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Skills and Innovation for Adult Social Care

LEADERSHIP IN WORK-BASED LEARNING DIGITAL LEARNING PROGRAMME FOR SOCIAL CARE MANAGERS AND COMMISSIONERS

MODULE 5: IDENTIFICATION OF INFORMAL LEARNING TAKING PLACE IN
WORKPLACE SETTINGS AND VALIDATING TRANSFERABLE SKILLS FOR
PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

LAPIS RESEARCH PROJECT
LEARNING FOR ADULT SOCIAL CARE PRACTICE INNOVATIONS AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT
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IDENTIFICATION OF INFORMAL LEARNING TAKING PLACE IN WORKPLACE SETTINGS AND VALIDATING TRANSFERABLE SKILLS FOR PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

Learning Objectives

By taking this module you will be able to:

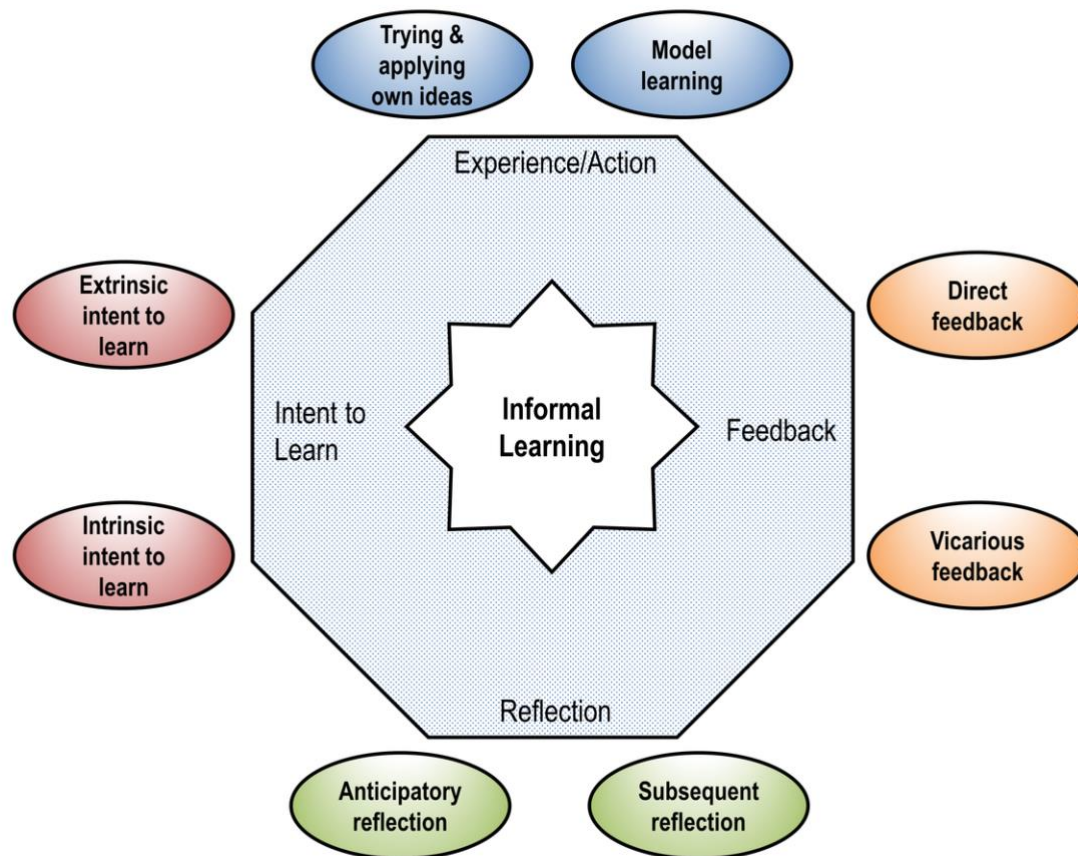
- **define** what informal learning is
- **compare** informal learning from non-formal and formal learning
- **evaluate** your own learning process
- **distinguish** between learning trends in the workplace
- **list** different assessment tools
- **identify** informal learning situations in the workplace
- **recognise** skills acquired through informal learning

What is informal learning?

Informal learning is a type of learning that happens every day, whether we realize it or not. Informal learning is a relatively new term and is associated with organic learning in an unstructured form. Typical mechanisms of informal learning include trial and error or learning-by-doing, modeling, feedback, and reflection. It generally happens naturally and inadvertently with the learner stumbling into a learning situation.

In fact, informal learning is the way we evolve every day. An example is how we learn new words by reading books. Or by watching a cooking show, we discover our new favorite recipe. It happened spontaneously or asynchronously, and even though the learner may not have been aware of it, it's learning nonetheless.

In the diagram below you can see the Octagon Model by Decius, according to which informal learning has 8 elements that can be assigned to 4 factors.



Octagon Model by Decius

Difference between formal and informal learning

When talking about workplace learning, organizations most often focus on formal training, missing the benefits of stimulated and moderated informal learning in a work atmosphere.

Formal training may happen in a classroom or within a team. Classroom learning is often trainer-centered, where the trainer decides its direction and content. Formal training within teams happens with a learning schedule and set agenda.

Formal learning is well-structured with:

- Clear objectives

- A detailed course plan
- Goals/milestones
- Assessments

On the other hand, informal learning is usually pretty spontaneous. It's when you:

- Peak over into the other cubicle.
- Hop on an offline zoom call with a teammate.
- Have downtime after running through agenda items.
- Ask your manager to send over instructions.

Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T3AyQDyV_oc

Activity 1:

Decide whether the statements below are true or false.

Statements	True/False
Informal learning has defined goals and scope	
Learning by doing is form of informal learning	
Formal learning is often trainer-centered, where the trainer decides its direction and content	
Formal learning can happen spontaneously and can happen in conversation with a colleague	
Organisation often focuses on formal training missing the benefits of the informal learning in the workplace setting	

Breakdown of answers:

1. **False:** Informal learning is associated with organic learning in an unstructured form
2. **True:** Learning by doing is typical mechanism of informal learning
3. **True:** Formal learning usually happen in a classroom where the training is the leader of the process

4. **False:** Formal learning is structured and requires detailed plan and set of goals
5. **True:** True because more organizations are not recognizing informal learning and its benefits for staff growth and are focusing on formal training

Informal learning in work-based settings

Observations show that up to 90% of every adult's learning occurs outside of educational institutions.

This is best expressed in the 70-20-10 model, where its creators at the Center for Creative Leadership, a nonprofit educational institution in Greensboro, N.C. The three, Morgan McCall, Michael M. Lombardo and Robert A. Eichinger, predict a distribution in learning where 70% is informal, 20% occurs in interaction with others and only 10% come from formal learning.

This large percentage is becoming increasingly significant for professionals because it enables them to discover and refine their job-related skills, make decisions, address challenges and interact with influential people such as bosses and mentors within work settings. They also learn from their mistakes and receive immediate feedback on their performance.

This is why this module focuses on the benefits of informal learning in the workplace:

- ❖ It was initiated by the student: According to the adult learning theory, when learning is in their control the effectivity is highest. They control the process and this makes them feel involved and interested in the learning
- ❖ The employees feel relaxed: Although formal training courses are mandatory and necessary, they create tension with deadlines, assignments, exams, etc., which is lacking in informal learning.
- ❖ Develops the competencies of employees and their professional portfolio: By stimulating employees to explore a particular topic, they potentially discover new thoughts, theories, and processes that broaden their knowledge. This is good, both for themselves as professionals, but also for the quality of services provided by the organization
- ❖ It saves your business time, money and resources: Some training needs to be formalized, but some of it doesn't. And when it doesn't this means your team can skip developing a learning plan, building tailor-made content, and more. Your employee just learns when they want and need to with limited effort required from you.

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N1t3hUFcljo&t=18s>

Reflection

Take 5-10 minutes after reading this section and try to list at least three benefits of promoting informal learning in the workplace.

- Was it easy?
- Which ones came to your mind first?

Informal learning examples for the workplace

Listing the benefits of informal learning in the workplace, we outlined the need to stimulate it in every organization. Most likely, it is happening without you even noticing it. So below are some examples of how to support it in your organisation.

- Encourage a knowledge-share culture

For your employees to learn informally, it's helpful that they know that they're in an environment that not only allows but actively advocates on-the-job learning. To do this, seek opportunities that enable your employees to share the valuable information they've learned. Ask your staff to gather up-to-date material to present at the monthly operational meeting or designated sharing forums

- Collate valuable resources for employees

A place to share knowledge is a beneficial first step, but offering a space for your learners to find useful information adds another level. Whether it's in a shared Google Drive or Dropbox, you should collate worthwhile materials for your employees. Then when they want to research information, they can log in and self-select a resource to read in their own time that will help them learn more about a specific subject.

- Offer social learning

A major aspect of informal learning is social. We gain a good deal of our knowledge from observing and interacting with the people around us. Within the work environment, there are lots of ways you can develop this. For one, there are good old face-to-face chats at desks or over lunch breaks. Alternatively, there is a forum, a work-centered place where your employees come together, chat, ask questions, and learn.

- Allocate time to learn

A place to share, resources to read, and discussion to be had, now all your employees need is time to learn informally. Again, this comes down to encouraging them. Communicate with your employees and let them know that if they have an area of interest they're free to research it. If they're learning valuable information about their role and how to perform better, then it's time well spent.

Test your understanding

Below are two columns, draw lines to link up the examples of informal WBL with the most suitable format. We have completed one as an example.

<i>Examples for WBL</i>	<i>Format</i>
Encourage a knowledge-share culture	Annual briefings, staff meetings
Allocate time to learn	World Café
Offer social learning	Case studies
Collate valuable resources for employees	A digital or physical space to collect up-to-date information related to the performance of your staff

Validation of Informal learning

Validation of skills allows people to be able to use the full range of their skills for their careers and further learning.

The need to a validation of skills acquired through informal learning is becoming increasingly relevant. In the field of adult social care, various transferable skills are formed in the process of work rather than through formal organised training.

Their validation provides an opportunity to:

- learners to identify and track their professional growth, which contributes to their confidence and professional fulfilment
- employers to plan and manage their staff more effectively

The methods for assessing skills formed through informal learning are not very different from those used in the formal learning system.

Before the assessment tool can be selected it is important to look at the learning to be assessed. It is generally accepted that the following criteria need to be considered:

- the range of competences being assessed.;
- depth of learning required;
- how current or recent are the knowledge, skills and competence;
- what are the dimensions of sufficiency in terms of competences;
- how credible is the evidence of learning that the learner provides

Having determined the basis of learning, it is important to choose the appropriate assessment tool based on the following criteria:

- ❖ validity: the tool must measure what it is intended to measure;
- ❖ reliability: the extent to which identical results would be achieved every time a candidate is assessed under the same conditions;
- ❖ fairness: the extent to which an assessment decision is free from bias (context dependency, culture and assessor bias);
- ❖ cognitive range: does the tool enable assessors to judge the breadth and depth of the candidate's learning;
- ❖ fitness for purpose of the assessment: ensuring the purpose of the assessment tool matches the use for which it is intended

Reflection:

Have you thought before about the opportunities for validating informal learning in your organisation?

After reading this section, take 15 minutes to consider situations in which assessing and validating competences formed through informal learning would be effective for your organisation.

Was it easy for you to identify such situations?

Assessment Methods

We have listed several methods you can use to assess and validate the skills of your staff.

- ❖ Debate: Candidates can, by taking part in debate, confirm their capacity to sustain a considered argument and demonstrate depth of adequate knowledge of a subject. The debate also offers a context where they can demonstrate communication and social skills.
- ❖ Interview: Interviews may be particularly useful in areas where judgement and values are important. Interviews usually accompany other tools for a more complete assessment of a candidate and to allow for commentary and clarification.
- ❖ Observation: This method allows the assessment of employee performance in a practical environment. It is important to have defined criteria for the observation beforehand.
- ❖ Portfolio method: A portfolio is an organised collection of materials that presents and verifies skills and knowledge acquired through experience. It is of particular relevance to validating non-formal and informal learning because it allows the individual candidate to contribute actively to the collection of evidence and also offers a mix of approaches strengthening the overall validity of the process. This is confirmed by the fact that many countries have introduced the portfolio as a central element in their validation approaches.
- ❖ Presentation: Presenting a case study to colleagues as an opportunity to present professionally formed competencies, but also soft ones.

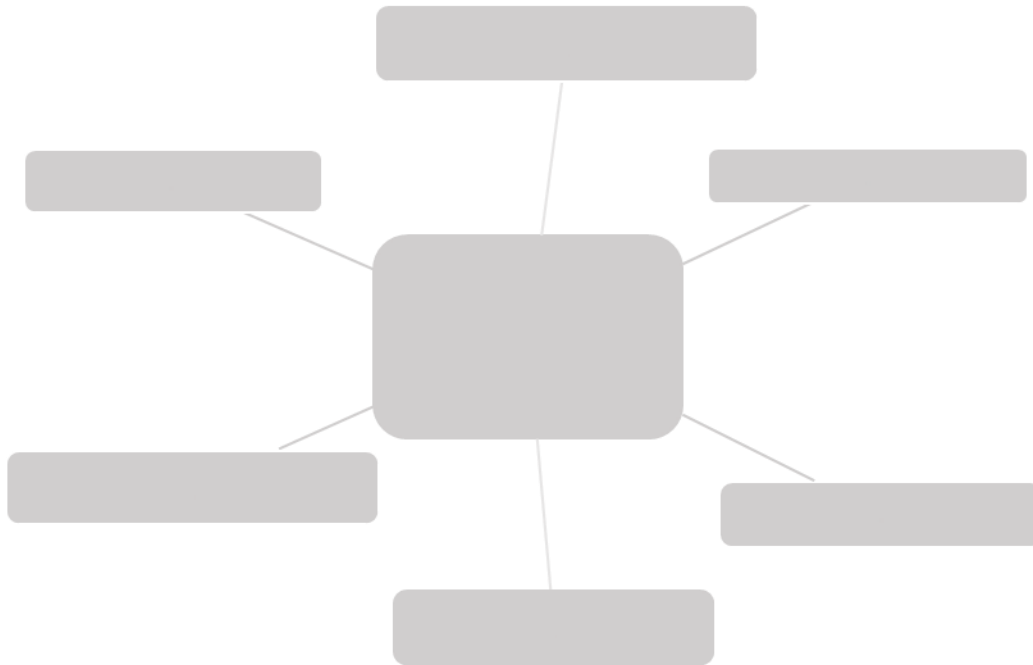
Task

Topic portfolio for publishing

How to find a topic

1. What is the broader topic?

2. Which terms and ideas do you associate with the broader topic? Collect them in a mind map – add as many fields as you want.



3. If needed, do some quick research on the internet or in books on the topic and add the results to the mind map.

4. Mark the subtopics you are most interested in.

5. Which strengths and competences of yours can you make use of when working on the respective topic?

6. Describe the subtopic you have decided on in a few words. What is your research interest?

How to plan a portfolio

Broader topic:

My personal subtopic:

My research questions:

Planned form of publication:

Ideas on completing the obligatory tasks:

Ideas on completing additional, free tasks:

Planned

work

steps:

Required material:

How to write a preface and an epilogue

Guiding questions to write a preface:

- What do I want to do?
- Why did I choose the topic?
- What is particularly important for me?
- What are my research questions?
- What are my objectives?

Guiding questions to write a self-reflection on one's working process (in the epilogue or, if an epilogue isn't used, in the preface)

- How was the development process of the portfolio?
- What did I do well in?
- Which obstacles did I encounter?
- Which ideas did I not use and why?
- What did I learn?
- Which of my skills and competences did I prove in the portfolio?
- What would I do in a different way the next time?