

MEASURING TRAINING EFFECTIVENESS

Despite widely publicized studies showing direct correlation between profitability and well-trained employees, often management and executives are not certain that money spent on training has enough return on investment.

To gain clarity, a common sense approach to measuring training effectiveness can be a crucial step to prove the value of Learning & Development (L&D) in a corporate environment.

This article series discusses various areas of focus that can assist you in assessing your training's effectiveness.

First, Let's Go Back to Basics

One of the first rules for measuring effectiveness is to develop materials that will actually train corporate employees. How do you know if your training delivers the right results? These 10 best practices will ensure you're designing effective training experiences for your learners.

1.

Incorporate Strong Instructional Design Techniques

Application of adult learning principles combined with the execution of good instructional design is a key underlayment to how well employees can learn, and without it, no measurement will yield results that come close to assuring employee performance at high levels.

Malcolm Knowles, an American practitioner and theorist of adult education, identified the following six principles of adult learning:

- Adults are internally motivated and self-directed
- Adults bring life experiences and knowledge to learning experiences
- Adults are goal oriented

- Adults are relevancy oriented
- Adults are practical
- Adult learners like to be respected

2. Enable Learners to Engage and Interact

Interactions motivate learners and enhance the learning experience. Both classroom and online training programs can deliver highly interactive learning, but to be effective, the interactions need to be relevant and appropriate to the instructional purpose. Consider these rules of thumb for using interaction:

- When new material is being learned, interaction involving choices or decisions should be kept to a minimum
- Interaction should be employed when learners wish to "try out" the principle they are learning
- Hints and help options are important resources for exploratory, interactive learning

3. Provide Relevant Examples using Scenarios

Relevant examples of learning points, both for demonstration and practice purposes, provide real life opportunities for learners to acquire skills and expertise. Remember, your employees bring their own life experiences and knowledge to the learning experience, so you should do the same in your training.

Whenever possible, incorporate scenarios and task-based activities that are clearly aligned with learner job roles and daily performance. Doing so will provide meaningful learning experiences that increase knowledge retention and motivation.

4. Give Learners Control

Adults like to control their learning experiences by directing and regulating their own actions toward their learning goals. They want opportunities to take on challenging tasks, dive deeper into the subject matter, and practice their learning. When given the opportunity, they monitor their current knowledge, take strategic actions regarding their progress and craft their motivation or drive to learn.

Here are a few ideas to provide learners control:

- Reciprocal or peer-learning: Allow learners to teach new material to their peers.
- Performance support: Allow learners to access the information they need, as close to the point of need as possible.
- Learner-developed assessments: Allow learners to develop test questions about new material.
- Unrestricted online or mobile training: Allow learners access to freely navigate through pages, topics, lessons, and jump straight to the test, if they choose.
- **Learner Certainty Assessments** (or self-assessments): Allow learners to assess what knowledge or skills they currently have and what knowledge or skills they will need.

5. Make the Most of Audio & Visuals

Adult brains can only process and retain a limited amount of information at once. Presenting too much information at the same time can overwhelm learners, decreasing the transfer of knowledge. Research shows this is particularly true when identical audio and text are used together. An example of this is when a facilitator (in classroom training) or a narrator (in eLearning) reads the exact text presented on the screen.

You can maximize learning and avoid redundancy by presenting abbreviated onscreen text that briefly summarizes what the narrator is saying, and by allowing the learner to turn the audio on or off.

6. Blend Your Approach with Various Resources

Often, your audience's knowledge levels and learning styles can be quite diverse, so it's difficult to determine the type and amount of information to provide to bridge this gap. To accommodate this, design your course so that it incorporates a variety of delivery methods.

Blended approaches can include:



7.

Consider Learning Environments and Bandwidth

Incorporating your company's various learning resources into your training can truly enhance the learning experience, however, be sure to weigh the benefits of each resource against the context of the learning environment. For example:

- Sound can enhance online or mobile learning, but depending on the workplace, sound could disturb co-workers or, out in the field, may be difficult to hear.
- Incorporating video or large files into your training mix could be an issue for those learners with insufficient bandwidth or slow satellite connections.

8.

Use Clear and Logical Navigation

Learners should be able to navigate through mobile and online training with ease. Consider these principles of screen layout that help with navigation:

- Place screen objects (such as buttons and links) together in a logical order based on frequency of use.
- Place buttons where the learner's eye can easily find them.
- Ensure buttons and text links are large enough for use on devices with smaller screens, such as tablets and smartphones.
- Give buttons clear symbols or labels.
- Design an appropriately sized course screen so learners do not need to scroll to view the entire page or locate navigation buttons.

Remember, while it's perfectly acceptable to suggest a path through a course, learners like to have some control over what they learn and when they learn it.

9.

Avoid Split Attention with Screen Designs

Split attention occurs when a learner has to hold something in working memory while searching for a matching component to complete the mental picture. Split attention can occur whenever two or more sources of information are presented separately on a screen and the learner must mentally integrate them together to make sense out of the material. A classic example is a diagram in one area of the screen and the explanatory text in another area.

Consider using techniques such as pointers, marquees and callout captions to lead the learner's eye to important or supporting information for your graphics.

10.

Respect the Learner

We've come full circle with this last best practice. If you remember from the first one we discussed, respecting your learners is a principle of adult learning. So it's no surprise that the attention and care you give to learners is critical to designing valued training.

Below are a few ways you can show your appreciation and respect to your training audience:

- Listen to your learners and incorporate their input into the training design and/or delivery.
- Ask open ended questions of your learners to find out what their needs are and how they prefer to learn.
- Create the kind of valuable and beneficial training you'd like to take.
- Provide content and specific feedback that is instructionally significant.
- Encourage and actively participate in their career development.

Implementing these best practices throughout your training programs will place you on a path to creating training with top-notch results. And once you have good results to measure, you're ready to assess.

Next time: We'll discuss using formative versus summative assessments to measure results. In the meantime, please join the conversation in the comments section of this article or feel free to [send us an email](#). We'd love to hear your thoughts!