Measuring Performance Improvement

The "Holy Grail" of training and development has always been to achieve *permanent, measurable improvements in performance that have a positive impact on the bottom line.* For decades, executives and HR professionals have pursued this goal. However, even the best efforts of trainers haven't been able to consistently achieve the expected results from the billions of dollars invested annually in these programs, especially in the areas of leadership, sales, service and team interaction skills.

Experts say the problem isn't with the training, but with the context of the training—the activities and practices that happen before, during and after training. Clearly, the development process needs to continue well beyond the classroom. What's needed is an extension of these programs into the workplace: a structured, supervised framework for applying and reinforcing desired skills. What's needed is for performance improvement to become a routine aspect of work itself.

Follow-up reinforcement is the "missing link" of most training and development programs. Quite a bit of supervised application, feedback, encouragement and coaching is needed to ingrain a new pattern of behavior, so this can only take place during day-to-day performance on the job. And if new behavior patterns aren't being reinforced on the job, participants will eventually fall back on their old, comfortable ways of doing things.

Since most people are either unskilled or uncomfortable giving feedback, the most effective way of gathering and presenting this input is 360-degree assessment. Administered before and after training, scores can be compared to measure how much improvement has taken place. Post-training surveys can be repeated periodically for a year or more after training. This keeps participants informed of progress and motivates them to persist.

The most powerful way to establish accountability uses the same technology mentioned above: pre-course and post-course assessment. 360-degree performance feedback identifies not what people know, but what they do on the job. The behaviors that are the focus of the assessment are the same behaviors that are the focus of the training. The averages of scaled ratings create an objective pre-course measurement of skill levels, and the identical post-course assessment provides data about skills several months after training. A simple comparison is made, and any Improvements in performance are indicated by improvements in skill scores. The consolidated feedback is presented to participants, and a summary of skill scores is given to supervisors and HR staff.

HOW TO SET UP 20/20 INSIGHT GOLD

Feedback is vital to the long-term reinforcement and ingraining of skills, because along the way both learners and their managers need to know how the skill development is progressing. When the performance improvement effort is focused on interpersonal skills (team leadership, team contributor, sales, service, instruction, etc.), 20/20 Insight is the assessment technology of choice because it delivers customized, quantifiable performance data in areas that are otherwise hard to measure.

Using 20/20 Insight GOLD for performance improvement validation involves two separate assessment projects. In each one, the course participants will receive feedback from the people who work closely with them. The first administration takes place shortly before the training program and presents items related to the skills that will be addressed in training. This assessment serves as a diagnostic, revealing strengths and priority areas for improvement. Trainers and managers can use the scores to determine which courses to offer the participants.

The second assessment occurs six to twelve months after training. This assessment is based on the first assessment and may contain the same items, or it may include only the areas the individual focused on in training. Pre-course and post-course results can be compared to gauge the improvement in performance since the person participated in the course.

The performance improvement measurements enable the organization to hold learners, managers and trainers accountable for the results of training programs. The information also gives evidence of the value and effectiveness of the programs, so that executives can decide whether to continue investing in these programs in the future. The measurements can be also used as benefit data in standard ROI calculations.

The set-up is similar to a typical individual feedback project, except that the items include behaviors to be addressed in training, and the project will be implemented twice.

Subject. The subjects are the course participants.

Respondent relationship types. The relationship types are the groups of people who have first-hand knowledge of the person's performance in the areas related to the course content – manager, coworker or peer, direct report and customer.

Surveys. The survey items used will be determined by the course content. The Survey Library contains hundreds of items related to individual performance, and these can be reviewed initially to determine if any are applicable. Your organization can also create customized items that tie directly to the course objectives.

Open-ended questions. Feedback in the form of open-ended comments can help the person focus his/her efforts during the training program.

- What do you think is this person's greatest strength in this area?
- What do you think this person needs to focus on most to improve in this area?

Scales. The Satisfaction scale works well for this application because respondents can indicate how satisfied they are with the person's current performance. If you'd like to use two scales in order to compare actual vs. desired performance, the "Frequency" and "Expected Frequency" scales can be used.