



F O C A L P O I N T

ORGANIZATIONAL ENABLERS OF GOOD MEASUREMENT

BY TRACY HOLLISTER

Learning leaders are well-aware that organizational factors outside their training departments can help or hinder their work. A recent study with sales executives revealed four conditions that allow companies to effectively measure the impact of initiatives, including training. These four enablers of good measurement are:

- Leadership Commitment
- Focus on Analysis Before Action
- Adequate Measurement Resources
- A Robust Data Infrastructure

Interestingly, these same enablers also help training organizations create higher-impact training. So what are these enablers and how do they drive better training?

Leadership Commitment

Study participants emphasized that company leaders champion a culture of accountability when they demand results, support the collection of metrics and take action on those metrics. In requiring departments to provide impact metrics, they are held accountable for not only reporting but getting results. Like other departments, training departments benefit from this focus on results when they are given clear objectives and metrics to gauge an initiative's success.

How does this improve training? Training content that is sharply focused around meeting business objectives and metrics is more likely to be successful in improving those metrics than training that is

created without a focus on these targets. Quite simply, if training departments have a clear target, they are more likely to hit it.

Focus on Analysis Before Action

Interviewees also pointed out that in a culture that supports the analysis of problems and needs before improvement efforts get started, the initiatives themselves benefit. First, analytical processes like due diligence, needs analysis and diagnostics can uncover the biggest drags on performance. Without such analysis, initiatives that are built around perceived problems may miss the mark. For example, if there is a perception that sales reps cannot negotiate well but the real issue is their inability to convey the value proposition, then even well-designed and delivered negotiation training should not make much of a difference.

Secondly, the process of collecting data on causes of poor performance engages stakeholders such as managers and allows them to buy in to the need for training. Such buy-in is particularly useful when the same managers are asked to reinforce the learning of their employees through coaching or other types of support and thus heighten the use and impact of the training.

Adequate Measurement Resources

To measure impact, interviewed participants recognize that they

need enough operations or support staff who know how to collect, measure, analyze and report on impact. To measure impact well, it is especially useful to know how to use available data effectively and even control for other factors that affect the outcome metrics. For example, a sales rep's experience level will probably have a strong result on his or her sales outcomes, independent of any training received.

In addition to using impact data to identify future changes for specific courses, training measurement staff can also identify best practices on what works well over time and across training programs. This may include which types of training work best with what types of employees and which instructors get better results than others on the same courses. Applying this knowledge to improving training allows training organizations to get the maximum impact for their investments.

A Robust Data Infrastructure

To have a robust data infrastructure that produces high-quality impact data, study participants underscored the need for their companies to have adequate systems and tools, consistent data entry and data sharing across different groups (e.g., HR, performance and learning management system data). This infrastructure is critical to make any meaningful observations about the effects of training so that improvements can

be made to any subsequent training. At a minimum, one needs to know what training was received and how they performed before and after the training.

Take new sales rep on-boarding as an example. Access to an infrastructure of high-quality data allows sales training organizations to see if they are having the desired impact on metrics like pipeline statistics and performance to goals, as well as how reps felt about the training, their test results and the manager's observations of reps on the job. Savvy training organization staff can then use all of this data to make any changes in the content or delivery for the next group of new hires.

In Summary

Together, the four enablers of good measurement provide the will, focus, people and data that allow training departments to create better-aligned training, focus content on the right objectives, identify best practices and access the necessary data. These abilities allow training leaders to improve the impact by both designing better initial content and making better decisions on what should be cut, continued or changed to improve future training.

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