

Eleven Reasons Why Training and Development Fails . . . and what you can do about it

By

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During their more than 10 years as consultants to some of the world's largest organizations, Jack and Patricia Phillips have developed a unique vantage point within the training and development community. They have assisted hundreds of organizations with measurement and evaluation to bring accountability to their workforce processes. As a result, they've examined major training and development programs in all types of settings, conducted impact studies using a comprehensive measurement and evaluation process and reviewed the success (or lack thereof) of studies conducted by their clients.

Of the more than 400 impact studies the Phillipses have conducted or reviewed over the years, some studies have shown positive results while others yielded a negative return on investment. Along the way, they have observed repeat patterns of issues that inhibit or enhance results. Even when a program is successful, issues may stand in the way of more impressive results. Collectively through their clients' impact studies, along with comprehensive evaluation, they have identified 11 reasons why training and development fails and provide a prescription for change.

[1] Lack of Alignment with Business Needs. A training program's payoff comes from the business measures that drive it. Simply put, if a

training program is not aligned or connected to a business measure, no improvement can be linked to the program. Too often, training is implemented for the wrong reasons – a trend, desire or perceived need that may not be connected to a business measure.

Initial training needs may be linked to the objectives and evaluation through the

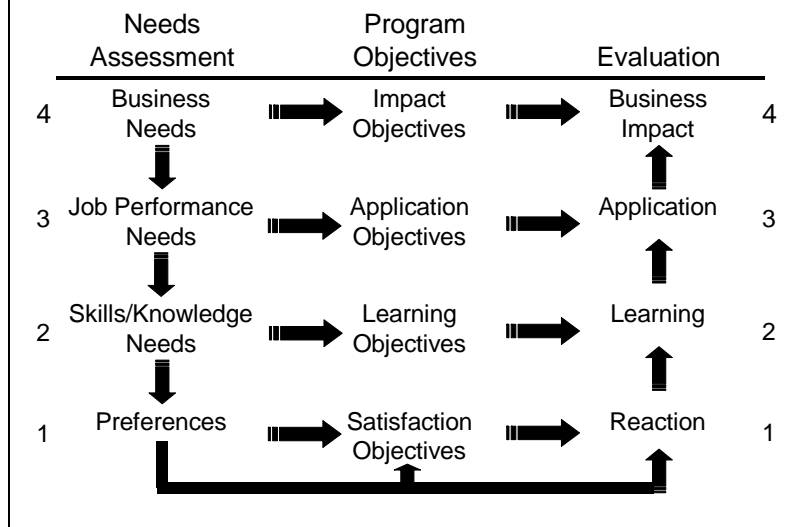
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use of a consistent four-level concept (See "Linking Needs Assessment" chart). If we accept this evaluation framework, four corresponding levels of objectives and needs assessment exist as well. Without the

business connection at Level 4, the program will have difficulty in credibly driving any business results

One major telecom firm in the USA faced this problem directly as they reviewed its corporate university's major programs. A first step to check for business alignment was to connect core courses to some business measure or need based on perceptions of the corporate university staff. When the staff could not readily make the connection, they determined the linkage did not exist. The company needed a more detailed up-front analysis.

Linking Assessment with Evaluation



[2] Failure to Recognize Non-Training Solutions

If the wrong solution is implemented, little or no payoff will result.

Too often, training is perceived as a solution for a variety of performance problems when training may not be an issue at all. A recent evaluation of a leading U.S. bank's major training program illustrated this problem. In its training program, the bank attempted to prepare the commercial loan officers (relationship managers) to sell products other than commercial loans, such as the bank's capital market products and cash management services. But the training produced little change in the managers' behavior. An impact study subsequently revealed that the culprit was the compensation arrangement. When probed for a reason for the poor results, the bankers clearly indicated that unless their compensation system changed to account for the new product lines, their behavior would not change. They will continue to sell only the products on which their commissions were based.

Attempting to solve job performance issues with training will not work when factors such as reward systems, job design,

and motivation are the real issues. To overcome this problem, training staffs must focus on methods to analyze performance rather than conduct traditional training needs assessments – a major shift in performance improvement that has been developing for many years. Up-front analysis should be elevated from needs assessment, which is based on skills and knowledge deficiencies, to a process that begins with business needs and works through the learning needs.

[3] Lack of Specific Direction and Focus.

Training and development should be a focused process that allows stakeholders to concentrate on desired results. Training and development objectives should be developed at higher Kirkpatrick levels than traditional learning objectives (See "Examples of Objectives" chart). These objectives correspond with six measures that lead to a balanced approach to evaluating training's success (See "A Balanced Approach" chart). Most training programs should contain objectives at multiple levels, ideally including those at levels 3 and 4.

Examples of Objectives	
<i>Objective</i>	<i>Level</i>
1. Decrease error rates on reports by 20%.	Business Impact (4)
2. Increase the use of counseling skills in 90% of situations where work habits are unacceptable.	Application (3)
3. Achieve a post-test score increase of 30% over pre-test.	Learning (2)
4. Initiate at least three cost reduction projects.	Application (3)
5. Decrease the amount of time required to complete a project.	Business Impact (4)
6. Achieve a 2:1 benefit to cost ratio one year after program implementation.	ROI (5)
7. Receive a job relevance rating from participants of at least 4.5 out of 5.	Reaction (1)
8. Increase the external customer satisfaction index by 25% in 3 months.	Business Impact (4)
9. Handle customer complaints with the 5-step process in 95% of complaint situations.	Application (3)
10. Achieve a job simulation test score average of 75.	Learning (2)
11. Conduct a meeting with direct reports to set performance improvement goals.	Application (3)
12. At least 50% of participants use all customer interaction skills with every customer.	Application (3)

When developed properly, these objectives provide important direction and focus for a variety of stakeholders at different time frames. For designers and developers, the objectives provide needed insight to focus on application and impact, not just learning. The facilitators need detailed objectives to prepare individuals for the learning experience's ultimate outcome: job performance change.

Participants need the direction provided by level 3 and 4 objectives to clearly see how the training program's outcome will actually help the organization. Sponsors of training and development, the key clients who pay for the program and support it, require such objectives to connect training with important business-unit measures. Finally, evaluators use this type of direction to know what data to collect to determine whether the program has been successful.

Recognizing the importance of multiple objective levels, including business impact, a vice president of corporate training and development at a major package delivery company recently posed an important question to the organization: "How can we expect our management team to support a

program when we cannot define the behavior expected from participants and the subsequent business impact driven by the program?"

While not all programs should undergo such detailed up-front analysis, it is a critical issue that needs more attention.

[4] The Solution is Too Expensive. Of course, a training and development program's ROI might ultimately fail to recoup its high costs. It's important to note, however, that a negative ROI is not always a sign of failure. Many programs might add enough perceived value through intangibles and significant short-term behavior change to overcome negative ROI. If positive ROI is expected, however, then negative ROI shows failure and is unacceptable.

One large bank's executive leadership development program, for example, offered an impressive design from a learning perspective and included project assignments for participants, mentors, and learning coaches. Unfortunately, the program proved too expensive for the monetary value that it added, even after multiple years of providing benefits. When the full cost of conducting the four-week

A Balanced Approach to Measuring Training's Success

Measure 1: Participant Reaction To, Satisfaction With, and Planned Action Connected to the Training



Measure 2: Participant Learning Improvement (Changes in Knowledge and Skills)



Measure 3: Application of Knowledge Learned and New Skills on the Job



Measure 4: Business Impact Directly Linked to the Training



Measure 5: Return on Investment Comparing Monetary Benefits to Costs



Measure 6: Intangible Benefits Linked to the Program

The ROI Process

The process used to capture the success of training and development programs develops six types of data about a specific program (See "A Balanced Approach" chart). These six types of data provide a balanced, credible approach to identifying the success of a training and development program. The first four types of data are consistent with the traditional Kirkpatrick levels. The process also requires a specific method or technique to isolate the impact of the program. This critical step answers the question, "How do you know it was the training?" This comprehensive process provides the complete profile of training success. At the heart of the process is a step-by-step model that shows how the data are collected, processed, and analyzed (See "The ROI Process Model" chart). The process starts by developing evaluation plans to collect data and make decisions regarding how the data are processed and analyzed. During the program, reaction and planned actions are captured from participants. Learning is captured as specific improvements in skills, knowledge and perceptions are measured.

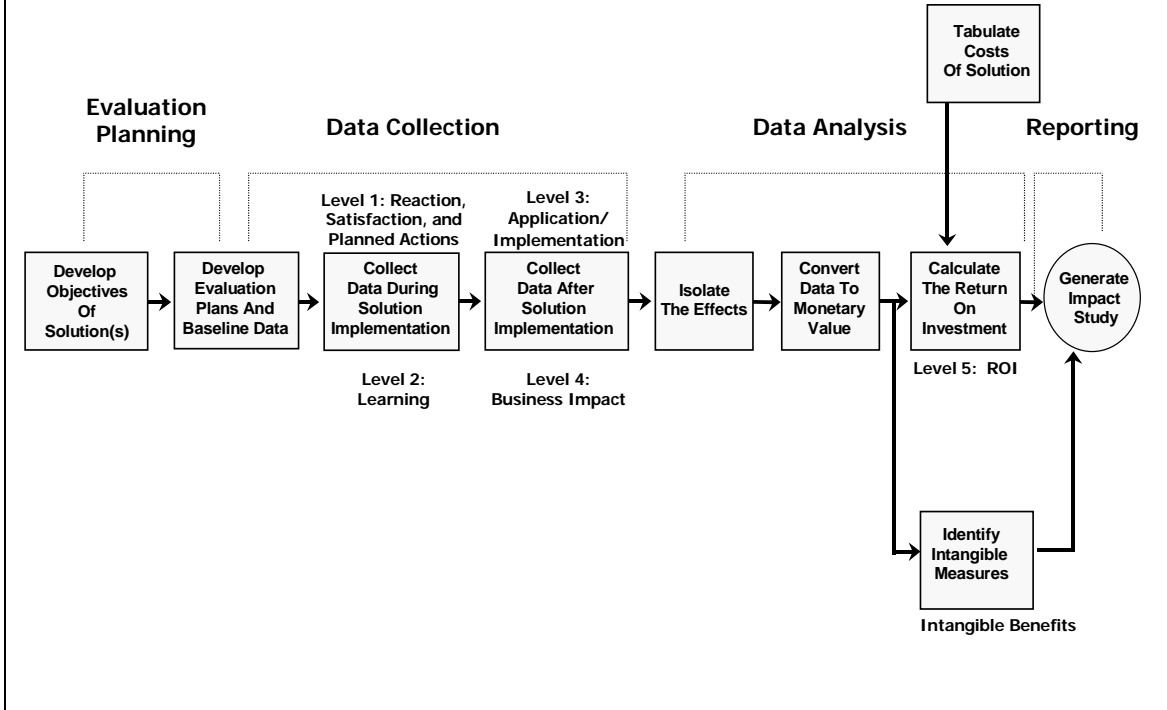
After the program is implemented, application and implementation data are collected which show the use of the skills and the application of what was learned in the training program. Next, the corresponding business impact, which is directly linked to the training and development program or solution, is measured. Together, these blocks in the process model comprise the key elements of data collection.

The next set of blocks in the process model comprises the ROI analysis. The first task is to isolate the effects of learning from other influences. This process uses one or more methods to separate training's influence from other factors that had an impact on the business measure. Next, business impact data are converted to monetary value and annualized to present an annual value for the training. One-year values are used for short-term solutions; longer periods are used for more extensive, long-range implementation.

The fully loaded costs are captured to reflect both direct and indirect costs of the training solution. Monetary benefits and the costs are combined in the calculation of the actual ROI. Intangible benefits are identified throughout the process and are tabulated after an attempt is made to convert them to monetary value. If an intangible item cannot be credibly converted to monetary value, it is left as an intangible measure and becomes the sixth type of data. This comprehensive measurement process is now being used by thousands of organizations in all types of settings, including public sector and nonprofit organizations.

THE ROI PROCESS

Calculating the Return on Investment of a Business Performance Solution



training sessions in major cities around the world were tallied along with the costs of consultants, personal learning coaches for each executive, and costs for the design, development, and facilitation teams, the total reached almost \$100,000 per participant. The program was unable to deliver what management expected.

This issue raises the question of what costs should be included in the analysis. Actual costs are traditionally included in an impact study, although some of them are indirect and might not be visible or contained in a particular cost statement (See “Recommended Cost Categories”). Too often there is a tendency to use only direct costs or even to minimize them to a certain extent.

The good news is that many effective learning solutions can be implemented with inexpensive processes and still drive business results. For example, a sexual harassment prevention workshop conducted at a hospital network cost each participant (supervisor and managerial level) \$424. The ROI was 1,052 percent. It is possible.

Recommended Costs for Training Programs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment Costs (Prorated) • Development Costs (Prorated) • Program Materials • Instructor/Facilitator Costs • Facilities Costs • Travel/Lodging/Meals • Participant Salaries and Benefits • Administrative/Overhead Costs (Prorated) • Evaluation Costs

[5] Regarding Training as an Event or a Series of Events.

A positive business impact must come from an individual participant's behavior change, and such change does not come easily. When training is considered a single event, such as attending a two-day workshop for example, the odds of changing behavior are slim. Without behavior change, training fails to generate business results.

One major physician malpractice insurance provider offered various training seminars to help physicians adjust their approach and behavior regarding certain medical procedures. Traditionally, the programs were offered in four-hour or full-day programs, with no pre-work and no follow-up reinforcement. Not surprisingly, the seminars changed few, if any, behaviors.

Sometimes it may be helpful to consider behavior change as bodybuilding. An occasional visit to the gym will have little impact on the body. Yet, a continuous process of working out, along with the proper motivation and support, will make it happen.

[6] Participants are Not Held Accountable for Results.

For training programs to be successful, participants must individually drive performance change. When pressed for reasons for not changing behavior, participants are quick to blame others, usually the boss. But that may not be the real issue. Of individuals most likely to be held responsible for results – including managers, trainers, developers, and senior executives – the overlooked participant deserves more attention. Participants often don't see changing their behavior as their responsibility. Historically, when results are few, the training and development staff, along with immediate managers, comes

under fire. But, we often fail to focus on the participant's role in the process.

A recent impact study involving a technology firm based outside the United States revealed that several leadership programs designed for employees at various organizational levels failed to yield the expected results. A major barrier was noticed: Each group of participants continually identified lack of support from immediate managers as the problem. Ironically, each level blamed the next. The

Barriers to Transfer of Training to the Job

- Immediate manager does not support the training.
- The culture in the work group does not support the training.
- No opportunity to use the skills.
- No time to use the skills.
- Skills could not be applied to the job.
- The systems and processes did not support the use of the skills.
- Didn't have the resources available to use the skills.
- Changed job and the skills no longer apply.
- Skills are not appropriate in our work unit.
- Didn't see a need to apply what was learned.
- Could not change old habits.
- Reward systems don't support new skills.

CEO commented that somewhere along the chain of authority a person must accept responsibility and make things happen.

Participants can succeed with training if they are properly motivated to do so and are held accountable for their results, even with an unsupportive manager. Traditionally, the participants' role in a training program has been limited to attendance – learning the skills and knowledge being offered. At times, they may even be required to apply the newly acquired skills on the job.

But participants should not only apply what is learned, they also should ensure that doing so will reflect business results. While this creates additional expectations, the participants' role is elevated from learning

to actually achieving results and reporting them to the training and development staff. This shift is accomplished by developing expectations into learning solutions, providing handouts that detail specific expectations and defining the roles of employees in various handbooks, employee manuals, and orientation sessions. Participants must understand that the program's success rests largely with them, and disappointing results may be their responsibility.

[7] Failure to Prepare the Environment for Transfer.

Regardless of what participants learn from a training program, without transferring it to the job, performance will not change and the training program will fail. This training-transfer problem has been an important issue in training and development for decades. Unfortunately, studies continue to show that between 60 and 90 percent of what is learned isn't applied on the job. The reason this occurs is complex, involving many different barriers (See "Barriers of Transfer" chart), to which little attention is given until it's too late.

The results: Barriers kill the success of an otherwise successful program.

Barriers must be understood at the beginning of the process as part of needs assessment and analysis. Identified early, inhibitors can be addressed in the solution's design, development, delivery, and implementation. Efforts to minimize, if not eliminate, the barriers before the learning solution is implemented will pay off significantly.

[8] Lack of Management Reinforcement and Support.

Without management encouragement and support, participants will rarely implement new skills and knowledge in the workplace. The manager's role, therefore, is critical in the learning process. Most studies have shown that the two most powerful opportunities for managerial input occur during the interaction with the learner prior to the training solution and after the training has been completed.

It's clear that managers usually don't realize their influence. This disconnect is most frequently identified in follow-up surveys conducted as part of an impact study. More action must be taken to ensure managers understand their impact and how they can make changes.

At one major computer manufacturer, participants were asked specific questions regarding the actions and performance of their managers following training. By using multiple-choice responses, the survey essentially listed the same questions but reworded the choices from the perspective of the group being surveyed. The results

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showed a tremendous disconnect. Some 40 percent of managers said they encouraged and coached their employees with the training, while the participants indicated that 0 percent actually provided encouragement and coaching.

The problem often exists in managers' perceptions about reinforcement and support. Some managers feel that since they created an empowered environment for employees, they should not have to probe

further into each learner's application of new skills or knowledge. *Learning* new skills is a different situation. A new process implemented in the workplace, particularly one involving a significant departure from previous approaches, requires the immediate manager's support. A simple inquiry about the training program's success and how it will be implemented into the work unit is often sufficient.

Organizations offering support have tackled this process by developing management reinforcement modules for a particular program, defining managers' support roles, conducting workshops to show managers their specific roles, holding managers accountable through their own job descriptions and responsibilities, and rewarding managers for doing it right.

[9] Failure to Isolate the Effects of Training. Too often, training programs are conducted, business measures are monitored, and improvements are credited to the training process alone. The assumption is the training program improved the business. Actually, other influences and processes may have influenced the business measure. The challenge is to isolate the improvement directly related to training.

Failure to attempt to isolate training's contribution might cause some training pros to be discarded as irrelevant. Such pros may actually bolster the bottom line, but if there is no attempt to isolate their impact, executives and sponsors are puzzled about the actual connection to business improvement.

No doubt this is perhaps the most challenging issue. The classical approach is to compare a group that has received the training to a group that has not, and let the difference in the two groups represent training's impact. We have attempted to use

this technique often, but only one-third of our studies contain this type of arrangement. For the remaining studies, another technique must be used to pinpoint training's impact. Recently, various techniques have evolved to estimate the connection between the training and business improvement (See "Techniques to Isolate").

Techniques to Isolate the Effects of the Training Program

- Use of control groups
- Trend line analysis
- Forecasting methods
- Participant's estimate of impact (percent)
- Supervisor's estimate of impact (percent)
- Management's estimate of impact (percent)
- Use of experts
- Subordinate's report of other factors
- Calculating/Estimating the impact of other factors
- Customer input

The good news is that at least one of these techniques identified in the chart will work in every setting, and the issue can be addressed in every impact study. To show training's real value, designers, developers, and evaluators must accept the challenge to tackle this issue.

[10] Lack of Commitment and Involvement From Executives. Without top executive commitment

and involvement, training and development will be ineffective and major pros will fall short of expectations. Commitment is critical, which equates to resources being allocated to the training and development function and its specific pros. Involvement

Communication: Common Target Audiences		
<i>Reason for Communication</i>	<i>Primary Target Audience</i>	<i>Level of Data</i>
Secure approval for program	Client, top executives	4, 5
Gain support for the program	Immediate managers, team leaders	3, 4, 5
Build credibility for the training staff	Top executives	4, 5
Enhance reinforcement of the program	Immediate managers	3, 4
Enhance results of future programs	Participants	1, 2, 3, 4
Show complete results of the program	Key client team	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Stimulate interest in training programs	Top executives	4, 5
Demonstrate accountability for client expenditures	All employees	4, 5
Market future training programs	Prospective clients	3, 4, 5

includes the actual presence and actions of individual executives in the process.

Business literature is laced with examples of top executives taking active roles. Andy Grove, chairman of Intel, sees training and development as one of his key responsibilities. Jack Welch, former chairman of GE, devoted a prescribed number of days per month at the GE management development center in New York. Bill Gates, Microsoft chairman, conducts a portion of the orientation for new employees as part of a rotating assignment with senior executives.

Active roles by senior managers are critical and can be accomplished in many ways – ranging from minimal participation to increased involvement in which specific days are allocated to teaching. When executives take a very visible role, others will do the same. This attitude filters throughout the organization and makes a big difference.

[11] Failure to Provide Feedback and Use Information About Results. All stakeholders need feedback. Employees require feedback on their progress, developers and designers need feedback on program design, facilitators need feedback to see if

adjustments should be made to delivery, and clients need feedback on a program’s success. Without such feedback, a program may not reach expectations.

The challenge is to provide a stream of information, as data are collected, to a variety of audiences (See “Common Target Audiences” chart). Sharing evaluation data from Kirkpatrick’s levels 1-5 can help refine the training process. Reaction data and learning data can improve learning design and facilitation. Application data should be provided to those individuals implementing the pros so that adjustments can be made. And business impact data must be shared with clients and others so that the entire group can understand the value.

Most importantly, the results may be used to make adjustments in the design, development, and delivery of the program. The routine communication of data serves as a process improvement in making a successful program more successful.

Conclusion

Chances are, these 11 issues sound familiar. Organizations must address them all if training is to live up to expectations and generate appropriate returns on investment. With increased pressure to show the payoff of the investment in learning and education, failure cannot be tolerated. Failure can be prevented. Using

