How do you ensure that the learning from training programmes is translated into action in the workplace that leads to the required business results? This guide shows how a technology-supported process of setting, reporting on, monitoring and measuring business related learning goals translates training into a quantifiable return on investment.

When to Use this Guide

You should refer to this guide when you are:

- Designing a new flagship training programme that needs to demonstrate a good return on the budget invested.
- When evaluating the success or otherwise of current training programmes, especially where there is evidence of a low transfer of learning and you need to put forward recommendations.
- Examining how you can move away from single-event learning activities towards continuous competency development programmes.
- Looking at how you can increase the visibility and role of yourself and your fellow trainers as business improvement agents in your organisation.

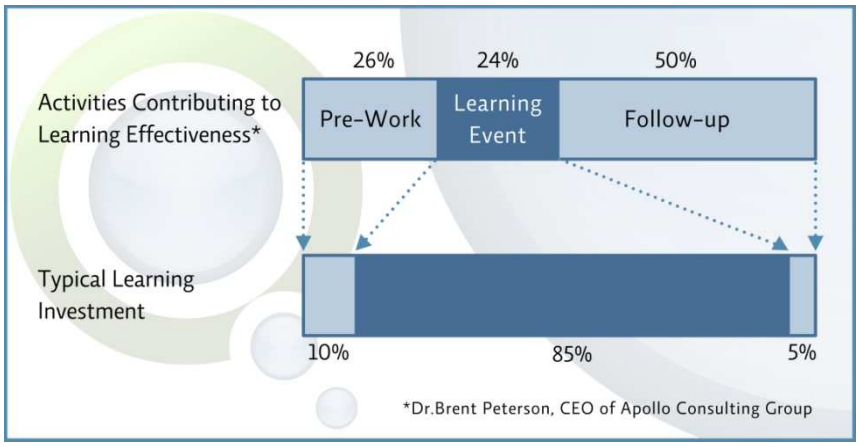


Figure 1 © Academy28 (2008) Image used with permission of Zenger Folkman

Overview

Designing and delivering training programmes that will have an impact back in the workplace is not rocket science.

Firstly, when we design a programme, the only thing that matters is making sure whatever is developed meets a definite business goal.

Secondly, we need to perform a proper analysis of what skills, knowledge and attitudes need to be demonstrated to achieve these goals and then only design a solution that addresses these requirements.

Thirdly, we need to ensure that our participants have every chance to apply what they've just learned. This shouldn't just be left to the line manager, especially as we all know it's very difficult to get them fully on board and involved. As trainers, we need to get actively involved with what happens after the training event.

Research (see above graphic) supports this fact, as whereas we typically devote most of our 'time in training' to what happens in the training room, the real learning is more likely to occur before and after the period of instruction.

Participants need to be well prepared for any training we deliver. They need to have clear goals for taking part in the training programme and we need ensure that the solutions we deliver meet each person's needs.

Bad objectives lead to bad action plans. In fact we may be using the wrong language. It's better to ask participants to set 'goals' for coming on a training programme. However, a goal about needing to learn something is not a valid goal. A goal should refer to something that that person needs to do after the training to achieve their business objectives.

The process of developing the action plan shouldn't be left until the very end of the workshop. We can't expect participants to reflect to the required depth and to create an effective plan, when the 'call of home' is ring loudly in their ears.

The follow-through after a piece of training should never be just an afterthought. After all, it's where the results that the business has requested will manifest themselves

We need to ensure that each participant regularly reviews their action plan. They need to reflect on what they have done recently as they've worked towards each of their goals. Once they have taken stock – how satisfied are they with the effort they've put in and the progress they've made – they need to plan their next steps and implement those. It's this reflective cycle that helps to maintain momentum and drives the implementation of the action plan.

Online Goal-setting and Action Plan Implementation

If deep down we know what needs to take place to ensure the successful transfer of learning, then why doesn't it happen?

The line manager – as we've already hinted – is a key player in the success of this process, but we know that in reality they usually don't have the time, skills or even inclination to do this. So as trainers, if we really want our learning to make a difference, we have to be prepared to step in to support each participant after they've returned to the workplace. No easy task, but an online goal-setting and online action plan implementation tool, such as **Your Action Plan** can help considerably.

Your Action Plan can automate the process that needs to be followed and provides a single source of data on the impact of learning and development activity on the business.

The Your Action Plan web-based tool:

- Quickly captures business-aligned goals before a training programme
- Supports the transfer of learning through driving the regular progress review of the post-workshop action plan
- Facilitates remote coaching through the embedded feedback mechanism
- Captures actual business activity that results from the implementation of the training received
- Demonstrates the true value of the training

As a result of centralising the collection and analysis of action plan implementation data, it's easy to see which programmes are having the greatest impact back on the job. Where progress begins to slip behind track, it's easier to step in and quickly offer whatever advice and guidance is required to move things forward. The ongoing evaluation of the training programme itself is facilitated too, based on any feedback received as to why there might be problems applying the new learning.

Having secure access to an individual's online action plan also allows for a number of people to collaborate to offer each participant post-workshop support. Not only can the trainer have access to the information, but it's also possible to include the line manager. Additionally, where a team of coaches work alongside the trainers, then they too can be granted access. So from first agreeing their goals with their line manager, through working with their trainer on ensuring they get the most from the training, to being coached afterwards, the individual can enjoy seamless support.

The approach below highlights how **Your Action Plan** can play a critical role in ensuring that your learning messages stick back in the business.

A 10-step Approach to Improve the Transfer of Learning

The following ten-step approach will ensure that you maximise the opportunities your training events have to improve individual and business improvement.

It ensures that goal-setting is taken seriously and it provides meaningful information that not only supports the learning process but also ensures that the learning is transferred back into the workplace in the form of demonstrable business results.

This approach can also transform a single-event workshop into an extended four-month period of competency development and enables the trainer to add remote coaching to their skill set.

1. Agreeing Goals

Four weeks before the workshop, each participant is asked to meet with their manager to agree some action-orientated goals, aligned to one or more of that department's business goals. These goals must specify what the person needs to do after the training, not what they need to learn, and they should be targeted for completion during the three months after the workshop.

2. Recording and Sharing Goals

The participant then records their goals into the online tool. As part of this process, they can also tag a goal to a 'goal category', usually related to a specific section of the course, although this could be a corporate goal too. This helps the trainer to pinpoint where the participant may have more interest in the programme content and it's the only time when the learner thinks about what they want to 'learn'.

3. Pre-workshop One-to-One Goal Review

About two weeks before the workshop, the trainer arranges to have a one-to-one telephone conversation with the participant, during which they refer to the goals captured on the system. As the trainer probes further, it's likely that some of the goals may be revised slightly or extra background information noted down that will later help the trainer to prepare for the session.

4. Pre-workshop Trainer Preparation

The trainer will then reflect on the workshop content and at least consider how he/she will emphasise certain aspects to help address each person's specific goals.

5. Developing the Action Plan

During the workshop the trainer will set aside regular time for action planning. If the participants don't have access to their own laptops, there should be sufficient computers available around the training venue, all with a link to the online tool. For each goal, they will document the precise steps they will take afterwards, taking into account the recommended three-month window.

Participants are also encouraged to amend their goals if they feel it is necessary to reflect what they've just learned about themselves during the programme or to incorporate the things they've been taught. In fact, they may even create new goals or even abandon some of their existing ones.

6. Regular Action Plan Progress Updates

After the workshop, the online tool really comes into its own and supports the important reflective cycle. At regular intervals – say every two weeks – it sends an e-mail request to the participants to update their action plan. They are asked to complete a short questionnaire that records how much effort they've put in, how satisfied they are with their progress and their next steps.

7. Trainer Feedback and Support

The trainer reviews each of the updates and is asked to post at least one piece of feedback via the tool. In fact, the tool offers the facility for both the participant and trainer to conduct regular threaded discussions about each of the individual goals and on a more general basis. The participant could even include their line manager – or some 'buddy' participants in their feedback loop.

8. Real-time Progress Reporting

Fortnight-by-fortnight, the tool reports the progress of each participant. Using percentages, the trainer can see how well (or otherwise) people are doing with implementing their learning. If a participant stalls with their progress, or even regresses, the trainer can get in contact and help them

move on.

9. Final Recording of Achievements

Towards the end of the three-month window, the participants should be asked to reflect one last time on their overall progress. They then complete a goal-closure update that poses additional questions about their overall achievements.

10. Programme Close Webinar

Finally, to bring the programme – and the transfer of learning period – to a formal close, the trainer should organise a so-called programme-close webinar. Each participant could present a simple three-slide presentation to their training group. In this they answer three questions: what business impact did they see; what barriers did they encounter; how did they overcome them; what new best practices did they encounter that would benefit the other participants?

These presentations are very powerful. They show how the training has made a positive impact on the business and through celebrating successes they provide additional momentum and motivation for the participants to continue with their development. The presentation slides also provide important evidence to back-up the progress data generated from the online tool.

Conclusions

This methodology acknowledges that what happens before and after a learning session has a significant impact on the success of that learning.

It also provides the project sponsors with the evidence they need that positive action resulted from the programme and their investment.

Finally, it enables trainers to positively transform their relationship with their groups and to see – often for the first time – the positive impact their programmes have.

So with the increasing attention that will be given to the contribution the training department is making to the business in challenging times, it's strongly recommended that we look at how we support our business operations and start now to change our working practices to ensure that we place the transfer of learning at the heart of our learning and development strategies.

Your Action Plan is offered exclusively in the UK by Academy28.

Academy28 also offers a range of online resources, based on their unique rapid online behavioural preferences assessment, in areas such as team working, change management, influencing skills, coaching, trainer and learner styles. They also provide a tool to enable trainers to match their delivery style with the learning styles of their audiences. In addition, we offer an online action planning and learning transfer tool and provide MBTI© consulting services.

Want to know more? E-mail us at info@academy28.com