



Accelerating the Integration of New Skills and Tools on the Job

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The Context

In its work with clients, The Forum Corporation emphasizes leveraging a variety of channels (online tools, manager coaching kits, and process-generated scripts and questions) in a planned approach to supporting application of learning back on the job. Our clients have achieved significant results from this approach, but there's still a substantial shortfall in achieving rapid adoption (speed-to-value) and sustained application (value-over-time) from learning.

We face an inflection point. We can stay in the same frame for sustaining learning: providing more effective tools, increased accountability, more frequent coaching, and more rewards. Or we can reframe our thinking about what it takes to master new skills and behaviors so we can achieve real and sustained changes in people's performance and in the workplace.

The Problem

Why do many traditional sustainment approaches fail to produce the desired results? Because the typical performance support tools are rational solutions to rational **and** emotional problems. A knowledge worker who has participated in a learning event rationally understands the value of the support and reinforcement tools available, but may not be motivated to use them. And, as time goes by, his or her ability to recall the initial perceived value of the tools diminishes, causing the likelihood of any real performance change to slip away.

A New Approach Defined

To make any significant shift, people need to experience progress quickly and pleurably, a common practice used in the best of game design. Games enable people to be enthusiastic about applying new skills to work situations and help produce tangible results through performance improvement. There is also a desirable paradox about the use of a game experience for workplace learning. At face value, the game appears to be an alluring escape

from the reality of the workplace; in actuality, it is an ideal environment in which to master skills and tools that help people cope with the reality they seek to escape!

Forum has blended its [Sustain to Attain](#) model with the defining traits of game-play to ensure that behavior change sticks in the work environment. This powerful approach supports people's efforts to apply skills consistently on the job by engaging them in a game experience that takes them through a defined mastery process. Accelerated results are achieved by focusing on intentional, targeted efforts and deliberate practice. Frequent interactions with colleagues and others, exposure to new challenges, focused goal setting, and opportunities for practice and knowledge sharing ensure that participants experience recognized progress over time.

Mastery Process Characteristics

The Forum Corporation calls this innovative approach to mastering skills Speed to Mastery™ (STM™). STM™ is a highly personalized experience that blends collaboration opportunities and game dynamics to create a game-changing approach to sustainment. The process is derived from a combination of principles of workplace learning, game design, and behavioral change and motivation. Its seven characteristics are:

1. **Play.** "To learn, we must explore new things. To motivate our exploration, our brain encourages play."¹ Until recently, the use of play in corporate learning activities has been marginal. The explosion of computer and video games today means an increasing number of "gaming virtuosos" who look for ways to put their highly developed gaming skills into practice. Many of these virtuosos log more than 10,000 hours of gaming before they turn 21 years old. Their brains are wired for play, and they understand the value of games as accelerators of learning.

STM™ leverages the traits of play²: goals, rules, feedback, and voluntary participation. STM™ players

encounter a series of escalating challenges at three levels (Apprentice 1, Apprentice 2, and Master); they experience the thrill of victory and receive recognition for their progress as they advance through each of the levels of the game.

- 2. Clarify.** A clear intention, a determined destination, and a path to the destination are needed for individual behavior change. Individuals must be able to confidently answer the question “Where am I going and why?”

In STM™ players declare their aspirations and their intention to learn in their written “Mastery Manifesto.” This helps them to identify what they want to learn as well as how and why they want to learn it. As they progress through the system, players clarify their path by marking milestones and timelines, focusing on the “leader board” to determine what they can achieve.

- 3. Commit.** Achieving a change requires both “brain in the game” and “fire in the belly”—a combination of rational and emotional commitment. In *Immunity to Change*, Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey describe commitment as the “source of what moves us—the motivation and energy to take on adaptive change challenges.”

In STM™ the Mastery Manifesto engages players in rational analysis of the tasks they are performing and connects them to the experience emotionally as they define their desires and beliefs relative to the importance of the tasks. Easy access to the Mastery Manifesto throughout the STM™ journey helps players stay committed.

- 4. Choose.** People need “autonomy over task (what they do), time (when they do it), team (with whom they do it), and technique (how they do it)” to be motivated.³

STM™ maximizes individual choices by providing players with the freedom to choose the “what, when, with whom, and how” aspects of the experience. Players set their own time frames, choose their own activities at each level, and engage with the people they want to work with on their challenges.

- 5. Act.** Adopting new skills and experiencing changes in behavior and performance require action. As Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey explain, “Through action we discover the benefits of an increased repertoire of behaviors and the sense of excitement, accomplishment, and mastery that comes from making progress on our change goals.”

The heart of STM™ is a series of options for action, organized by level. Each action relates to applying the focal skills and tools from the formal learning program players experienced before entering the STM™ process.

- 6. Repeat.** Behavior change requires repetition over time; newly formed and solidified patterns must become so automatic they also become instinctive.

STM™ players experience six challenge rounds to repeatedly explore targeted skills and tools. They experience:

“Know It”

(understanding how the focal skills and tools grow their performance)

“See It”

(understanding what the skills/tools look like in action)

“Need It”

(assessing how well they are using the skills/tools)

“Do It”

(setting goals and deadlines to practice and apply the skills/tools)

“Live It”

(seeking out support to apply new skills and tools)

“Grow It”

(reviewing and synthesizing their experiences to develop and refine their own and others’ performance)

- 7. Relate.** In his seminal book *Change or Die*, Alan Deutschman highlights “relate” as a key ingredient of successful change in any behavior or habit. If you can form “new, emotional relationships with a person or community that sustains hope,” the chances of making lasting changes in behavior are significantly improved.

Collaboration is central to STM™, which is both a learning and a teaching environment. STM™ combines the mastering of new skills with collegial support from others who have achieved mastery. New STM™ players interact with the graduated mastery group throughout the experience. The mastery group sustains hope for lasting change and helps new players build their status as they share lessons learned, results of applying skills, and tricks, advice, and insights. The online learning environment provides significant incentives for sharing, which in turn provides an expanding body of material that sustains the hope and engagement of additional new players into the system.

Summary

In the book *Mastery: The Keys to Success and Long-Term Fulfillment*, George Leonard explains that, while mastery brings rich rewards, it is a process and a journey, rather than a destination. Those who earn their “Mastery Credential” at the conclusion of the STM™ process realize that they are on their way to improving their performance in a specific skill area. They may be expected to say things like: “I learned about learning on the job. I started off understanding something difficult, but I but didn’t know how to integrate it into my work. In the STM™ system, applying it became easy and pleasurable. I started on a master’s journey.”

By reframing sustainment in the STM™ game frame, Forum is enabling accelerated and enduring changes in behavior, which deliver stronger results over time than the more traditional approach limited to performance tools, coaching, and feedback. STM™ appeals inherently to the gaming virtuosos in our workplace; it also provides an emotional and rational experience to others who may not be steeped in the gamer’s perspective. As an innovative solution, it is not only a powerful lever enabling people to apply what they learn in formal training sessions back on the job, it is also an exciting approach to accelerating performance improvement in any development path a person chooses.

Endnotes

1. Aaron Dignan, *Game Frame* (Free Press).
2. As defined by Jane McGonigal in *Reality Is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better* (Penguin Press).
3. Daniel Pink, *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us* (Riverhead Trade).

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