

# Adaptive Transfer Capacity Within Customizable Simulations

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 **THE REGIS COMPANY®**

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## Executive Summary

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We are wired to learn. Yet, most people are not great learners. It's not entirely their fault, however. Traditional training methods focus on knowledge-based learning, which helps create individuals who are adept at a certain set of limited challenges – a useful skill, to be sure. Unfortunately, this kind of training does not teach workers to adapt their thinking to a wide spectrum of problems, or to problems that haven't yet been defined or encountered. It also doesn't show them the interconnected nature of organizations, where one decision has a domino effect systemwide.

As the world and organizations grow increasingly complex, workers must learn to rethink past assumptions and change their perspectives. In other words, optimize their adaptive transfer capacity to become true Value Workers. Employees who add substantial value in unique situations are called Value Workers because their value is continuously greater than their cost to the organization. Systems thinking and adaptive learning are two key elements found in such workers.

This white paper touches upon:

- **The Shortfalls of Traditional Training**
- **Rethinking Thinking Through High Adaptive Transfer Capacity**
- **The Role of Simulations in Stimulating Learning**

## The Shortfalls of Traditional Training

Teaching methods are based on old thought patterns and have done little to prepare people with the abilities to adapt. The professional instructional design community, which should be at the forefront of innovation, often falls into the familiar “teach to the objective” approach, reducing training to linear chunks of information laced with knowledge checks and bound by pre- and post-assessments in hopes that students will eventually “get it.”

Recently, many organizations have jumped onto the technology and gamification wagon, adding badges, gifting, virtual goods, and leader boards to spruce up training. The good news, for the most part, is that these techniques have improved completion rates. The overall result, however, is still the same: learners may know a bit more, but they are not capable of doing more.

## Rethinking Thinking Through High Adaptive Transfer Capacity

There is a better way to create environments that allow people to rethink their thinking. We can generate positive and lasting behavior change that helps individuals and, ultimately, organizations perform and treat one another better – or, more simply put, teach individuals to become Value Workers. Becoming a Value Worker only happens if what people learn in the classroom can be applied to different situations – through transfer and capacity.

“Transfer,” to the training professional, is the Holy Grail. It means how much of what is learned within the learning arena can be applied back to the workplace. We define two levels of transfer:

- Situational transfer, where you can apply what you learned to similar situations
- Adaptive transfer, where you can adapt what you learned to a variety of situations

There is another dimension to transfer that we call capacity. For learning to occur, there needs to be a modicum of transfer at some later point. So, if someone remembers a few facts and fun stories and can later recall those facts, then some level of learning has occurred. This is not very impressive, but it is the most common outcome of training. The goal, then, is to increase the capacity of the learner while learning.

Capacity correlates with the amount of information that an individual retains and is capable of applying after the learning program. If an individual can transfer many newly learned skills to different situations, then the learning program is said to have a high adaptive transfer capacity.

Obviously, learning that has a high adaptive transfer capacity is the most desirable for improving an individual's value potential and for the organizations who are trying to get the most out of their training budget. When it comes to developing how-to-think learners, this level of transfer is also imperative. The right kind of immersive simulation teaching tool can help ensure a high adaptive transfer capacity.

## The Role of Simulations in Stimulating Learning

So how do we create scenarios that optimize individuals' adaptive transfer capacity? We have spent a considerable amount of time and resources rethinking traditional principles and evaluating assessment techniques focused on improving the value of individuals. We've seen firsthand how simulations can improve adaptive transfer capacity.

Closely aligning a simulation with an organization's challenges and goals for change heightens relevancy for participants, as does incorporating the organization's specific scenarios, data, competitive pressures, culture, and language. This relevancy assures the learning exercises are as close to real life as possible, increasing the likelihood that lessons can be easily transferred from simulation to job.

Simulations featuring repetitive practice offer individuals ample opportunity to gain new insights without the fear of actual consequences. Learners can explore new strategies and subsequent outcomes within the simulation that directly relate to their work world. Periods of reflection between successive lessons are key to solidifying these new ways of thinking.

Progressive rounds within the same simulation reveal the systemwide impacts of decisions – an enormously important change agent. This cause-and-effect approach accelerates learning and leads to powerful aha moments.

Building in an emotional throttle further increases participant engagement and strengthens learning. We know that when people are actually involved in making substantive decisions that mirror real-life challenges within a carefully constructed simulation, their adaptive transfer capacity spikes. Learners care about the outcome and are emotionally invested in “winning” or doing well within the simulation.

Effective simulations also present substantial cognitive challenges to learners. We aim our simulations one or two levels higher than the participant’s current skill set. Learners are encouraged to reach but are not overwhelmed by

the situation. These challenging mental tasks cause participants to give the simulation their full attention, to take chances and to learn from their decisions.

The ultimate outcome for a simulation is high adaptive transfer capacity within individuals, which leads to immediate and lasting organizational change.

### Summary

In over a 100 simulated events, The Regis Company has studied the types of simulations that create and hone Value Workers. Simulations that reflect the challenges and explicit learning goals of an organization have the most likelihood of generating immediate and lasting change – or a high adaptive transfer capacity within workers.

### About the Author

**Mike Vaughan** is the managing director and president of The Regis Company, and the author of *The Thinking Effect: Rethinking Thinking to Create Great Leaders and the New Value Worker*, (TheThinkingEffect.com) as well as *The End of Training: How Simulations are Reshaping Business*. The Regis Company is one of the top leadership development consulting firms, specializing in customized, immersive simulations for Fortune 500 clients and government agencies.

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