



Can You Prove Your Training Programs are Effective?

Description

How do you know the training you're providing for your employees is working?

Many CEOs and CFOs feel about training like [John Wanamaker](#) felt about marketing: they are sure half the money they spend is wasted, but don't know which half. It's symptomatic of a real problem. How do you prove training works? And, more importantly perhaps, how do you know which parts *work better* than others?

We believe the answers to those questions begin to become clearer when you first answer some fundamental questions about the purpose of training.

What Do You Want to Measure and Why?

As a client commissioning learning, you'll want to know how effective that learning will be. But how will you define *effective*? Is it how much is learned? Is it how well that learning is applied in the workplace? Is it how well engaged the learner is? Is it the quality of their personal learning plans? Is it evidence of behavioral change? There's not a single right answer. Each of these may be perfectly valid metrics. But it's important you begin your training endeavors with well-defined visions of what success looks like.

Professional Development is a Process, Not a Performance

The next step is to be practical about what can be achieved and by when.

A Kaplan team was recently designing a three-hour session for a group of executives around collaborative decision making. The manager commissioning the session asked the team how we would ensure the participants applied what they learned in the session back in the workplace. Our answer was simple: we couldn't. What we *could* do was create an engaging, stimulating session that would challenge the participants to reassess their current practices and consider the alternatives—one or two of which we would offer. We were training executives with years of experience and attendant habits,

most of which they likely believed were effective. To claim we could guarantee adoption of what we were teaching would be a monumental victory for hope over expectation.

Learning is a process—one of exploration and experimentation, reflection and consolidation, application and personalization. It is not a performance—we simply do not ditch our existing ways for new ones. Adult educators have long known this. They expend much effort on finding ways to encourage their learners to reveal and explore their existing practice and the assumptions that underpin this practice. They know that if they can not accomplish this, the learners are apt to, at best, filter and distort the new learning through the lens of their existing assumptions or, at worst, reject the new learning completely.

Adult learners are not “blank slates” we can simply write upon.

Designing Learning Journeys: Matching the Learning to the Business Need

Planning any journey starts with the destination in mind. The next step for us to identify the business need.

The starting point for our design of a learning journey is how the learning will be transferred or embedded back in the workplace. To achieve this, we know that we need to have an intimate understanding of what our participants’ job role in their organization is today, and what will be required of them in the future. It’s also important to understand the organization’s strategic objectives and how our provision will align to this. A brief analysis of the needs at different levels will provide excellent insight into what we will ultimately assess in terms of the success or failure of the learning interventions.

Level of Need	Key Questions
Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are the strategic objectives that the learning will support?• Are there new capabilities that need developing or enhancing?• Is there a cultural change required?
Role Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What does the role require?• How has it changed?• How will it change?
Training and Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How should the training be delivered?• What should it cover?• How should the different elements in the training be choreographed?

Individual

- How do your people learn best?
- What support will there be in the wider environment?
- What processes or practices are likely to help or hinder their ability to apply the learning?

Create Assessment Schemes that Track the Learning Journey

While we design with the end in mind, we have to deliver with the learner in mind. This means setting out the journey in a way that appreciates the stages of learning that the learner progresses through.

[Trigger, Support, Embed](#) is the Kaplan approach to creating and choreographing learning and development. In essence, it is a framework for planning and managing the learning journey from the initial engagement to the embedding phase. It is this final stage that is the most important—to transfer it back into the workplace as part of the learner’s skillset.

When creating your assessment scheme, you should be assessing how well the learning meets the specific objectives it has at each specific stage in the journey.

Stage	Triggering the Learning Need	Supporting the Learning need	Embedding the Learning
Key Objectives of the Learning Interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Acts as a catalyst for learning and personal transformation• Challenges the learner to assess their current KSA set in light of the topic• Encourages personal reflection and self-evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide the opportunity to acquire the relevant skills and knowledge• To provide opportunity for experiment• To provide means to reflect and plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To provide opportunities to consolidate learning• To provide opportunities to apply• To encourage self-reflection

Desired Learner Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identifies a personal learning gap• Engages and recognizes a personal learning need• Evaluates current KSAs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Actively seeks out new skills and knowledge• Experiments with and rehearses skills• Plans and monitors their own learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Applies learning in the workplace• Shares the learning• Demonstrates a commitment to lifelong professional learning
Possible Means of Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 'Kirkpatrick' style participant feedback• Learning logs/ self-development journal• 180/360 feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Design assessment/ observation• 'Kirkpatrick' style participant feedback• Decision-making assessments• Formative performance assessments• Summative quizzes or tests	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 180/360 feedback• Brinkerhoff Success Case Study• Confidence/Competence assessments• Theory of Change KPIs

Measure What is Important to You

It's unlikely that you can practically assess every aspect of the learning process; nor do you need to.

Identify those aspects of the learning process you want to pay most attention to and the most appropriate means. For example, you may want to be reassured that your learners are engaging at the outset or that your team leaders and managers are involved in supporting the learning. Instruments such as 180- and 360-degree feedback systems can be very useful in that regard. Participant feedback sheets work as well, though these should be carefully tailored. Equally, using more formal assessments will help you gain insight into how much is being learned.

It is likely that the most important measure for you will be the application of the learning in the workplace. 180- and 360-degree feedback systems can act as good proxy indicators of transference. We often use these in combination with one of our [diagnostic tools](#).

We also recommend using the [Success Case Method](#) to produce both the quantitative and qualitative data that will shed light on what is being applied. This method will also (and this can be of particular interest to those engaged in wider cultural or behavioral change programs) help identify which factors in the workplace either help or hinder the transfer of learning into business-as-usual practice.

Kaplan is passionately dedicated to helping organizations develop proven training programs tailored to the needs of the business and the way employees learn. As an L&D partner, Kaplan can help your organization [develop L&D programs](#) tied in a clear and measurable way to the objectives that matter to your business.

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