

The Science Bit – Making Learning Stick!

What can you really learn in 90 minutes?

A question we hear often. The underlying problem here is that many people have come to believe that more must be better – that a one or two day training course will be more effective than a bite-size session. After all, what can you really learn in just 90 minutes?


Whilst it is certainly possible to cram in more content over one or two days than in 90 minutes, the key issue is what the participants will actually **learn** from the training. What will they take away that will make a positive impact?

Even though it may be counter intuitive to what many people think, there is NO direct correlation between the amount of time we spend on training and the amount of learning it delivers!

Well delivered, a focused bite-size session can deliver more relevant learning and specific take-away actions than a traditional one or two day course that attempts to cover too much ground and training fatigue sets in – and so very little different ever happens as a result.

The Pareto Principle suggests that 80% of our results come from just 20% of our actions – and it is these things we focus on in our 90 minute toolkit sessions. In longer training courses, the reverse often happens – we end up spending 80% of the time on things that deliver only 20% benefit (“nice to know” fillers).

And then of course... there is the challenge of time! Increasingly these days, most people find it very difficult to take one or two days away from their hectic schedule and in-box to complete a training course. By the time they finally get back to their job, the good intentions from the last couple of days away rapidly fade into the backlog of work. Conversely, our 90 minute course participants are able to quickly get in, get out, and apply their learning immediately – no delay.

 *The power of our 90 minute training is underpinned by recent studies in Neuroscience which clearly demonstrate the benefits of this approach to maximise learning in a 'brain-friendly' way.*

Neuroscience: Your brain on learning

Neuroscience (study of the brain and the nervous system) has been with us for hundreds of years in one form or another. Scientists first observed people with brain injuries to try and understand the relationship between the brain and behaviour.

Over the past few decades, scientists have made dramatic breakthroughs in our ability to study the brain directly. We can now observe electrical activity or blood flow inside the head, or switch off functioning for a specific region of the brain on demand. The result is an enormous burst of brain research, with thousands of papers published each year.

Leading organisations are now actively using this research about **how** we learn to inform new ways to design more effective learning solutions.

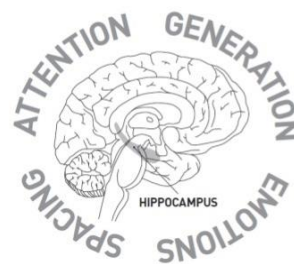
Design better learning

There are many different findings emerging from neuroscience, but they can be summarised into four categories called the **AGES** model

- Attention
- Generation
- Emotion
- Spacing

These are the four conditions needed for high quality learning to occur.


How to embed new skills?




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ATTENTION is about how much we focus in the moment on a particular learning task. This is no small matter in our modern day of ever shrinking attention spans! We experience a dramatic drop-off in memory simply by diverting our attention off the specific learning topic. To embed clear memories, we need to pay close attention during a learning task.

Essentially, to speed up learning we need to focus more on... being focused! Deep focus is a critical factor in our learning ability. Anything that gets in the way of this focus needs to be removed if we want to recall ideas later.

 *Our 90 minute training enables participants to give their attention and focus to the specific topic being covered. How can anyone focus intensely for days on end when emails are piling up?*

GENERATION means that we need to make our own meaning, literally generating our own links while learning – not just passively listening to ideas. We need our brains to create rich webs of links to any new concept, linking ideas to many parts of the brain. Using different types of neural circuitry to link to an idea is the key. Meaning, we should be listening, speaking, thinking, writing, speaking and completing other tasks to embed an important idea. We often generate ideas in dialogue with others, not just when we're alone.

 *Our 90 minute training is highly engaging and incorporates a wide variety of interactive delivery methods to enable participants to share ideas, contextualise, retain and make sense of things in their own way.*

EMOTIONS are also necessary to embed learning and memory. The stronger the emotions we feel while learning, the better we can recall information later. Strong emotions can be either positive or negative. Negative emotions like learning anxiety are easier to activate in people because of the brain's basic physiology where bad is stronger than good. Yet, overly strong emotions can shut down learning altogether.

Building positive emotions requires time and space, and usually involves human interactions, as social rewards tend to be the strongest. In some longer courses there is no time for emotion; there is simply too much material to get through.

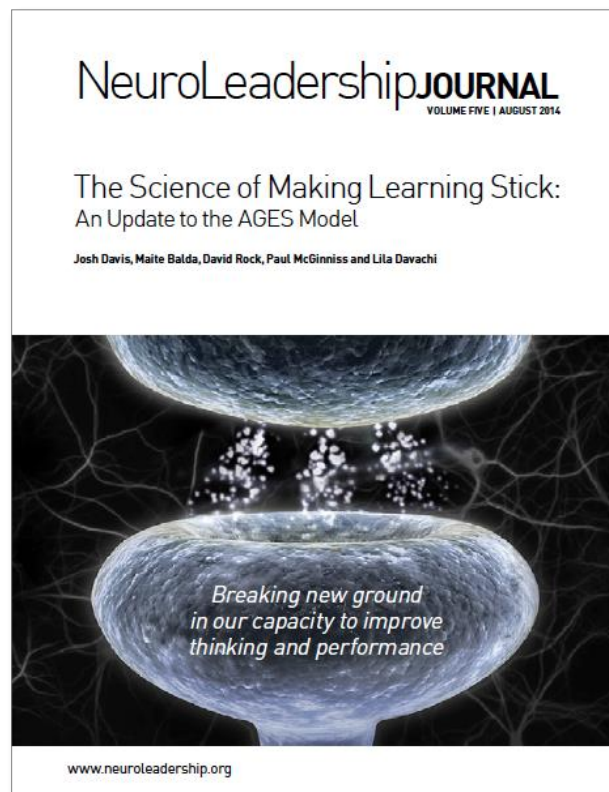
★ *Our 90 minute training is highly interactive and enables participants to collaborate together to connect with a topic on a feelings level, both individually and collectively.*

SPACING is the maybe the most surprising finding from the research. We tend to assume that learning in one block of time will be better for recall. This turns out to be true, but only if someone needs to remember something for a short time, such as for an exam the next day. This is known as the “massing” effect. Long-term recall is far stronger when we learn information over several smaller sittings, and any amount of spacing appears to help a lot.

Essentially, the longer we need to remember information, the more the learning should be sliced up and spaced out. Most organisations are not taking advantage of ‘spacing’ in the current design of their traditional learning and development programmes.

★ *Our 90 minute training enables participants to learn in bite-sized chunks spread over time and capitalise on the spacing effect.*

Want to find out more?



You can learn more about neuroscience research findings and the AGES model in the above article published in August 2014 or visit www.neuroleadership.com

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