Introduction

Where the Transitional Learning Model Came From

Innovation in the workplace is what industry and the corporate world wants in the 21st Century. In a forward-looking essay on the new millennium, Stan Shih, founding chairman and CEO of Taiwan's Acer Group, appealed for societies, education and industry to foster a new breed of student and employee. "Continuous job training cannot take us anywhere if the emphasis is still on fast-food-style discipline," he argued (Shih 1999). Independent thinking ought to be encouraged in an environment that allows trial and error, risk and potential failure to go hand in hand with innovation.

As valid and inspirational as it is, the thought is not new. Socrates and Plato were early articulates of instrumental learning to develop reasoning and thinking rather than treating people as passive recipients of knowledge. Over centuries, education and training methodologies have taken into account contemporary understandings of learning styles and processes, or required skills and competencies to complement the growth or shrinkage of economies, shifting social priorities and ever-changing cultural identities.

In recent decades training designers have been greatly assisted by the insights of educators and cognitive theorists who exposed and explained the many facets of the learning process. Malcolm Knowles gave us andragogy, or adult learning, and the confidence to adopt training methods that accommodated the life experience of adults, who bring a wealth of knowledge and purpose into the training situation. Others taught us about learning styles, the different ways or patterns by which people learn.

Advocates of competency-based training mobilised us to redesign training to emphasise outcomes, what a person could actually do as a result of training—performance of a task to a specified standard in a specified situation. Jack Mezirow led consideration of the processes of transformation (the change of meaning perspectives, or the way people learn) and the role of critical reflection in learning. If any one summative goal could be drawn from these movements, it is for participatory or learner-centred methodology to enable and empower people to achieve their potential.

All of this was, and remains, helpful.

Three things frustrated me, however, as I became more involved in training practitioners in the field. The first was that, despite the ideals of participatory methods, participants were often not ready to accept such methods, particularly in cross-cultural settings where participants expected (and, in some cases, demanded!) lectures. Co-instructors were often unwilling to adopt a more facilitative, collaborative role with participants because of the change in relationship, from "teaching" (instructor-directed) to "learning" (learner-centred). Yet, at the same time, all agreed that participatory methods were a more effective way of acquiring problem-solving skills.

The second difficulty was that there was no systematic structure on which to hang these worthwhile ideas. My own learning preferences often seemed at odds with those of the participants and my instructional tendencies were sometimes counter-productive to the training purpose or requirements. Designing and delivering a coherent and unified training plan was a constant challenge.

But can you guess what frustrated me the most? It was that practitioners, academics, educators and vocational trainers had their own "war stories", similar experiences to report. They too were searching for a workable mechanism to resolve what they knew to be an unsatisfactory situation. I was soon surprised by another discovery—there was very little development of design and delivery frameworks to integrate educational and instructional theories into vocational training. Further, no real research had been conducted, or attempt made, to understand the interface between participatory methodology in cross-cultural settings.

Frustration turned into resolve, a determination to learn more. And so it became a part of my doctoral research. The result was the Transitional Learning Model, emerging from more than 20 years of training in diverse settings in Australia, Asia, England and the United States.

The key to the Transitional Learning Model is incremental shifts in the learning experience for learners and facilitator. Those shifts are shaped by performance conditions, six transitions and associated learning goals.

One performance condition is the "ideal" condition. The Transitional Learning Model first approaches the learning of skills as if conditions (i.e., equipment, circumstances, time and resources) are consistently ideal. As we well know, the real world is not like that at all, so the Transitional Learning Model shifts to methods that address workplace conditions, to strengthen problem-solving skills and continuous learning disciplines.

The Transitional Learning Model has six transitions that frame a comprehensive learning experience for both facilitators and learners. Embedded learning goals assist learners and facilitators to make the transition:

- from learning about attitudes and aptitudes (the Projective transition),
- to acquiring a theoretical framework (the Cognitive transition),
- to performance of behavioural skills (the Application transition),
- to anticipation and resolution of problems related to workplace setting and conditions (the Synthesis transition),
- to collaboration and teamwork (the Group-reinforcement transition),
- to initiative and self-responsibility (the Self-direction transition).

The Projective, Cognitive and Application transitions nurture learning for the "ideal" workplace conditions, while the Synthesis, Group-reinforcement and Self-direction transitions strengthen skills required in actual workplace conditions.

I have three broad aims for this handbook. Firstly, I want to demonstrate a practical, step by step approach to learning and training. The Transitional Learning Model is a filter, enabling training designers to consolidate the entire process of training from identifying needs to the follow-through phases of maintaining a comprehensive training plan.

Another aim is to show how the Transitional Learning Model is different to other training models, in that it directly addresses learning styles, particularly cultural dimensions of learning, a process that is frequently omitted or glossed over in training design.

The third aim is to establish that the Transitional Learning Model does impact vocational training. Learners themselves contributed to the design and evaluation of the model and stamped their seal of approval on its validity. Learners come out of a course designed on the Transitional Learning Model, surprised at what they were able to do. Facilitators discover the power of participatory training with the model's approach to training design and delivery.

About the Handbook

This book is partially based on a distance education unit I originally wrote for a post-graduate program in the School of Public Health at Curtin University of Technology, Perth, Western Australia.

Seven chapters are grouped into two parts. Two chapters in Part A establish the principles of the Transitional Learning Model. Chapter One scans what we know of training and learning. Building on that foundation, Chapter Two merges those perspectives into the Transitional Learning Model, the planning framework that is the reason for this handbook.

Five chapters in Part B, the Learning System, operationalise the principles established in Part A. Chapters 3-6 explain how to use the Transitional Learning Model to assess training needs, design a learning plan, organise and deliver training. Chapter Five contains nine checklists to assist with organising a course. The follow-through phase of training is outlined in Chapter Seven. Finally, the appendices contain a list of verbs relevant to performance criteria, a sample learning plan, a case study of a learning needs assessment, a sample reading report and performance checklist, and two sample course evaluation questionnaires.

My own training experience is in the area of radio programming, specifically applied to health promotion and health communication. It is only natural that I'll draw extensively on those formative influences.

Power on!

Ross James
Perth, Western Australia (January 2000)