

Adult Learning Assumptions

Audio Descriptive Text

Title: Professional Development 201: From Basic to Dynamic. Adult Learning Theories; Adult Learning Assumptions. Image of PD practices: Sustain, Design, Promote, Deliver, Follow Up, and Evaluate. CDC logo.

Video Summary

Malcolm Knowles developed basic assumptions about how adult learners differ from child learners. These assumptions include self-concept, experience, orientation to learning, and readiness to learn. PD event planners can ask themselves questions based on these assumptions to ensure their events are reaching adult learners.

Audio Script

The last adult learning theory we will discuss is derived from the work of Malcolm Knowles.

Knowles developed basic assumptions about how adult learners differ than child learners. They are:

- Self-concept
- Experience
- Orientation to learning, and
- Readiness to learn

Adult learners require some tailoring to how the instruction is presented.

- **Self-concept:** As a person matures, self-concept changes from dependence toward independence. Therefore, adult learners prefer some degree of control over what they learn and how.
- **Experience:** Life experiences become a resource for learning over time. Therefore, adult learners value discussions and active participation that connect with their experiences.
- **Orientation to learning:** Adult learners' perspective of time changes from one of future application to immediate application of learning. Accordingly, orientation toward learning shifts from subject-centered to problem-centered. Therefore, they seek education based on what is relevant to their lives—often in response to a stressor or to solve a problem.
- **Readiness to learn:** Adult learners become more focused on the developmental tasks of social roles. Therefore, adult learners seek the benefit derived from prescribed topics, practical application of knowledge to problem solving, topics supportive of functional roles, or simply independent interest in a topic.

You can optimize the design and development phase of your event by asking questions based on Knowles' *Adult Learning Assumptions*.

Here are some sample questions.

- For **self-concept**: Does your audience expect a proactive learning experience? What type? At what frequency?
- For **experience**: How can the audience experience be incorporated to add realism to the training?
- For **orientation to learning**: How does this topic meet an immediate need or help clarify or solve a problem?
- For **readiness to learn**: Why does, or why should, your audience care about this topic?

The answers to these questions can help you better understand how content and design can be used to resonate with your audience.

Remember, successfully designed events have:

- Respected participants,
- Safe and supportive learning environments,
- Relevant content to participants' needs,
- Varied learning activities to address the needs of a diverse audience, and
- Opportunities for participants to practice skills and apply new knowledge.