The 70-20-10 Model for Learning

How do people really learn to do their jobs well? The 70-20-10 model gives a simple answer. It comes from research at the Center for Creative Leadership in the United States, where researchers asked successful executives about the events that had shaped them most. Michael Lombardo and Robert Eichinger later summed up the lessons: about 70 percent came from challenging experiences at work, 20 percent from other people, and 10 percent from courses and reading. Today, many organisations use the model to plan how their people learn and grow.

1. Learn by Doing (70)

The biggest share of learning comes from experience on the job. People grow most when they face real tasks, solve real problems and take on new responsibilities. Challenging assignments, such as leading a project or fixing a difficult situation, stretch our skills. Learning by doing works best when we stop and reflect: what worked, what did not, and what we will do differently next time. Without reflection, experience can simply repeat the same mistakes.

Example: A home cook learns by doing: every weekend he cooks a new dish and writes down what did not work. After a few weeks, his dishes taste far better than any recipe video could teach.

At work: Ayman, a new team leader, learns by doing: his manager asks him to run the weekly team meeting. After each meeting he reflects on what worked, and by the fourth week his meetings end on time with clear actions.

2. Learn from Others (20)

The second share of learning comes from other people. We learn when a manager gives feedback, when a mentor shares experience, or when we watch a skilled colleague at work. Coaching, mentoring, peer support and professional networks all belong here. Other people help us see what we cannot see ourselves, and they help us make sense of our experiences. This is why good relationships at work are also a source of growth.

Example: A new driver learns from others: a parent sits beside him and gives calm feedback after every trip. Soon he parks with confidence, because someone pointed out the one habit that kept going wrong.

At work: Ayman learns from others: a senior manager becomes his mentor and sits in on one of his meetings. She notices that a quiet engineer never speaks, so Ayman starts asking for everyone's view, and new ideas appear.

3. Formal Learning (10)

The smallest share comes from formal learning: courses, workshops, books and online programmes. Formal learning gives us models, words and basic knowledge in a short time. It works like a map: it shows the way, but it does not walk the road for us. Its value grows when

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people use what they learned at work soon after the course. A course that is never applied is soon forgotten.

Example: A mother takes a short first-aid course as formal learning. The course teaches her the basic steps, and a week later she stays calm and treats her child's cut correctly.

At work: Ayman joins a one-day course on giving feedback, which is formal learning. The very next day he uses the course model in a real conversation, and the employee leaves with a clear plan instead of hurt feelings.

4. A Guideline, Not a Rule

The numbers are a guideline, not a strict ratio. They come from what successful leaders remembered about their key learning events, not from exact measurement, so the real mix differs between people, jobs and industries. The main message is that the three sources work best together. Formal learning gives the ideas, experience gives the practice, and other people give the feedback that turns practice into skill. A good development plan links all three instead of counting hours.

Example: A person learning a new language uses the model as a guideline: a weekly class, chats with native speakers, and real use when shopping or travelling. Nobody counts the hours, yet the three sources together build real fluency.

At work: Ayman's manager uses the model as a guideline, not a strict ratio: Ayman's plan joins one course, a monthly talk with his mentor, and the lead on a new project. Six months later, he is ready to manage a larger team.

Conclusion

In summary, the 70-20-10 model says that most learning happens through experience, a good part through other people, and a smaller part through formal training. Learning by doing, learning from others and formal learning support one another. The numbers are a guide that shows where growth really happens, not a rule for measuring. When organisations plan stretch tasks, feedback and focused courses together, people grow faster and use what they learn. The best place to learn is often the job itself.

Sources

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