

How can I ensure that training delivers business impact?

Nick Smith of EAM Consulting looks at how using the ROI Methodology to plan your training can ensure that the training has an impact on business results.



The real benefit from applying the ROI Methodology is not the ability to calculate the return on investment (ROI) of a project. Rather it is the structure and discipline that it brings to the commissioning of an intervention and the early indications of how effective it is being that enable you to make timely adjustments and so increase the return on your investment even though you almost certainly will never actually get to calculating it.

After a well run and engaging training event people usually return to work with a desire to apply what they have learnt. All too often, however, a few short weeks later they have lost their enthusiasm and have reverted to their old ways. Why? What could lie behind this failure for the learning to be transferred to the job? Could it be that:

- ❑ The learners are not sure how to apply what they have learned?
- ❑ Their Line manager prevents them from trying out their new ideas?
- ❑ Sheer volume of work prevents them from ever being able to try?

Whatever the reason the transfer of learning to the job is usually low. What can we do to change this and so ensure that training events have more (some?) impact on the businesses results? The first step is to realise that the acquisition of knowledge and skills are not the ends in themselves but are the means to the end. The end is the impact on the business results.

Good practice, then, is to start with a business needs analysis that will determine the required business results and who is required to do what differently (new process, higher skill level etc.) to deliver the required result. Once this has been done then a training needs analysis can be carried out to determine what, if any, training is required to enable the change in work pattern to take place. Finally we can determine how best to structure the delivery of the training. This approach is represented in the “V” diagram opposite.

If we apply this model we will determine objectives for the application of the learning as well as at the other levels. These objectives need to be specific, measureable and time-bound and we need to be clear about how the application will be measured. If we then communicate these objectives and the measurement approach to all of the relevant parties – participants, their line managers and the trainers – we will have set clear expectations for the application of the learning. This should greatly increase the degree to which the learning is transferred to the job, and hence the desired results achieved. Not only will everyone know what they are expected to do following the training but also as the old adage puts it “What gets measured gets done”.

For this to work effectively it is best to involve the line management in the planning and measurement of the objectives. This will not only secure their engagement and support but will also ensure that the measurement processes are practicable. It is also important that the range and frequency of the measurement is kept to the minimum required to ensure that the learning is being transferred. The aim is to ensure that the training achieves the required impact not to weigh the organisation down with measurements and data.

Nonetheless it is important to measure some key points at each level and to monitor the results so that any areas where adjustments are needed can be identified early and corrections made. This way we will also build up the evidence that will enable us to demonstrate how the intervention has played its part in achieving the required business impact. It is also important to report the results to all those involved so that they not only know how well things are going but also to reassure them that the data they are providing is being used. How many times have you been asked for a “return” about something never to hear about it again? And how enthusiastic were you to complete the next one?

In summary to maximise the transfer of learning to the job for a training intervention you need to work out what people need to do new / differently, tell them and tell them how this will be measured and then measure and report the results.

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nick@eam-consulting.co.uk
07775 586235
www.eam-consulting.co.uk

