



# Adult Culture: NTN Principles of Adult Learning

## Summary

The NTN Principles of Adult Learning are a collection of guidelines derived from extensive research, aimed at shaping the design and delivery of effective professional development for adults. These principles recognize the unique learning needs and preferences of adults, taking them into account in the creation of tailored learning experiences. Malcolm Knowles' research in 1973, along with more recent adaptations, has heavily influenced the foundation of adult learning theory.

## Why Does it Matter?

Understanding these principles is crucial for leaders and educators as they facilitate adult learning experiences. They help ensure that learning is effective, engaging, and relevant to the learners' needs and experiences.

## NTN Principles of Adult Learning

### Foster Emotional Connections



Adults' emotional states are inextricably tied to their ability to learn. Fostering emotional connections involves creating a safe, supportive environment that recognizes and honors the diverse cultural backgrounds and needs of all learners. Through trust, care, genuine interest in adults' experiences, and actively listening and affirming their insights, we ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to connect and engage, valuing their emotional states and diverse knowledge throughout the learning process.

### Cultivate Purposeful, Task-Oriented Learning



Adults engage in learning when it's relevant and directly applicable to their tasks and they understand the 'why' behind it and its connection to the mission and vision. Cultivating learning experiences with clear, realistic objectives that align with personal, professional, and organizational goals fosters a strong connection between learning and its practical use. This principle emphasizes the equitable alignment of learning experiences, ensuring that learning is accessible, meaningful, and tailored to the diverse goals and needs of all participants.

### Promote Self-Direction



Adults want to be in charge of their own learning and should therefore have some control over how learning is structured and conducted. Knowing adult assets and recognizing the unique strengths and needs of each learner creates opportunities to support learners with challenges that build on their strengths and meet their needs. By encouraging learners to take risks, make mistakes, and learn from these experiences, we foster an environment where all individuals are empowered and provided the access to take control of their learning journey, promoting self-direction and internalizing new practices.

### Facilitate Internalizing of Learning



Adults need direct, concrete experiences in which they apply and reflect on what they have learned. By creating a supportive environment that allows learners to learn from their mistakes, we foster a growth mindset, an asset-based culture of continuous learning and improvement, and the mastery of new skills through time and practice.





## Checklists:

The following checklists provide examples of how these principles can be implemented in adult learning experiences. However, not all items will apply in every context. These checklists serve as a guide, offering potential strategies to embody these principles in your design and facilitation of adult learning experiences.

<b>1. Foster Emotional Connections</b> Adults' emotional states are inextricably tied to their ability to learn. Fostering emotional connections involves creating a safe, supportive environment that recognizes and honors the diverse cultural backgrounds and needs of all learners. Through trust, care, genuine interest in adults' experiences, and actively listening and affirming their insights, we ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to connect and engage, valuing their emotional states and diverse knowledge throughout the learning process.	✓
Intentionally create a safe and supportive environment that values the emotional states of the learners.	
Plan for opportunities for expression and reflection in your agenda.	
Design agendas that allow time for processing and connection.	
Provide ongoing support during the implementation of new practices.	
Encourage sharing of successes and challenges.	
Incorporate elements of fun and joy in the learning process.	
Acknowledge and respect the diverse experiences and knowledge of learners, using these as a resource in the learning process.	





<p><b>2. Cultivate Purposeful, Task-Oriented Learning</b></p> <p>Adults engage in learning when it's relevant and directly applicable to their tasks and they understand the 'why' behind it and its connection to the mission and vision . Cultivating learning experiences with clear, realistic objectives that align with personal, professional, and organizational goals fosters a strong connection between learning and its practical use. This principle emphasizes the equitable alignment of learning experiences, ensuring that learning is accessible, meaningful, and tailored to the diverse goals and needs of all participants.</p>	✓
Design learning experiences that are task-oriented.	
Connect learning tasks to practical applications relevant to the learners.	
Facilitate collaborative activities that allow learners to work on tasks together.	
Encourage learners to share their experiences.	
Clearly communicate the learning objectives and rationale for why the learning is important.	
Align the learning objectives with the personal and professional needs of the learners.	
Connect learning objectives to the larger goals, mission, or vision of the organization.	
Create opportunities for learners to engage in sensemaking.	

<p><b>3. Promote Self-Direction</b></p> <p>Adults want to be in charge of their own learning and should therefore have some control over how learning is structured and conducted. Knowing adult assets and recognizing the unique strengths and needs of each learner creates opportunities to support learners with challenges that build on their strengths and meet their needs. By encouraging learners to take risks, make mistakes, and learn from these experiences, we foster an environment where all individuals are empowered and provided the access to take control of their learning journey, promoting self-direction and internalizing new practices.</p>	✓
Provide opportunities for learners to take charge of their own learning.	
Allow learners to influence the structure and conduct of the learning experience.	
Incorporate elements of choice and autonomy in the learning design.	
Design physical spaces that encourage autonomy and self-direction.	
Facilitate reflection on successes, challenges, and learning experiences.	
Foster a culture of continuous improvement and learning.	
Demonstrate modeling as an instructional practice.	





#### 4. Facilitate Internalizing of Learning

Adults need direct, concrete experiences in which they apply and reflect on what they have learned. By creating a supportive environment that allows learners to learn from their mistakes, we foster a growth mindset, an asset-based culture of continuous learning and improvement, and the mastery of new skills through time and practice.



Provide opportunities for learners to apply what they have learned to their work.

Facilitate reflection on these application experiences.

Build in feedback mechanisms to support the internalization of learning.

Design physical spaces that support active learning and application of skills.

Provide opportunities for learners to practice new skills and experience small successes.

Encourage learners to share their experiences of implementing new skills.

### References

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