

S T E P T W O

Align Training to Improve Your Organization's Bottom Line

STEP 2

OVERVIEW
Linking training to the business goal
Designing to meet business requirements
Ensuring follow-up and application

You probably expect to see an ISD (instructional systems design) model, a training cycle, or at least ADDIE (analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation) mentioned. Well it's here—in the background.

Think of this book as a movie.

In a movie the setting is important to the story line. Let's face it, *Brokeback Mountain* had a good story line, but it just wouldn't be the same if it was set in New York City. You don't usually go to movies to see the scenery or the movie set. You go because you want a good story, which means engaging content. Just as the scenery sets the mood for a movie, imagine that ADDIE sets the stage for this book. It is there in the background; it is important to the 10 Steps, but it isn't the story line of this book. Assume that we just panned the ADDIE scenery, and it's there in the background influencing the next nine steps.

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Obtain a copy of your organization's strategic plan and business plan. Read through them and tie what you do to these two plans. Identify your contribution to the organization's success. As a second step, obtain copies for your training colleagues and create a dialogue at your next staff meeting about how your department contributes to the organization's success.

Even though we are not following a training cycle in this book, we will address the *10 Steps to Successful Training* in order. Therefore, it's never too soon to remind trainers that their success depends on the success of the business for which they work: Training goals should be aligned with organizational requirements and goals. This step serves as that reminder. What business goal does your training address? This should be one of the first things you consider when you begin a new training project.

Step 2 addresses how to link training and development to the business goal, how to design training and development to meet business requirements, and how to ensure follow-up and application of new skills.

This Step Is Important for Success

Training is not just something that is nice to do. It is a critical part of business. Organizations support training departments so that the departments can do their part to help the organization reach its business goals and objectives. Like any other aspect of business—research, marketing, sales, manufactur-

ing—training requires an investment. Organizations also expect a return on their investment. When training is the investment, the organization expects a return in terms of improved customer satisfaction, higher sales, improved productivity, an overall increase in the bottom line, or better regulation compliance.

This step is important because your organization expects a return on its investment in training. The better you have tied the training delivered to your organization's goals, the more successful you will be as a trainer. Aligning all training to organizational requirements is the underlying reason why trainers are on the payroll, making this an essential step to successful training.

Linking Training to the Business Goal

To ensure that training is aligned to organizational requirements when designing, buying, or delivering a training program, you need to identify the business goal that the training supports. Think about the kind of goal it is with regard to the business. Goals typically fall into a few general categories: expense reduction, revenue generation, or regulation compliance. Examples of each include:

- ◆ **Expense reduction:** Refresher courses might be required to decrease errors or rework; new information might be used to reduce reliance on more expensive support from consultants or other organizations; new information might also be aimed at increasing employee productivity.
- ◆ **Revenue generation:** Sales training is usually aimed at increasing sales; customer satisfaction courses are aimed at ensuring customers return and recommend products or services to others.
- ◆ **Regulation compliance:** Government or industry might require organizations to provide courses to prevent errors as well as fines from regulatory agencies.

Always know how the training program you will deliver addresses organizational requirements. You need to know what training your organization needs. And at times you need to know what training your organization does not need. How can that be? I can think of at least two scenarios.

Sometimes management asks for training when in fact training isn't the solution. For example, if one of your organization's goals

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is to increase customer satisfaction, no amount of training provided to your customer service department is going to achieve the goal if the real problem is slow delivery of product from your supplier. Even if training is part of the solution, it is rarely the entire solution. Most goal accomplishments require a systems approach—that is, examining the entire set of inputs (material, people, equipment, process, and environment) and aligning them with the goal.

A second scenario occurs when the organization cannot support the training that is requested. If your organization has decided to invest in supervisory training for a large number of people, but does not have positions for all of them, the participants may become frustrated about not being able to use their skills and will find positions in other organizations. Another example occurs when an organization overdesigns training. That is, it

designs training that is more expensive, more involved, more time consuming, and more complex than necessary and stops the program before it is completed.

Your job in all of these situations is to educate management and to provide data that supports your rationale (read needs assessment and analysis).

What can you do to ensure that training links to the organizational goal?

- ◆ Review all relevant documentation such as the corporate strategic and business plans, and if the training is linked to a specific department, the departmental business plans.
- ◆ Interview leaders of the departments that have requested

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Read *The Six Disciplines of Breakthrough Learning: How to Turn Training and Development Into Business Results* by Cal Wick, Roy Pollock, Andrew Jefferson, and Richard Flanagan. This book provides a six-step model that aligns training to business goals.

- training to clarify the problem they are trying to solve.
- ◆ Discuss the training programs you and your colleagues deliver to ensure the programs are aligned to and support an organizational requirement.
 - ◆ Be sure to stay abreast of the changes your organization is facing and anticipate the kind of support it will need.
 - ◆ Use questions like those in Table 2.1 to be certain that you have considered the issues of linking training to organizational goals.

Designing to Meet Business Requirements

A trainer must incorporate myriad items when designing training, including developing objectives; developing materials, instructional methods, timing, and participation; addressing questions; assessing session length and cost; developing audiovisuals and experiential learning activities; creating a safe learning environment; practicing delivery skills; and many others. We can understand your concern about adding yet another thing to remember!

Don't think of this aspect of design as one more thing to remember. Instead, think of it as a process that ties everything together so you can systematically design a holistic learning experience. Think in terms of expanding the learning experience. To meet business requirements, the design doesn't begin when your participants walk in the door and doesn't end when they leave. It begins as soon as you identify who the participants will be and it continues until you are sure participants are contributing to the intended organizational goals.

What can you do to ensure that the design meets business requirements?

- ◆ Be sure that your design incorporates steps prior to the learning experience to better prepare participants for what will happen during training. This should include

TABLE 2.1

Questions to Ask Regarding Business Results

Prior to the Training or Learning Event:

- ◆ What organizational requirement will be addressed with the requested training?
- ◆ What organization or industry issues are driving the training request?
- ◆ Is training the solution? The only solution?
- ◆ How will participants' performance improve as a result of the training?
- ◆ Who are the suppliers and customers who will be affected by the training?
- ◆ What can the organization expect as a return on its investment?
- ◆ What is the value of the results?
- ◆ How will we measure the value?

During the Training Event:

- ◆ Did the prework and conversations ensure that the participants are prepared as well as they need to be?
- ◆ Do participants know why they are attending the training session?
- ◆ How well are participants able to connect what they do to appropriate business goals?
- ◆ Do participants know how they contribute to achieving the results?
- ◆ Are participants confused by mixed messages?

After the Training Event:

- ◆ Are managers and supervisors involved in the follow-up as planned?
 - ◆ Do participants know where they can receive support?
 - ◆ Was coaching available as necessary?
 - ◆ Are participants held accountable?
 - ◆ Are managers and supervisors held accountable?
 - ◆ How accurate was our measure of value?
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a conversation with the employees' supervisors.

- ◆ Be sure to clarify with management what the participants are expected to do differently or better and how this aligns to the business goal.
- ◆ Identify what actions management will take to support changes following the training session (including reinforcement and feedback) and share these actions with participants.
- ◆ Design support—both hard copy and online materials—that can be used following the training session.
- ◆ Ensure that participants know how their efforts will affect business goals.
- ◆ Be certain that participants know what is expected of them and how they will be held accountable following the training event.
- ◆ Clearly identify the trainer's role in support and follow-up.
- ◆ Be sure participants know how they can find assistance following the training session.

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Management's support is critical to ensure implementation of the concepts learned in any training session. Determine what you will need to do to obtain more buy-in and involvement from managers before and after a training experience. What do you want them to do? How can you motivate them? What information can you provide? What do they need to know? How can you coach them?

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Ensuring Follow-Up and Application

Ensuring transfer of learning is possibly one of the most important and most overlooked aspects of producing successful training. Yet

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As a trainer you have an important role in ensuring that the transfer of knowledge occurs. Check Step 9 for suggestions directed at you.

if you step back and think about it, this is truly where success is defined. Many books have been written about the “did training take?” conundrum. Rather than study why it “doesn’t take,” let’s identify what you can do to ensure it does. What can you do to ensure that follow-up and application of the skills and knowledge learned in the training session are implemented?

- ◆ Follow up with the managers and supervisors within 24 hours of the training session to answer questions or to prod them into action if necessary.
- ◆ Follow up with participants asking what on-the-job actions they have taken since the training session.
- ◆ Review the accountability plan put in place during the design process.
- ◆ Gather data about how many participants are using the support systems (online, coaching, supervisory, and so forth) established for them during the design. Use the data to make improvements where necessary.
- ◆ Review the training department’s role to determine the level of support that is provided and whether it is appropriate for your organization’s culture.

Remember that your organization invests in training and developing its people. Therefore, training and development should be treated like other investments—goals need to be aligned, appropriate plans made, and accountability measured.

Personal Steps to Success

- 1 . Use the list of “Questions to Ask Regarding Business Results” in Table 2.1 to prepare for the next training

program you are asked to design or deliver. Share your responses with your supervisor to identify ways that the program might be improved and better tied to your organization's business goals and objectives.

2. Buy copies of *The Six Disciplines of Breakthrough Learning: How to Turn Training and Development Into Business Results* for each of the trainers in your area. Have everyone read and discuss ideas that could be incorporated into your training department's design-and-delivery process.
3. Before your next training session, meet with the participants' supervisors. Ask them to identify the learning transfer objectives. What do they want their employees to do after returning from the session? Write the actions down word for word. Once you return to your office, send an email to the supervisors you interviewed, thanking them for their time. List the learning transfer objectives in your email and ask for confirmation. Use this information during the training session to help your participants understand the expectations on returning to their workspace.
4. Establish a plan to follow up with participants two to four months after a training session to identify how successful the transfer of learning was as well as any barriers that prevented it from occurring. Use the data to determine improvements that are required in your department and throughout the organization.

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Read *Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done* by Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan to identify quotes and support for this important aspect of transferring skills and knowledge.

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