

TABLE 5.2 Examples of Obstacles in the Work Environment That Inhibit Transfer of Training

Obstacle	Description of Influence
Work Conditions Time pressures Inadequate equipment Few opportunities to use skills Inadequate budget	Trainee has difficulty using new knowledge, skills, or behavior.
Lack of Peer Support Peers: Discourage use of new knowledge and skills on the job Are unwilling to provide feedback See training as waste of time	
Lack of Management Support Management: Does not accept ideas or suggestions that are learned in training Does not discuss training opportunities Opposes use of skills learned in training Communicates that training is a waste of time Is unwilling to provide reinforcement, feedback, and encouragement needed for trainees to use training content	Managers do not reinforce training or provide opportunities to use new knowledge, skills, or behavior.

Based on R. D. Marx, "Self-Managed Skill Retention," *Training and Development Journal* (January 1986): 54–57.

These obstacles inhibit transfer because they cause lapses. **Lapses** take place when the trainee uses previously learned, less effective capabilities instead of trying to apply the capability emphasized in the training program. Lapses into old behavior and skill patterns are common. Trainees should try to avoid a consistent pattern of slipping back or using old, ineffective learned capabilities (e.g., knowledge, skills, behaviors, strategies). Also, trainees should understand that lapses are common and be prepared to cope with them. Trainees who are unprepared for lapses may give up trying to use new capabilities—especially trainees with low self-efficacy and self-confidence.

One way to prepare trainees to deal with these obstacles is to provide instruction in self-management techniques at the end of the training program. Table 5.3 shows an example of self-management instruction. The module begins with a discussion of lapses, emphasizing that lapses are not evidence of personal inadequacy; rather, they result from habits of usage of knowledge and skill that have developed over time. Lapses provide information necessary for improvement. They help identify the circumstances that will have the most negative influence on transfer of training. Next, a specific behavior, skill, or strategy is targeted for transfer. The skill should be measurable and countable. Then, obstacles that inhibit transfer of training are identified; these can include both work environment characteristics and personal characteristics (such as low self-efficacy). Trainees are then provided with an overview of coping skills or strategies that they can use to deal with these obstacles. These skills and strategies include time management,

TABLE 5.3 Sample Content of Self-Management Module

<p>1. Discuss lapses.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note evidence of inadequacy • Provide direction for improvement <p>2. Identify skills targeted for transfer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specify the skills • Make them measurable and countable <p>3. Identify personal or environment factors contributing to lapse.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low self-efficacy • Time pressure • Lack of manager or peer support <p>4. Discuss coping skills and strategies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time management • Setting priorities • Self-monitoring • Self-rewards • Creating a personal support network 	<p>5. Identify when lapses are likely.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Situations • Actions to deal with lapses <p>6. Discuss resources to ensure transfer of skills.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manager • Trainer • Other trainees
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Source: Adapted from R. D. Marx, "Improving Management Development through Relapse Prevention Strategies," *Journal of Management Development* 5 (1986): 27-40; M. L. Broad and J. W. Newstrom, *Transfer of Training* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1992); R. D. Marx and L. A. Burke, "Transfer Is Personal," in *Improving Learning Transfer in Organizations*, ed. E. Holton and T. Baldwin (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003): 227-42.

creating a personal support network (persons to talk with about how to transfer skills to the work setting), and self-monitoring to identify successes in transferring skills to the job. Next, to deal with lapses trainees are instructed to be aware of where the situations are most likely to occur. The final part of the module deals with the use of resources to aid transfer of training. These resources may include communications with the trainer or fellow trainees via e-mail as well as discussions with their boss.

For example, a manager may have attended a training program designed to increase her leadership skills. After a discussion of lapses, the manager identifies a target skill, say, participative decision making—that is, discussing problems and potential solutions with subordinates before making decisions that will affect the work group. The manager defines the skill and how to measure it: "Discussing problems and solutions with my subordinates at least two times each week." Next, the manager identifies factors that may contribute to a lapse. One factor may be the manager's lack of confidence in being able to deal with subordinates who disagree with her view. Potential coping strategies that the manager identifies may include (1) scheduling time on the calendar to meet with subordinates (time management), (2) communicating to the boss the transfer goal and asking for help (create a support group), and (3) taking an assertiveness training course. In what situation may the manager be especially likely to experience a lapse? The manager identifies that she may be most likely to lapse back into an autocratic style when faced with a short time frame for making a decision (time pressure being an obstacle). The manager recognizes that it may be inappropriate to try to gain consensus for a decision when time constraints are severe and subordinates lack expertise. In the last step of the module, the manager suggests that she will (1) meet with her mentor to review her progress, (2) talk with other managers about how they effectively use

participative decision making, and (3) resolve to communicate with other managers who attended the training session with her. The manager also commits to monitoring her use of participative decision making, noting successes and failures in a diary.