

# Educating leaders on learning

[Business](#), [Management](#)



It is often assumed by management at University of Tennessee Health Science Center (UTHSC) that the people who work there obtain their training before they accept the job at UT or that they are already trained in their job, but what happens when it's time to innovate, create new processes and implement new systems? Leadership either is unaware or underestimates the progression in intentional learning and how long it will take for people to learn new processes and new systems.

Because a person has a job, does not mean that they stop learning. Learning is a lifelong process that should be embraced first by leadership and trickled down to the employees. Therefore, this paper focuses on educating leadership about learning, so that they will realize that learning is intentional and there is a method that should take place to learn new processes, and more specifically for the sake of this paper, the fleet management system and maybe to improve the system rollout so that people can learn it faster.

The learning potential of employees at UTHSC depends on leadership. That learning potential is the participation in new implementations; employees' motivation to learn; and the opportunities that the atmosphere makes available to learn on-the-job and the application of knowledge, skills, and competence. An organization or institution that engrains learning in tasks benefits to the creation of a learning culture in the organization and it helps employees to continue to be a student in their job. Operant and active leadership at an institution such as the University of Tennessee Health Science Center makes a difference in refining the learning skills of the employees, especially when it comes to getting familiar with new systems that have been or will be implemented. Even though it is clear about the

huge role effective leadership plays in the learning process at UT, what is not so clear is to what extent leadership matters when it comes to those thought-provoking tasks, which involves peer learning and applying new knowledge.

In my opinion, UT needs to develop and improve leadership to alter our workplace into one that inspires learning. To enable employees to become much more proficient in a particular field or become a subject matter expert while implementing a system, work-based learning needs to be combined with more structured and systematic learning. Repetitive work patterns not only hinder learning but, eventually, have a deskilling effect.

I think the impact of leadership tends to be greatest in UT's Facilities Department where the learning needs of employees are most critical. In this Solutions Paper, I will be focusing on educating leadership and the employees in the Facilities Department, since the Fleet Management System will be implemented in Facilities first, then introduced to the entire Campus to use for car reservations. Leadership has to set directions by establishing high expectations and mapping a clear course for managers, supervisors, and team leaders that everyone comprehends. This can be done by developing staff members and providing the necessary support and training to succeed; nonetheless, by ensuring that the entire range of conditions and incentives in the department fully supports, rather than inhibits teaching and learning.

Without any documented evidence and just from my firsthand experience by working at UT, my observations suggest that successful leadership can and

does play a highly significant and frequently underestimated role in improving employee learning. The capacities and motivations from the leaders will significantly determine the effects of such contexts on employees. At best, my observations allow me to infer suggestions and solutions that leaders, managers, supervisors, and team leaders will need to implement, while identifying leadership practices that are successful in adhering to those suggestions and solutions. Those suggestions and solutions should first be to start motivating employees, then focusing on and modifying environmental factors that influence learning.

**Motivating**

As a key suggestion and solution for leaders in Facilities, motivating employees should be priority in enhancing performance, and the cognitive process. Motivation affects what staff members pay attention to and how effectively they understand and to what extent they truly learn the Fleet Management System, especially if the behaviors and cognitive processes necessary for learning are voluntary and under our control. Furthermore, once we learn how to do something, motivation is largely responsible for whether we continue to do it (Ormrod, 2016).

What I've seen in other departments at UT is that motivation has led to improved performance and the employees who are most motivated to learn and outshine in their work are the ones that has received good performance reviews. That is why motivation is one of the suggestions and solutions that I think leadership should adopt.

Due to UT Facilities employees' lack of motivation, the feeling of frustration and annoyance has blocked their efficiency and happiness. As a solution, I'm hoping that the employees' level of motivation will increase their engagement and impact, and this will in turn create a natural learning environment. As in other departments, the active and highly motivated employees naturally get involved in activities without expecting any external rewards. But meanwhile, to encourage the low motivated employees in Facilities, the external rewards are needed to convince them to participate in a learning environment.

**Modifying environmental factors**

By focusing on and altering environmental factors that affect learning, behaviorist and social cognitive theorists give us reason for optimism about helping learners obtain more advanced learning skills (Omrod p. 139).

Social cognitive theory is associated with behaviorist Albert Bandura and is a learning theory that examines how thoughts, feelings, and social interactions form the learning process. It is most commonly applied in educational settings but can and should be applied just as often in an organization where processes and systems are new, and where employees really needs to be trained. It centers around some of the cognitive processes that employees engage in when they are learning through observation and socialization.

**Vicarious Learning**

Another solution is indirect learning; this is the same as social learning and is also known as vicarious learning. At UT, this is the process that takes place when an employee picks up the same behaviors and skills just by simply

watching what team leaders are doing. The employee observes what the team leader is doing, then later the employee will try to put into action or imitate that same behavior they observed or learned.

Facilities team leaders have to do what needs to be done by acting out the behavior that the employees need to learn in the fleet management system. Teaching behavior via the social learning theory is team leaders demonstrating the step by step the processes in the system. Instead of team leaders simply telling the subordinates what they want them to do or handing them a process map, team leaders has to perform the steps, physically demonstrating the steps they hope the subordinates under them will repeat and follow. By seeing the steps in action, subordinates will have a more defined understanding of what the behavior feels like and experience more achievement in carrying out the action.

### **On -the- Job Learning**

To learn by watching other employees do the job is common and called on-the-job learning and it is the reason new hires or less experienced employees are often paired with experienced employees or subject matter experts when learning new things or for the first time. At UT, I think this is one of the best solutions the staff in Facilities can learn the new Fleet Management System, which is much more effective than reading a training handout or process map.

The Facilities Department is the on-the-job learning location for the Fleet Management System. Employees should be in its natural normal environment, but in the past, the team leaders in facilities had supported or

offered detailed guidance, almost as though they expect the employees to learn through osmosis; that is/was a mistake. Leadership has to be reminded that on-the-job learning is not a shortcut, or a cost cutting method, but a different vehicle for developing and growing people and their skills. It is training that takes place in its natural normal environment.

Next, team leaders should encourage the employees to imitate their behaviors. This needs to be done in two ways: First, team leaders can directly tell the employee that they want them to imitate exactly what they just saw. Secondly, they should allow employees to show their modeled behavior to their peers, allowing them to see that this is the behavior that all workers should adopt.

As employees imitate the learned behavior, team leaders have to observe the employee as the behavior is carried out. Team leaders should keep a constant eye on employees, making sure that they are following the procedures they modeled. If the employees are found not to be following the procedures and makes a mistake, the leader should step in and allow the employee to understand the mistake that was made, then correct the employee's behavior, encouraging him try to continue to adapt his behavior, even if a mistake was made.

Learning is enhanced when we allow employees to make mistakes. If the employees are allowed to make a mistake, it will motivate and challenge them to learn to try a new approach. But establishing consequences for repetitive mistakes and intentional behavior deviation is important. When employees continuously fail due to not wanting to put forward the effort at

what leaders are trying to endorse, there must be consequences for doing so. The consequences should be something as simple as a verbal correction first, then leading up to more severe sanctions. Employees should really focus on effortful control, that is restraining themselves from making impulsive responses that are unlikely to be productive (Omrod, p. 135)

Even though some people naturally know how to self-regulate, others don't, but there is one particular strategy that can help employees gain control of their own behavior and that is called self-control; self-control includes self-instructions.

### **Self-Instructions**

Team Leaders should introduce the approach of self-instructions to cut down on the unnecessary mistakes and help guide employees' behavior. Leaders should teach employees the steps on giving themselves instructions on guiding their own behavior. Those steps are (1) Cognitive modeling – The team leader acts out the task while speaking the instruction on exactly what they are doing, (2) Overt, external guidance – The employee performs the task while listening to the team leader instructions, (3) Overt self-guidance – The employee repeats the instructions out loud while performing the task, (4) Faded, overt self-guidance – The employee whispers the instruction while performing the task, (5) Covert self-instruction – The employees silently thinks about the instructions while performing the task (Omrod, p. 136).

If team leaders would proactively guide the employees through self-instructions, the employee will then start to experience self-efficacy.



**Self-Efficacy**

Self-efficacy is a self-fulfilling important part of the social cognitive theory. If facilities employees believe they can learn the fleet management system successfully, they can learn processes and other things successfully. The definition of self-efficacy is a person's confidence and belief that they have about their ability to successfully perform a certain behavior. The social cognitive theory not only describes how employees can learn from others, but also describes how employees learn on their own through each of the above steps of self-instructions. This does not occur unless employees display self-control. This will allow facilities employees to learn a behavior even when external reinforcement and or team leaders are not telling them they should. Employees should be rewarded for displaying self-control, and team leaders should step back and observe.

Leadership and employees should always think about being a student on their job. If an employee stop learning as a student on the job, that employee really is not doing their job. That employee might be in a particular role or position, but yet still doing themselves disservice. Learning about their job should be exciting. Learning how to be more efficient, how to be better, and/or how to lead in “ their” work space is so much easier when their paradigms are focused on enjoying the fact that learning is everything. Learning is your job. Learning is my job. Learning is their job. Learning is the job.