

THE MOST EFFECTIVE, LEAST EXPENSIVE WAY TO PROTECT YOUR TRAINING INVESTMENT

As agencies grapple with budget shortfalls, learning leaders are looking for ways to make the most of what's left of their training dollars. Many look to technology, such as blogs, mobile learning, HTML 5 and social media, as a means to stretch each dollar invested. But while these tools may enhance the learning experience, they continue to beg the question: are learning outcomes any better as a result? More pointedly, will technology ensure greater returns on your training investment? If it doesn't, the investment is a waste. So what's the alternative?

WHAT OUR RESEARCH TELLS US

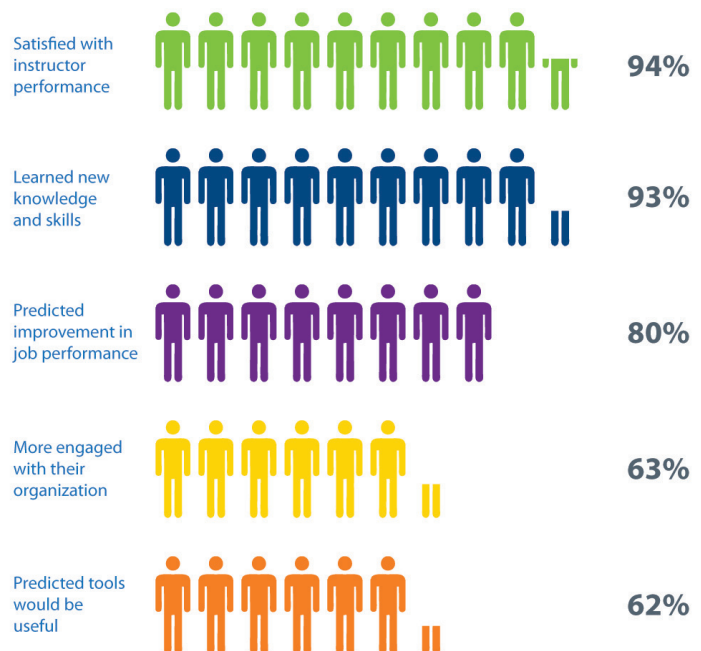
Few practitioners will argue that performance improvement linked to training is the yardstick of a training investment's success. Without learning adoption, the learning experience—no matter how engaging—is a waste of an organization's resources. One of the key factors behind learning adoption is management engagement. Yet our survey of more than 17,000 government learners shows managers are too often disengaged or left out of the loop and, as a result, unable or unwilling to provide learners the opportunities and resources needed to apply what they've learned.

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ESI surveys all on-site course participants at the conclusion of the course to find out how much of what they have just learned they will apply at work. Sixty days later these participants are surveyed again, to find out whether they've applied what they earlier said they would. Seventy-two percent of government participants predicted they would apply new knowledge and skills on the job following ESI training. Sixty days later, however, only 43% reported success in doing so.

A closer look at the survey results explains the gap between the predictions of application and actual application. Most participants emerge from training with very positive responses to the training. Around 94% were satisfied with instructor performance, 93% rated course quality as high and 93% believed they had learned new knowledge and skills. Eighty percent predicted improvement in job performance and 63% said they felt more engaged with their organization.

IMMEDIATELY AFTER TRAINING



The picture changes dramatically 60 days later. Only 31% reported meeting with their manager to set training-related expectations before attending their courses. Only 20% met with their managers after training to discuss applying the learning on the job. Only 41% had the resources to apply the training. Finally, while 62% had predicted the tools would be useful on the job, only 38% had used the materials 60 days later.

ADOPTION FAILURE POINTS

The survey results tell us adoption fails to occur as a result of the following root causes:

Organizational Goal: Managers, learning practitioners and participants often don't have the same answers to the question, "What impact should applying the training have on the organization?" In many agencies,

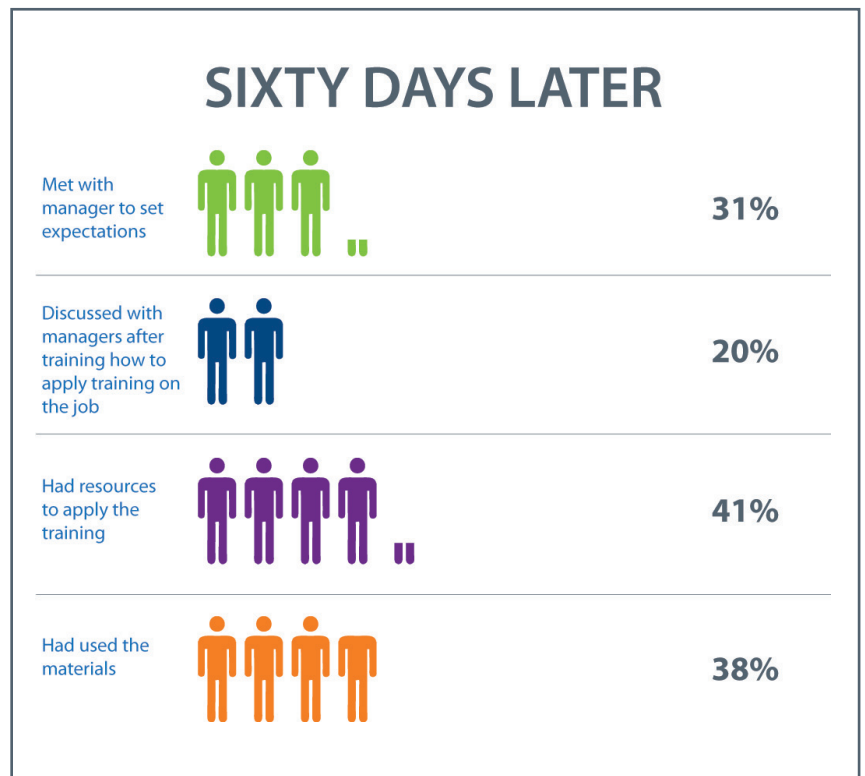
where the objective to meet certification requirements outweighs organizational performance goals in importance, this question should be followed up with "How can the organization make the certification policy work to the organization's—not to mention the individual participant's—advantage?"

Design: Functional and line managers play a small or no role in designing training programs; don't feel they have a stake in the program's success; and don't have the opportunity to ensure the training will be relevant.

Expectations: Learning practitioners, participants and their managers often fail to discuss why the training is important, what skills and knowledge participants should develop, and how those new skills and knowledge will fit the workplace's existing or evolving culture and processes.

Timing: A significant lapse in time between training and application at work will reduce participants' ability to retain what they've learned. Likewise, infrequent opportunities to apply the new knowledge and skills will reduce participants' chances of increasing their mastery.

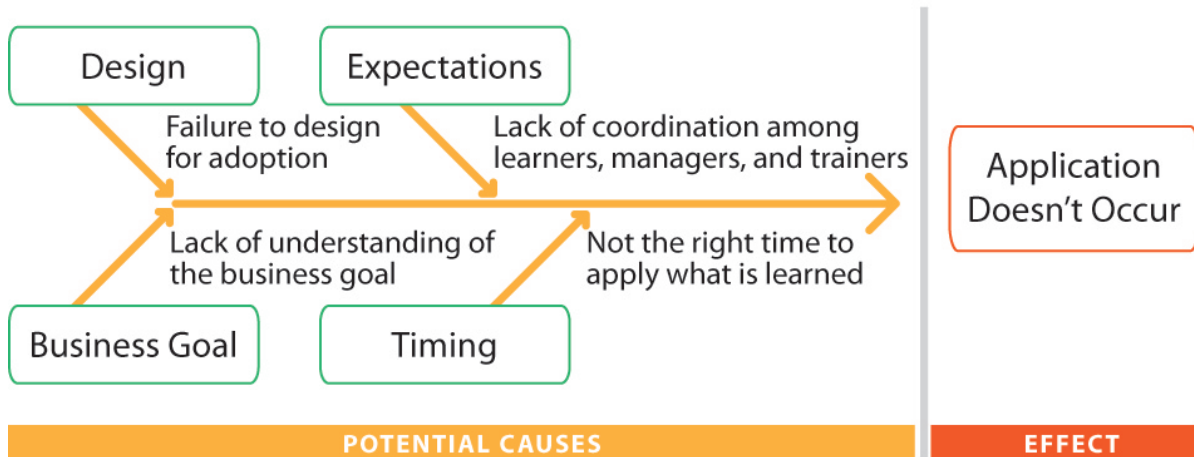
Centering the training on achieving the business goal, designing for adoption, setting the right expectations, and having the opportunities and resources to apply the learning all require the manager's involvement. So if adoption is the goal, engaging the manager throughout will make a huge difference and cost less than the latest tools or technology.



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SYMPTOM:

The gap between learning and doing.



GETTING MANAGEMENT SUPPORT

A plan to obtain management support should cover three key phases: assessment, implementation and adoption. Below are activities that learning practitioners, training sponsors and mentors can use to enhance manager engagement throughout a learning and development program.

Assess

Before the learning program begins, work with managers to assess the participants' knowledge and skill gaps. Assessments range from basic interviews to detailed questionnaires to a Level III assessment. The goal is for managers to validate the assessment results and participate in the program's design.

The program's design will highly depend on what success looks like. Request managers to develop clear success criteria they'll review with participants. Provide managers with a framework to develop an action plan that will serve as the basis for ongoing dialogue on what was learned and how to put it to use.

Implement

Learning isn't an event. Plan activities for managers and participants to work together throughout the program. These activities will keep the manager involved, reinforce the program's importance among participants and encourage all to share expectations on adoption. A few sample activities are for managers to drop in on the course, send emails to participants or set up blogs for participants to interact with them.

Adopt

Encourage managers to meet with participants to discuss what they've learned, what can be applied on the job, what can't and how the learning can be applied immediately. Managers should revisit action plans at regular intervals (e.g., 30, 60, 90 days) to measure participants' progress against the action plan. These meetings will also help determine whether the program was a success.

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When training dollars are short, ensuring adoption by engaging managers is one of the least expensive, yet most effective, ways to protect any training investment. It doesn't require a fancy learning management system or complex instructional design theories. But like any endeavor worth doing, it requires a good dose of commitment, involvement and effort. While it's never easy to pull off, its impact on organizational performance can be thorough and lasting.