radio interviewing, participants would demonstrate that they can manage a microphone, frame questions appropriate to the purpose of the interview and the audience, handle an interviewee and ethically edit an interview.

Up to this point, the transitional learning goals have assumed ideal conditions for competent skills performance. Notice that the Synthesis transition now introduces learning for workplace conditions with an emphasis on problem-solving. In our imaginary radio interview course, the learning goal is for participants to solve unexpected or expected difficulties that may emerge while the participant planned and conducted the interview. Problems needing resolution could be related to values, ethical and moral dimensions, a lack of available resources, management issues in the workplace setting and so on.

The learning goal of the Group-reinforcement transition is to promote collaboration, teamwork and partnership. In small groups of three to five participants, perhaps, members collaborate to produce a group project.

Finally, the enabling of individuals is completed in the Self-direction transition. In our example, individual participants would produce an

interview to demonstrate required performance levels of self-direction, initiative and problem-solving.

You will observe that this example has described the Transitional Learning Model in the delivery stage for training participants in a course. But that is just an expression of the Transitional Learning Model process that began in the first stage of the Learning System. In fact, the Transitional Learning Model is a planning matrix for all stages of the Learning System.

### **2.3 A Planning Matrix for the Learning System**

Any training designer will verify that the synchronisation of training needs assessment, design and delivery is a formidable task. The Transitional Learning Model doesn't necessarily make the exercise any easier, but with the model's assumptions underpinning the four stages of the Learning System, planning and organisation becomes more comprehensive.

#### **Self-validating Integration**

When constructed on a matrix the Transitional Learning Model has self-validating vertical and horizontal integration (Fig. 2.2). Decisions made in each cell are causal linkages to preceding cells and subsequent cells, above, below and alongside. The columns (the transitions and their learning goals) shape the activities that are associated with the Learning System stages of assessing learning needs, design, delivery and follow-through for each transition. The rows sequence the Learning System stages of each transition. Training design is driven by the needs assessment. In turn, design impacts delivery. Follow-through activities influence and are influenced by the entire process, feeding back into the system vertically and horizontally.

In total, then, the matrix is stabilised with built-in planning controls. Now let's look in more detail at how the Transitional Learning Model and Learning System stages work together.

Learning System Stages*	Transitions		
	Projective (Attitudes and aptitudes)	Cognitive (Theoretical framework)	Application (Performance of behavioural skills)
<b>Assess needs</b>	Assess required attitudes, aptitudes, range of experience and current gaps	Assess required technical knowledge and current gaps	Assess required behavioural skills and current gaps
<b>Design</b>	Design or select a concept, product, case study or similar projective activity	Establish framework for technical knowledge and design methods and materials	Design and plan activities to practice competence
<b>Deliver</b>	Establish attitudes and aptitudes. Learners project ideas, observations and views onto a concept, product or case study. Identify, discuss, evaluate and reflect on related attitudes and aptitudes	Construct a theoretical framework. Facilitator integrates and re-organises responses provided in the Projective transition. Additional information is given and technical concepts are explained	Practice competence. Activities are ordered into logical building blocks of experiential, practical learning
<b>Follow-through</b>	Monitor changing requirements and provide further learning opportunities. Maintain and develop learning resources	Monitor changing requirements and provide further learning opportunities. Maintain and develop learning resources	Monitor changing requirements and provide further learning opportunities. Maintain and develop learning resources

\* See the Learning System, Figure 1.2

**Figure 2.2 Planning Matrix**

(Learning Goals)		
<b>Synthesis</b> (Problem-solving)	<b>Group-reinforcement</b> (Teamwork and collaboration)	<b>Self-direction</b> (Initiative and self-responsibility)
Evaluate extent to which performance is affected by the operational context and the availability of resources to maximise performance. Assess required planning and problem-solving skills and current gaps	Assess required quality and scope of collaboration, teamwork and group learning, and current gaps	Assess required quality and scope for individuals for Self-direction and initiative, and what is permitted within the working environment
Design a hypothetical scenario and activities and methods	Design a group activity	Design an activity for individuals
Anticipate and resolve problems. Facilitator and learners work together on a hypothetical scenario to integrate and involve all the competence learned in the Application transition. Emphasis is on problem solving	Collaborate on a group project. Learners, organised into groups, complete a small project that demands the required task competence and teamwork	Demonstrate self-direction. Individuals complete a project to demonstrate their learning of all task competence. Emphasis is on self-directed learning and problem-solving
Monitor operational context, evaluate extent to which performance is affected by available resources and workplace policy. Provide further learning opportunities	Monitor quality and scope of teamwork and group learning. Provide further opportunities for strengthening collaboration	Monitor quality and scope of individual self-direction. Provide further opportunities to develop individual skills

## **Assess Learning Needs**

The basic formula used to establish learning needs is:

- identify what is required to perform the task or resolve a problem;
- compare that with current or existing performance or ways of completing the task or resolving the problem;
- establish whether training or some other, non-training intervention, is required.

The transitional learning goals guide the assessment of learning needs. In the Projective transition, attitudes and aptitudes relevant to the task are identified (Fig. 2.2). Any gap between requirements and current performance is established. For the Cognitive transition, a required technical and theoretical framework is compared with the existing knowledge of the learners. Behavioural skills (decision-making, communication and psycho-motor skills) are the subject of the Application transition. Again, the purpose in this stage is to compare required performance with current performance to ascertain the most appropriate intervention. And so the inquiry continues into the Synthesis, Group-reinforcement and Self-direction transitions.

## **Design the Learning Experience**

In the design stage of the Learning System, learning is coordinated into a plan of content, methods, activities and resources. Any complexity in this stage is removed by the Transitional Learning Model because, quite simply, the model is the learning-plan. It intuitively constructs the training elements of sequencing, continuity, learning reinforcement and assessment of learning.

## **Sequencing**

A training sequence systematically follows the transitions and their learning goals from Projective through to Self-direction. In the needs assessment stage, learning needs are established for attitude and aptitude (Projective transition), technical knowledge (Cognitive transition) and in each succeeding transition. The same sequencing pattern through the

transitions occurs in the design, delivery and follow-through stages of the Learning System.

### **Continuity**

Continuity occurs with the integration of the Transitional Learning Model with the four stages of the Learning System. When moving from Stage 1, Assess needs to Stage 4, Follow-through, activities build upon and are consistent with, the previous stage. Follow, for example, the Group-reinforcement transition and its learning goal (Fig. 2.2). Activities for the assessment of learning investigate the workplace requirements, and identify current gaps in teamwork and group learning. The Design stage builds on the findings of the assessment and Delivery activities are consistent with design decisions. Finally, the Follow-through stage reviews and evaluates the complete process against the stated transitional learning goal and directs those findings into a maintenance program for the upgrading of resources and learning opportunities.

### **Learning Reinforcement**

Repetition and reinforcement of learning is imbedded into the Transitional Learning Model as each transition overlays previous learning. A cognitive framework is built onto attitude and aptitude formation in the Projective transition. Behavioural skills are added to the cognitive framework in the Application transition. Another layer of learning takes place when problem-solving skills are introduced in the Synthesis transition. Only after those fundamental problem-solving skills are developed does further learning reinforcement take place in the Group-reinforcement and Self-direction transitions.

### **Assessment of Learning**

Throughout the delivery stage of the Learning System (Fig. 2.2) the facilitator and learners will be engaged in assessing what has been learnt in the course. Formal assessment of participants occurs in the Group-reinforcement and Self-direction transitions. At the same time, following each transition, facilitator and learner will both evaluate the quality of

what has taken place with the aid of a Quality Check (explained in Chapter Four).

## **Organise and Deliver**

The third stage of the Learning System is organisation and delivery, where design intention meets the reality of group process. Refer to Fig. 2.3 below, to follow the explanation of how the Transitional Learning Model is implemented in this stage and how it impacts delivery and learning. You may also want to look at the example in Appendix C.

### **Projective**

In the Projective transition of our illustrative workshop on radio program interviews (Fig. 2.3), the learners first reflect on an interview that contains either broadcast standard or substandard interviewing skills. The interview could be either an actual product, previously broadcast, or one that has been especially produced for training purposes. It could be a recorded interview or a script. In situations where no tangible product is readily available, projective instruments might include a role-play, a case-study or a story. Another appropriate activity might be to visit a setting and reflect on observations and findings.

Related attitudes and aptitudes are identified and analysed. Discussion is facilitated with questions such as, What do you like about it? What would you do differently in your situation? Why would you approve/disapprove this interview if you were this person's supervisor? What did the person need to know, do or feel in order to perform this task well? Participants' responses are listed on a flipchart.

Six dynamics emerge from this transition.

Firstly, participants are no longer apprehensive about what is required of them. By examining a product in detail and reflecting on it, they gain an understanding of the broad direction for the training as well as the parameters of expected standards. You may argue that participants will merely re-create what has been given to them because this activity will limit or restrict creativity and individual initiative. I've not found that in

my experience. The transition merely establishes a frame of reference for acceptable attitudes and aptitudes. The frame of reference has a reassuring effect on a learner's confidence. It does not restrict creativity.

Secondly, the transition markedly reduces the perceived "risk" that occurs when participants are confronted too early with unfamiliar problem-solving methodology and when they have still to be introduced to the fundamentals of the task. The Projective transition appeals to professional experience and informal learning by employing familiar critiquing and decision-making procedures used in the radio profession. The basic question is, Can it be broadcast? If yes, Why? If no, Why not? In other vocations the question might be, Is it safe? Does it work? Will people buy it? Does it leak?

Thirdly, learners quickly find they are encouraged to, and can, utilise their existing experience or informal learning. Despite the availability of sophisticated training technology, I still find the humble flipchart hard to beat. The writing of participants' comments onto the flipchart at this point has a delayed effect in the upcoming Cognitive transition. When they see their words in tangible, permanent form on those flipcharts, participants know they have been taken seriously and that their experience counts.

Fourthly, participants also learn that they learn from each other.

Fifthly, the interaction between learner and facilitator begins the transition from any previously-held expectations of the learner-facilitator relationship.

And finally, the transition is an informal on-site learning needs assessment as the facilitator observes group dynamics, and assesses the content and quality of learners' responses. At this point a consideration can be made of the level of aptitude of the group or individuals and any possible conflicts in attitude. If necessary, decisions are made to adjust the learning plan in terms of content and methods.

## **Cognitive**

In the Cognitive transition, the facilitator develops points raised in the Projective transition (Fig. 2.3). Information is organised into the process

Transitions and Delivery Activities	Transition Impact
<p><b>Projective</b></p> <p><i>General:</i> Participants project their ideas, observations and views onto a concept, product or situation. The example can demonstrate ideal or substandard performance. Projective instruments might consist of role-play, case-study, demonstration, story, description of past experience or visit/tour a relevant setting. <i>Example of radio interview:</i> recorded interview or script that contains either broadcast standard or substandard interviewing skills. It could be an interview previously broadcast or especially produced for training purposes.</p>	<p><i>The Learners ...</i> Can demonstrate attitudes, knowledge and experience. Are given a point of reference, establishing a broad direction for the training and illustrating what the required output will be or what is and is not expected. See that they already have valuable experience to draw on. Are given a demonstration of a process of critiquing, evaluation and discussion. Are introduced to critical reflection in a familiar professional mode. Undergo a change in their preconceptions of the facilitator-learner relationship.</p> <p><i>The Facilitator ...</i> Assesses current attitudes and aptitude. Identifies group dynamics (e.g., opinion leaders; positions taken on possible tension points). Identifies learners who—if appropriate—could strengthen group learning because of higher levels of competence and experience</p>
<p><b>Cognitive</b></p> <p><i>General:</i> Facilitator integrates and re-organises the responses provided in the first transition to construct a cohesive technical or theoretical framework. <i>Example of radio interview:</i> information is organised into all the competence needed to conduct an interview.</p>	<p><i>The Learners ...</i> Are reassured by the facilitator's knowledge and experience.</p> <p><i>The Facilitator ...</i> Maintains credibility and trust with demonstration of expertise.</p>
<p><b>Application</b></p> <p><i>General:</i> Practical learning activities are organised. <i>Example of radio interview:</i> learn how to manage a microphone, construct questions etc.</p>	<p><i>The Learners ...</i> Apply and practice learning. Are exposed to experiential learning methods.</p> <p><i>The Facilitator ...</i> Uses practical activities to maintain interest and involvement.</p>
<p><b>Synthesis</b></p> <p><i>General:</i> The facilitator leads participants in a discussion of a hypothetical situation to resolve problems. <i>Example of radio interview:</i> the facilitator asks participants to problem-solve issues relating to an antagonistic interviewee.</p>	<p><i>The Learners ...</i> Are reassured by the continued involvement of facilitator. Receive learning reinforcement of expected standards and procedures. Develop teamwork and collaborative learning skills.</p> <p><i>The Facilitator ...</i> Assesses learning. Facilitates the transition into collaborative group work.</p>
<p><b>Group-reinforcement</b></p> <p><i>General:</i> Participants are organised into small groups to complete a project. <i>Example of radio interview:</i> participants work in small groups to plan and conduct an interview.</p>	<p><i>The Learners ...</i> Gain confidence in decision-making, organisation and problem-solving. Learn collaborative learning and teamwork skills.</p> <p><i>The Facilitator ...</i> Assesses learning.</p>
<p><b>Self-direction</b></p> <p><i>General:</i> Participants now complete a project on their own to demonstrate individual competence. <i>Example of radio interview:</i> individuals take complete responsibility for planning and conducting an interview.</p>	<p><i>The Learners ...</i> Have accumulated learning from previous transitions. Gain confidence to complete the task on their own.</p> <p><i>The Facilitator ...</i> Assesses individual learning.</p>

**Figure 2.3 Transitional Learning Model and Impact in the Delivery Stage**

of the task (i.e., all the competence needed to conduct an interview such as developing questions, microphone management etc.).

Two aspects characterise this transition. Firstly, the facilitator must pull together the threads of the participants' contributions in the previous transition and link those contributions to the cognitive framework. This transitional device demonstrates to learners that their previous experience is valuable to group learning and is valued by the facilitator. Secondly, it is important for learners to be reassured by the facilitator's experience and knowledge. In our imaginary workshop on radio interviewing, the facilitator constructs the steps of planning and conducting an interview, with illustrations that are drawn from experience.

### **Application**

Practical learning activities in the Application transition expose the participants to experiential learning methods. Interest and involvement is maintained through a variety of learning methods. This is where participants get hands-on experience of a microphone, perhaps, or learn how to construct questions.

### **Synthesis**

In this transition, the facilitator gives problems for learners to solve. Intense discussion centres on resolving ethical, professional, practical and other issues that may impact performance in the workplace. Not only does the Synthesis transition reinforce learning, it also affords the facilitator an opportunity to informally assess the learning of participants. In the radio interview course it would involve the facilitator asking participants to make decisions based on a hypothetical interview.

The perceptions of the facilitator-learner relationship are in rapid transformation during the Application and Synthesis transitions. The possibilities and scope of independent thinking are being demonstrated. Participants are increasingly exposed to problem-solving. The requirement and responsibility for their decision-making is expanding and the input of the facilitator is increasingly diminishing. The strength of this transition is that it effectively reduces the uncertainty and

discomfort that often occurs in training settings where learners are introduced too early to unfamiliar participatory methods.

Discussion, interaction and problem-solving readies participants for collaborative skills required in the next transition.

### **Group-reinforcement**

With teamwork the goal of the Group-reinforcement transition, participants are organised to work together in small groups.

Before examining delivery activities in this transition, pause for a while to reflect on the relationship between groups and learning. Individuals learn because they take part in and share the experiences of vocational, social, recreational or cultural groups, and those shared experiences have a learning quality. Stenhouse (1967) argued many years ago, “Though people can think for themselves, they cannot think by themselves.” Don’t misinterpret this as reducing the importance of the individual. Rather, it is to balance our understanding of the role and importance of the group in learning. Communication between young and old or senior and junior is often bound by cultural or social interpretations of the nature of authority and respect. Dialogue is constrained to greater or lesser degrees because of the degree to which society discourages or encourages criticism, argument, creativity and reasoning, and the extent to which directives are meant to remain unquestioned and unchallenged. Relationships between individuals and contemporaries, however, allow freedom of thought and action. The broad implication is that training designers should, where appropriate, provide learning for groups of peers so that what is learnt becomes so important to the group that individuals maintain it as a group norm back in the workplace.

With these perspectives in mind, the Group-reinforcement transition, firstly, intensifies the transition toward independence and problem-solving by maximising horizontal relationships with peers, within a small group. Secondly, as another exercise to reinforce learning, participants gain confidence in decision-making and organisation. Finally, the transition promotes collaborative learning.

## **Self-direction**

Individuals now have the opportunity to complete the task on their own in the Self-direction transition. In our example, each participant is responsible for planning and conducting a radio interview.

Three broad outcomes are apparent in this transition. Firstly, learners bring to the Self-direction transition the accumulated learning of all that has preceded it. Secondly, that accumulated learning and experience transfers confidence and competence. The task is now achievable without the perceived risk of personal failure. Thirdly, the facilitator is able to assess individual performance.

## **Follow-through**

Having assessed learning needs, designed the learning experience and organised and delivered training, it is now time to follow-through on training. This, the fourth stage of the Learning System, incorporates a determination of any intended and unintended impact that the learning has had back in the workplace. Findings are returned to the Learning System to inform future training. Other activities in this stage entail monitoring workplace performance requirements and any resulting learning needs, updating existing resources or developing new resources, maintaining administrative procedures and providing continuing learning opportunities. Chapter Seven expands on the relationship between the Transitional Learning Model and training follow-through.

## **2.4 Pulling it Together**

In summary, the Transitional Learning Model stabilises the process of moving through incremental depths of responsibility for facilitator and learners. While the involvement of the facilitator is in decline, learners are increasing in confidence and competence in decision-making, problem-solving, collaborative learning and teamwork, organisation and self-responsibility. As a unified whole, the Transitional Learning Model gives priority to:

- principle, a learning process between equals where both facilitator and learner are objects of learning and agents of learning;
- practice, competence-based learning that leads to skills in problem-solving and resource management, with transitions that develop the capacity to discover questions to be asked rather than finding “fixed” answers;
- a non-formal learning environment that is conducive to both learner and facilitator;
- the life experience of the learner;
- concrete experiences that lead to reflection and conceptual thought;
- the learner taking more control of his or her learning.

Yes, but does it work? In the early stages of designing the Transitional Learning Model, I needed to prove to myself its robustness in dealing with participatory learning in a variety of vocational, cultural, administrative and corporate settings. At great professional risk I sometimes walked into training workshops armed only with flipcharts and marker pens, a commitment to participatory learning, and a belief in the power of the Transitional Learning Model as a tool to release those learner-centred, empowering processes. No other resources. Little preparation. But my faith in both the Transitional Learning Model and learner-centred impact was well-rewarded.

A colleague recalled with delight the Ah ha! moment, when the liberating power of the model released him into a new realm of confidence and competence as a facilitator.

In my Asian culture, the teacher speaks and the student listens. All the knowledge is supposed to be transferred with words. These words may be written down or spoken. My background affected my way of thinking and my methods of teaching. Training for me has always been where the teacher is the knowledge provider. There are certain expectations of both the teacher and the student. Respect for the teacher is one of them. I wanted to avoid any situation where I would lose my status as a teacher. I always wanted to be sure of the material that I was teaching. I didn't want any student to divert my thoughts. Losing face in front of your students is a shameful thing and I made sure that this didn't happen. This method has made my teaching more enjoyable for me and for the participants. It has also generated a trusting learning environment.

Your training experience will be rewarding too, as you put the Transitional Learning Model into action. Evaluation and experience have demonstrated its potential and impact. It was first developed and formalised in non-formal education settings in Asia. Learners themselves contributed to its initial design and evaluation and, thus, to its substance.

Learners emerge from a course designed on the Transitional Learning Model, surprised by self-discovery and self-direction. As one participant said, “It was inside us but we didn’t know it. We just needed an opportunity to get it out.”

*What might be the:*

*... advantages of the Transitional Learning Model in your situation?*

*... disadvantages of the Transitional Learning Model in your situation?*

