

## Twelve factors supporting transfer of learning after participating in the HOPE Exchange Programme

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***Managers at all levels depend on their ability to train and develop the staff competencies to transfer and apply learning from different external settings. This paper argues that it is possible to identify and actively use twelve factors which encourage participants in exchange programmes to bring their learning into play within their own organisation, resulting in observable and constructive behavioural changes<sup>1</sup>.***

The HOPE Exchange Programme, arranged by the European Hospital and Healthcare Federation, is used by 150-170 European healthcare professionals every year. This study presents the experiences of Danish participants in their own organisation after joining the HOPE Exchange Programme<sup>2</sup>.

Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick introduce four levels of evaluation of educational programmes<sup>3</sup>. This study focuses on level three changes in the processes of interaction in the participants' own organisations. These processes provided new possibilities for learning and sense-making as a result of the clash between the individual learning process of the participants and the technical-organisational and social learning environment at their workplace. Thus, the focus is on the changes in behaviour after participating in the HOPE Exchange Programme. The basic assumption is that the more the participants can bring their learning into play, the more likely it is to obtain a positive organisational outcome in the sending organization. To bring learning into play is in this paper an observable and constructive change in the behaviour of participants in HOPE exchange programme. This change provides the possibility for the participants to generate new learning or sense-making to the benefit of both the individual members and the entire sending organisation.

The study identified twelve factors related to either participation in the exchange programme or to the learning environment of the participants' own organisations.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is an extended abstract following a master thesis from t Aalborg University, Denmark at Master of Public Governance January 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Primary data for the study is 8 qualitative interviews with participants from the HOPE exchange programme who were part of the programme in 2013 (2), 2015 (3) and 2016 (3).

<sup>3</sup> Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick 2006 four levels of evaluation of educational programmes 1) *Reaction – measures how those who participate in the programme react to it.* 2) *Learning – the extent to which participants change attitudes, improve knowledge, and/or increase skill as a result of attending the programme.* 3) *Behavior – the extent to which change in behavior has occurred because the participant attended the training programme.* 4) *Results – the final results that occurred because the participants attended the programme.*

## ***12 factors that encourage participants to bring their learning into play within their own organisations***

### *Factors related to participation in the exchange programme*

1. Active involvement of management prior to the exchange
2. Workplace should be involved during the exchange
3. Time out from daily work
4. Management follow up

### *Factors related to the learning environment in the participant's own organisation*

5. Job function
6. High degree of autonomy
7. Access to relevant decision makers and other key persons
8. Reorganisation or other huge development projects'
9. Workload
10. Good and professional relation between participants and their manager
11. Possibility to apply achieved learning in specific assignments
12. Access to multidisciplinary fora

These twelve factors are in this paper presented and should be considered as recommendations. In different settings or situations, one factor is perhaps more important, relevant or available than others. You can as a participant, a manager of a participant or organiser of the exchange programme try to activate and use one or more of these twelve factors. In different kinds of organisations and relations, these factors or some of them are a natural part of everyday life, which makes it much easier to use them. In other situations, participants may bring their learning into play even though they have no support from any of these factors. However, if you as a responsible manager, a participant in the exchange programme or an organiser of the exchange programme do not pay attention to these factors, participants will in the best of all worlds bring their learning into play in an unstructured way and the timing will also be coincidental.

### *Factors related to participation in the exchange programme*

When participating in an exchange programme you are blessed with a special setting or occasion. The exchange programme as a learning setting includes the opportunity to work with some special factors which are not necessarily easy to access in an everyday work life setting. The HOPE Exchange Programme where you have to leave your job and family for nearly five weeks is a unique learning setting for participants from the healthcare sector.

When entering the HOPE exchange programme, management should take an active part in the preparations by ***defining the boundaries and/or focus points prior to the exchange***. In this way the management supports the participant's preparation, creates a platform from which the participant can communicate and clarifies the demand for or wishes to actually receive input from the participants

after returning from the exchange. In an open learning session with multiple possibilities, such as the HOPE Exchange Programme, it is on the other hand important not to exclude learning possibilities by too narrow boundaries and/or focus points by the management. An important part of the HOPE Exchange Programme is to be able to seize opportunities as they occur. All in all it is important to involve management in the preparations.

During the exchange, the **workplace should be involved through e.g. newsletters** or more direct dialogue using Facebook or other social media. When being in a dialogue with your workplace it forces the participants to start reflecting on how and why input could be relevant to the workplace at home already during the exchange. Furthermore, an active dialogue provides many possibilities for interactions after returning from the exchange. More people will have heard of and can contribute with more stories, incidents, ideas etc. Apart from this involvement, the participants should not (or only to a very limited degree) be obliged to manage their job in their sending organisation during participation in the HOPE Exchange Programme. To have a **time out from the daily setting and work** is a unique possibility to step back and reflect on the job, special challenges etc. An important effect of the time out from your daily setting and work is that it will allow the participants to fully participate and actually see and explore what they meet in the exchange programme. As an additional window of opportunity, some sending organisations let talents in their organisation try to step up and face new and bigger responsibilities when the organisation sends a participant to participate in the exchange programme.

Returning from the exchange, **management follow up** is extremely important. It is important that management follows up regularly on the application of the achieved learning in the organisation and reflects on how this is done. Learning would much more likely be put into play if management not only supports it but also requests it. The study showed a clear positive effect among participants who had a dialogue with their management about how, where and when it could be relevant to bring the learning points into action. When reflecting with the management on how, where and when, you open up to use participants' experiences strategically and actively. When returning from an exchange it is furthermore important for the participants to experience that they can bring their learning into play **quite fast and/or in relevant situations**. Timing is of course important. It is better to wait for a relevant situation than to try to force unrealistic settings to work. When the participants' experience that they can bring learning points into action in relevant settings, they are encouraged to try again. This is a more explicit situation than the implicit feeling many participants describe as "the experience is just a part of me and follows me in everything I do".

### *Factors related to the learning environment in the participant's own organisation*

Even though the participants in the HOPE Exchange Programme have access to factors related to participation in the exchange programme, they still meet the challenges of everyday life at home. The following factors relate to the learning environment in the participants' organisations. These factors can, similar to the factors related to participating in the exchange, support and encourage the participants to bring their learning into play. The same factors can on the other hand also effectively

kill any attempt to change behaviour and thereby the possibilities to gain a positive result in the sending organisation.

Upon return to the workplace of the participants, the study found the following five factors in relation to the technical-organisational learning environment<sup>4</sup>. The **job functions** such as work tasks and positions of the participants have a great impact on the possible application of the learning in the organisation. If the participant is a manager, it makes it easier to bring the learning into play. The participant then has the autonomy and power to test different kinds of learning points in own department. If the participant is a key person in the organisation, he or she will often have access to valuable cross organisational and internal processes. In these processes there tend to be better possibilities to bring learning points into play. It is easier to bring in your examples and test your ideas if you have a central voice in the organisation. Furthermore, the participant should have a **high degree of autonomy** regarding where, how and when the learning is brought into play. Autonomy and the ability to plan your own work is often but not always related to the job function. The third factor related to the technical-organisational learning environment is that participants should have easy **access to relevant decision makers and other key persons**. This does not necessarily follow the traditional organisational structures and the job function. As a former participant in the HOPE Exchange Programme, you have special knowledge and competencies. However, in an environment with many people and opinions fighting for attention, the organisation does not always pay attention to this. In relation to the technical-organisational learning environment the study shows that if there is **reorganisation or other huge development projects** going on in the organisation, it is more likely that the participants will bring their learning into play. In other words, if things are changing there is a window of opportunity and it is more likely that new input and different perspectives will be introduced. The last thing regarding the technical-organisational learning environment is the **workload**. If the participants face a very heavy workload with no or very limited time or place to test new ideas or to bring their learning into play it will reduce the possibilities to do so.

Upon return to the participants' workplaces, this study found three factors regarding the social learning environment<sup>5</sup>. First of all, it is important with a **good professional relation between the participant and the manager**, where the manager pays positive attention to the effect of the participant's efforts. If the management systematically works and reflects together with the participant on subjects such as managerial competencies, when and why the participant succeeds and when and why is it difficult, it is more likely that the participants will bring their learning into play. Secondly, it should be **possible to apply achieved learning in specific assignments**, actions and processes. The study showed that it is more likely that the participants bring their learning into play if they are part of and involved in relevant processes and assignments. It is very important not only to participate because of your name – but because you have to contribute to the process or assignment. Lastly, the participants should have **access to multidisciplinary fora** and/or processes where they have the

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<sup>4</sup> The technical-organizational learning environment is the technical and organizational conditions that determine the conditions for learning in the organization (Jørgensen & Warring 2002).

<sup>5</sup> The social learning environment is the social mechanisms and relationships that determine the conditions for learning in the organization (Jørgensen & Warring 2002).

opportunity to exchange and develop the learning points. As a participant in the HOPE Exchange Programme you participate in a multidisciplinary programme, not a clinical or technical programme. Therefore insights and learning points from the exchange programme are not simple solutions of "do it like this". Through more or less formally structured multidisciplinary fora or networks, it is possible to challenge the learning points (ideas, approaches or methods) obtained during participating in the HOPE exchange programme.

### *You can support and encourage learning being brought into play*

The conclusion of this paper is that different factors can support and encourage learning being brought into play after participating in an exchange programme such as the HOPE Exchange Programme. Depending on the participant, the specific setting and organisational processes, the different factors can be more or less important or relevant. If you do not have the best organisational setting in your sending organization or the "right" position, you can as a participant use some of the other factors to help you bring your learning into play. If the management does not pay very much attention to your ideas or you have very limited autonomy, you can use an exchange programme such as the HOPE Exchange Programme as a special landmark to start a dialogue with him or her (or the level above your manager).

The different factors can be used actively and reflected on by

- *managers* (or supporting HR departments) sending out candidates through an exchange programme,
- *candidates* participating in an exchange programme, and
- *organisers* of or responsible persons in the exchange programme.

Depending on which of the positions you hold, you can support or create these factors more or less directly. If convenient, you can also strategically create a demand for these factors. All of the above will increase the possibility for a participant bringing his or her learning into play within their organisation, resulting in observable and constructive changes in behaviour. The purpose of this is to gain a better organisational outcome or result.

### *References*

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