



Research Summary Number 1

## **Readiness to Learn and Transfer of Learning –**

### ***Is There a Best Time for Leadership Development Training?***

**July 15, 1993**

**Abstract:**

This study examines factors that affect a manager's readiness to learn from an assessment-based leadership development experience as well as a manager's capacity to transfer the learning into the workplace. The findings indicate that certain controllable events can enhance the learning experience.

# Readiness to Learn and Transfer of Learning

**Question # 1: What are the variables that affect a manager's readiness to learn from an assessment-based leadership development training experience?**

**Results:** In the interview, participants were identified as being either receptive or non-receptive when questioned about their interpretation of the discrepancy in their "self" and "other" feedback. The recipients who were most receptive to the feedback discrepancies were asked about factors that might affect their openness to the feedback. Table 1 presents four identified factors that affected the managers' readiness to learn from the leadership development experience.

**Conclusion:** A manager's readiness (and ultimately his or her ability) to learn from

## The Analytical Process

The subjects for this case study were mid-level and upper-level managers who attended the Leadership Development Program (LDP) at the Center for Creative Leadership between 1983 and 1984. In total 1,122 managers attended this program during this time frame with 20% of participants being women.

The sample for the case study analysis consisted of 10 male and 10 female managers who had attended the LDP at least six months earlier. All twenty managers had a substantial discrepancy between of their self-perception and the perception of "others." (The "self" rating was higher than the "others" rating on at least one personal assessment instrument which was completed prior to attending the program and for which feedback was given during the program. Additional data were collected with a Timing Events Checklist created for the study.) The discrepancy in "self" and "other" assessment presented an opportunity for objectively exploring the gap and learning about self. A structured interview was conducted with each manager to explore questions related to readiness to learn from an assessment-based experience and the ability to transfer what was learned into the workplace.

an assessment-based leadership development training experience can be substantially enhanced by considering the four factors identified. Readiness to learn is present when

careers are in transition and lives are in crisis. It also occurs when job satisfaction is decreased and when organizations are in turmoil.

**Table 1**

Factors Affecting Readiness To Learn	Description of Factors
<b>Career Transitions</b>	Three key career transitions were identified: 1. Becoming a new manager 2. Transitioning from manager to executive 3. Taking over at the top
<b>Mid-life Crisis</b>	A time of serious professional and/or personal questioning. This often occurs in the early forties.
<b>Time of Decreased Job Satisfaction</b>	Decreased job satisfaction was caused by several factors including personality conflicts, dislike of present project or assignment, dislike of new policies or personal loss of challenge (i.e., 'burnout').
<b>Presence of Organizational Stress</b>	Organizational stress includes organizational transitions, financial problems and organizational or job restructuring.

**Question # 2: Why do some managers use more of their learning from an assessment-based leadership development experience than do others?**

**Results:** The study revealed five criteria that affect the transfer of management development training to the workplace. These are identified and described in Table 2.

**Conclusion:** Transfer of learning is enhanced by the climate of the organization, promotion before

training, the presence of normal work routines and the availability of follow-up training and support.

**Question # 3: Are men and women affected differently by the criteria that influence readiness to learn and the transfer of learning?**

**Results:** The criteria influencing readiness to learn and transfer of learning were analyzed for gender differences. The criteria were combined into two categories:

- Professional - career transition/ promotion, decreased job satisfaction, organizational stress/climate, normal work routine and follow-up training/support.
- Personal – mid-life crisis, personal/family stresses.

**Conclusions:** No significant difference appears in the assessment of professional and personal criteria with regard to the readiness of men and women to learn or to transfer learning to the workplace.

**Table 2**

Criteria Affecting Transfer of Learning	Impact of Criteria
Organizational climate	A favorable climate included emphasis on training and development, top management support for change and new ideas, open communication and job security.
Promotion or major increase in job responsibility	Training should occur six to eight months after a promotion or increase in responsibility. This allows time to know the challenges and deficits, but before the manager is set in his/her new position.
Normal Work Routine	A period of relative predictability following the training is critical. People need to practice what they have learned. Avoid vacations or business trips immediately after the training.
Follow-up training and/or support	Time diminishes the enthusiasm and the determination of managers to make personal changes. Follow-up may be as simple as a commitment from the manager's boss to provide support, encouragement, and reinforcement for the manager's efforts.
<b>Personal or family stress</b>	Any personal or family stress can diminish the transfer of learning into the workplace. This is true of positive as well as negative stressors.

**Questions raised by this analysis:**

- What is the most effective process for measuring job satisfaction and mid-life crisis?
- What is the ideal organizational climate to support leadership development?
- What is the optimal time to spend in a new position prior to a leadership development program?
- Organizations can control the timing of training and business trips or vacations following training, but can they do anything to buffer the negative effects of personal family stress on transfer of learning?

**References:**

Musselwhite, W. C., "The impact of timing on readiness to learn and transfer of learning from leadership development training: A case study." Dissertation Abstracts International: Doctoral dissertation, North Carolina State University, 1985.

Van Velsor, E., "Uses and transfer of leadership development training." Research report of the Center for Creative Leadership, Greensboro, NC, 1984

## Research Summary Report Series

Discovery Learning publishes a series of research summary reports tailored for busy managers, consultants and trainers interested in new and emerging knowledge in the field of human resources and organizational development. We strive to make these reports informative, useful and concise. The series includes:

Number	Report Title	Number	Report Title
1	<i>Readiness to Learn and Transfer of Learning – Is There a Best Time for Leadership Development Training?</i>	7	<i>Debunking Myths about Decision Makers  Change Style Indicator and MBTI – Is there a connection?</i>
2	<i>Selecting Developmental Goals – Manager Priorities</i>	8	<i>Business Benefits of Team Learning</i>
3	<i>Learning and Performing Management Behaviors – Who Are Better – Men or Women?</i>	9	<i>Development of a Simulation Classification System</i>
4	<i>Personality and Change – How Do People Respond Differently to Change?</i>	10	<i>Discovery Leadership Profile</i>
5	<i>Participation and Decision Making Affect the Bottom-Line</i>	11	<i>Discovery Leadership Profile for Public Health</i>
6	<i>Organizational Culture and Bottom-Line Performance</i>	12	<i>Discovery Leadership Profile for the Public Sector</i>

### About Discovery Learning, Inc.

#### Our Mission:

Collaborating to build healthy and sustainable organizations through experiential learning and individual, team and organizational assessment.

#### Our Products:

Discovery Learning, Inc. offers a system of well-integrated and highly effective training tools designed to meet the key learning goals of 21<sup>st</sup> Century organizations. Our assessment instruments and performance-driven simulations span individual, team and organizational learning objectives.

#### **Assessments**

Change Style Indicator  
Decision Style Profile  
GoalGetter  
Denison Culture Survey  
Denison Leadership Survey  
Discovery Leadership Profile  
Discovery Leadership Profile for Public Health  
Discovery Leadership Profile for the Public Sector  
Discovery Leadership Profile for Educators

#### **Simulations**

Paper Planes. Inc.  
PressTime  
OurTown  
Paper Scrapers  
AWAKA  
EdgeWork  
The Acquisition

#### **Training Modules**

Right Decisions Made Right



**Discovery Learning, Inc.**  
431 Spring Garden Street  
Greensboro, North Carolina 27401 · USA  
(336) 272-9530 Fax : (336) 273-4090  
[www.discoverylearning.com](http://www.discoverylearning.com)