

Required Course: Manager's Role in Learning and Performance

Jack J. Phillips, Ph.D. and Patti P. Phillips, Ph.D.
August 2003

The Management Support Dilemma

Almost every learning and development (L&D) professional complains about the lack of management support. The topic will move to the top of most lists of persistent problems in the learning and development field. Managers are sometimes reluctant to send participants to programs, decline to be involved in any type of follow-up activity, will not reinforce the objectives of the program, and sometimes complain about the cost of the program. In a few cases, managers even suggest that participants ignore what was presented in the program.

Lack of management support is a very serious and universal problem. An absence of strong management support will inhibit an otherwise professional and effective learning solution. Because job-related learning has little chance to be effective without manager support, some studies estimate that as much as eighty percent of what is taught in a program is not utilized, and the principal culprit is the management group.¹ The problem can be serious enough in some organizations to cause the ultimate demise of the learning and development function.

Check Your Current Status

As a preliminary step to improve support, it is helpful to assess the current level of support from the management group. An excellent tool for this assessment is presented in Exhibit 1. The instrument addresses thirty important issues that collectively measure the degree of management support for the learning and development function. The target group for assessment can be any management group (division, plant, corporate, or regional - at middle management or senior level). High scores on this instrument indicate a strong, supportive environment where little additional efforts are needed. Lower scores indicate serious problems, signaling a need for several actions to improve the support. An analysis of scores is also included at the end of the exhibit.

Why Managers Fail to Support Training

Managers are reluctant to support training for a variety of reasons. Some are valid while others are based on misunderstandings about learning and development and its impact. An analysis of the current level of support will usually reveal the most common problems, which are outlined below.

No Results. Managers are not convinced that job-related learning adds value in terms they understand and appreciate. They do not see programs producing results in ways to help them reach their objectives. In many instances, they are never asked, “Is this learning program working for you?” or “Is it adding value to your department?” Learning and development professionals deserve much of the blame for this situation. L&D staff have routinely judged the effectiveness of learning by the reactions of participants and measures of learning during the program. In today’s environment, this approach is inadequate for evaluation. Mounting evidence shows that, while participants may have a favorable reaction to the program and learn the material, there is no assurance that subsequent job performance and business impact will follow.

Too Costly. Managers view training as a double or triple cost. The direct cost for learning development is ultimately taken from the operating profits and sometimes charged back to their department. They also see formal learning programs as taking employees away from their jobs, resulting in a loss of productivity. They experience a personal cost of finding ways to get the job done while an employee is away in training. They must rearrange work schedules to meet deadlines, find new ways to meet service requirements, redistribute the workload, or secure a replacement. Sometimes, the method of recording time when employees attend formal learning programs reinforces this concept, since many situations result in the time being labeled “non-productive.” Unfortunately, this sends an important and sometimes negative message throughout the organization.

No Input. Managers do not support learning because they are not offered an opportunity for input into the process. They are not asked for their views on the content or focus of a program during needs assessment or program formulation. They rarely are provided objectives that link learning to job performance improvements or business results. Without input, managers will not develop the ownership for learning and development.

No Relevance. Managers have little reason to believe that the learning programs have any job relevance or are going to help the department. They see content descriptions that bear little resemblance to work unit issues. They hear comments about learning activities that are unrelated to current challenge faced by the team. Managers have many requests and demands for resources. They quickly eliminate the unnecessary

activities. No relevance equals no need which equals no priority and eventually leads to no support.

No Involvement. Managers do not support learning because they are not actively involved in the process in any meaningful way. Even in some of the best organizations, the manager's role is severely restricted or limited, sometimes by design and other times by default. To build respect for the learning and development function, managers should have some type of active involvement in the process, ranging from attending programs designed for their employees to actually delivering part of a program as a facilitator.

No Time. Managers do not have time to support formal learning and development. They are very busy with increasing demands on their time. When establishing daily priorities, the specific actions necessary to show support for learning do not make their top priority list. Consequently, nothing happens. Managers often perceive that requests for increased support will always require additional time. (In reality, many supportive actions do not require much time; it's often a matter of perception.) Sometimes the learning and development department creates this perception because it doesn't honor its own request for management support. L&D staff talk about developing partnerships and having line management involved, but are sometimes unwilling to do the work it takes to initiate and nurture it.

Lack of Preparation. Sometimes managers do not have the skills necessary to provide reinforcement to participants after they attend programs. Although they may be willing to offer support, managers may not know how to provide feedback, respond to questions, guide participants through specific issues, or help achieve results with programs. Specific skills are needed to provide effective reinforcement, just as specific skills are required for planning, budgeting, delegating, and negotiating.

Lack of Knowledge About Learning and Development. Managers are not always aware of the nature and scope of learning and development in their organization. They understand that it is a legitimate function and that it is needed to equip new employees with specific skills and knowledge required for the job. Beyond that, they are not fully aware of what learning and development is attempting to provide for the organization. They do not fully understand the different steps involved from needs assessment to development, to delivery, and to evaluation. They see bits and pieces of the process but may not know how it is integrated to become an effective process. Recently, an operating manager, who had just been promoted to Director of HR, told his learning and development manager that he wanted to find something productive for the learning and development staff to do while they were not facilitating. It is difficult for managers to support a process they do not fully understand.

No Requirements. Finally, managers do not support learning and development because they are not sure what they are supposed to do. If the only request from the learning and development department is to allow participants to attend a program, that is all they will do. The learning and development staff usually creates this problem because they do not “make the request;” they do not communicate directly with the operating managers to let them know what is needed and what managers must do to make the process work. Instead, they rely on vague policy statements, top executive communications, and an occasional informal conversation. This serves to reinforce the manager’s view that they have a very limited role in the learning and development process, and at best, only a secondary responsibility to make it effective. In many situations, managers will respond when asked directly, but first, they must be asked.

Collectively, these reasons for non-support equate to challenges for training and development departments and represent opportunities for managers. If the issues are not addressed in an effective way, management support will not exist, transfer of learning will be diminished, and consequently, training results will be severely limited or nonexistent.

Definitions

Several terms need additional explanation. *Management commitment, management support, management involvement, reinforcement, maintenance of behavior, and transfer of learning* are overlapping terms and are sometimes confusing. *Management commitment* usually refers to the top-management group and includes its pledge or promise to allocate resources and support to the learning and development effort. *Management support* refers to the actions of the entire management group, which reflects its attitude toward the learning and development process and staff. The major emphasis is on middle and first-line management. Their supportive actions can tremendously impact the success of programs. *Management involvement* refers to the extent to which managers and other professionals outside the learning and development function are actively engaged in the learning process in addition to participating in programs. Because *management commitment, support, and involvement* have similar meanings, they are used interchangeably in current literature.

Reinforcement, maintenance of behavior, and transfer of learning also have similar meanings. Reinforcement refers to actions designed to reward or encourage a desired behavior. The goal is to increase the probability of the behavior occurring after a participant attends a program. *Maintenance of behavior* refers to the organization’s actions to maintain a change in behavior on the job after the program is completed. *Transfer of learning* refers to the extent to which the learned behavior from the program is used on the job. The term *line managers* is used to represent key managers involved in producing, selling, or delivering the products and services.

Key Strategies to Build Support and Commitment

Increasing Commitment

Commitment is necessary to secure the resources for a viable learning and development effort. Table 1 shows the ten general areas of emphasis for strong top-management commitment. These ten areas need little additional explanation and are necessary for a successful learning and development effort.

The Ten Commitments of Top Management

For strong top-management learning and development commitment, the chief executive officer should:

1. Develop or approve a mission for the learning and development function.
2. Allocate the necessary funds for successful learning and development programs.
3. Allow employees time to participate in learning and development programs.
4. Get actively involved in learning and development programs and require others to do the same.
5. Support the learning and development effort and ask other managers to do the same.
6. Position the learning and development function in a visible and high-level place on the organization chart.
7. Require that each learning and development program be evaluated in some way.
8. Insist that learning and development programs be cost effective and require supporting data.
9. Set an example for self-development.
10. Create an atmosphere of open communication with the learning and development manager.

Table 1

Now for the big question. How can top-management commitment increase? Quite often the extent of commitment is fixed in the organization before the learning and development manager becomes involved with the function. The amount of commitment varies with the size or nature of the organization. It usually depends on how the function evolved, the top-management group's attitude and philosophy toward learning and development, and how the function is administered. The key to the question of increasing commitment lies in the results. Top-management commitment usually increases when programs obtain desired results. This is a vicious cycle because commitment is necessary to build effective programs with which results can be obtained. And when results are obtained, commitment increases. Nothing is more convincing to a group of top executives than programs with measurable results they can understand. When a program is proposed, additional funding is usually based solely on the results the program is expected to produce.

Increasing Management Support

Middle- and first-level managers are important to program success. Before discussing the techniques involved in improving the support for programs, it is appropriate to present the concept of ideal management support. Ideal support occurs when a manager reacts in the following ways to a participant's involvement in a learning and development program:

- Encourages participants to be involved in programs
- Volunteers personal services or resources to assist with learning and development
- Outlines expectations with the participant before the participant attends the program, detailing what changes should take place or what tasks the participant should accomplish after completing the program
- Reinforces the behavior change resulting from the program; this reinforcement may be demonstrated in a variety of ways
- Conducts a follow-up of the results achieved from the program
- Rewards participants who achieve outstanding accomplishments as a result of attending the program

This kind of support for a program represents utopia for the learning and development department. Support is necessary before and after the program is conducted. Effective actions prior to a program can significantly impact learning from the program and application on the job.

The degree to which managers support programs is based on the value they place on learning and results achieved. To improve management support, the learning and development staff must regularly show the results achieved from programs where these managers have the most concern or have the most involvement.

Improving Reinforcement

The importance of involving the participant's supervisor as an integral part of the process cannot be overstated. Too often participants return from a program to find roadblocks to successfully applying what they learned. Faced with these obstacles, even some of the best participants revert to old habits and forget most of what they learned in the program. In fact, regardless of how well the skill-training is conducted in the classroom, unless it is reinforced on the job, most of the effectiveness is lost.

The reason for this painful finding lies in the nature of learning. In learning a skill, participants go through a frustrating period when the skill does not feel natural and is not producing the desired results. This period represents a results decline and is difficult for most participants. However, those who persist gain the expected reward from the

new behavior. If the participant continues the new behavior or skill, it eventually feels more natural, and performance improves. However, without proper reinforcement, particularly during the time when results decline, participants may abandon the acquired skills. They may revert to the familiar old ways of behavior with no change.

Although self-reinforcement and peer reinforcement are helpful, participants' immediate managers are the primary focus for reinforcement efforts. An immediate manager can exert significant influence on the participant's post-program behavior by providing reinforcement in the following ways:

- Helping the participant diagnose problems to determine if new skills are needed
- Discussing possible alternatives for handling specific situations; acting as a coach to help the participant apply the skills
- Encouraging the participant to use the skills frequently
- Serving as a role model for the proper use of the skills
- Giving positive rewards to the participant when the skills are successfully used

Each of these activities reinforces what has been taught and can tremendously impact participants.

Improving Management Involvement

Management involvement in learning and development is not a new process. Organizations have practiced it successfully for many years. Although almost as many opportunities exist for management's involvement in the learning and development process as there are steps in a training design model, management input and active participation generally only occur in the most significant situations. Management should be involved in most of the key decisions of the learning and development department. The primary vehicles for obtaining or soliciting management involvement are presented here.

Program Leaders. The key to involving management and professional personnel is to use them as course leaders or instructors.

Advisory Committees. Many organizations develop committees to enhance line management involvement in the learning and development process. These committees, which act in an advisory capacity to the department, may have other names, such as councils or people development boards. As shown in Table 2, committees can be developed for individual programs, specific functions, or multiple functions.

Types of Committees

Responsible for:	Examples:
Individual Program	New Supervisors' Development Program Committee Account Executives' Training Program Committee Product Knowledge Course Committee Apprenticeship Training Committee
Specific Function	Sales Training Committee Nurse Development Committee Quality Control Training Committee Underwriting Training Committee
Multi-functions	Management Development Committee Faculty Development Committee Skills Training Committee Government Compliance Training Committee

Table 2

Learning and Development Task Forces. Another potential area for management involvement is through the use of a task force. The task force consists of a group of employees, usually management, who are charged with the responsibility for developing a learning and development program. Task forces are particularly useful for programs beyond the scope of learning and development staff capability. Also, a task force can considerably reduce the time required to develop a program.

Managers As Participants. Managerial participation can range from attending the full program to auditing a portion to examine its content. However, participation may not be feasible for all types of programs, such as specialized courses designed for only a few individuals.

Involving Managers in Evaluation. A final major area in which managers can be involved in the learning and development process is in the evaluation of programs. Although management is involved to a certain extent in assessing the ultimate outcome of learning programs, this process focuses directly on evaluation through a team or committee approach. One approach requires managers to examine collectively the application and business impact of learning. Six steps are used:

1. Invite clients to participate in focus groups.
2. Ask clients to collect data regarding the learning's application and impact.
3. Ask participants to share positive results of learning.
4. Ask participants to share negative or unachieved results.
5. Reconvene the entire group to share overall results.
6. Consolidate lists and agree on actions.

In addition, by involving managers and executives and showing them how evaluation can work, increased commitment and support should follow.

New Roles for Managers. The approaches described above are primary ways to involve managers in the learning and development process when the focus is on achieving results. However, many other ways abound in which managers can be involved. In essence, these types of management involvement define new learning roles for managers in an organization. In these roles, managers:

- Coordinate/organize learning
- Participate in needs assessment
- Train employees
- Serve as subject-matter experts
- Reinforce learning
- Evaluate learning application and impact

It is imperative that managers assume these key roles, and the staff must communicate frequently about the program's results. Collectively, this process will increase support and commitment, as well as enhance input from each learning role.

Developing Partnerships with Managers

As a conclusion, this section summarizes the actions needed to build a partnership with management, and in some situations, previous sections are repeated. Overall, this section represents the major steps needed to address this issue in a comprehensive way.

A partnership relationship can take on several different formats and descriptions. In some organizations, the relationship is informal, loosely defined, and ill-structured. By design, these organizations do not want to develop the relationship to a formal level but continue to refine it informally. In other organizations, the process is formalized to the extent that specific activities are planned with specific individuals, all for the purpose of improving relationships. The quality of the relationships is discussed, and assessments are typically taken to gauge progress. Still, in others, the process is very formal, where individuals are discretely identified and a written plan is developed for each individual. Sometimes a contract is developed with a particular manager. Assessments are routinely taken, and progress is reported formally. Although these three levels of formality are distinct, a learning and development department can move through all these different levels as the partnering process matures and achieves success.

For relationship building to be effective, the learning and development staff must take the initiative to organize, plan, and measure the process. The staff must want to develop the relationship. Rarely will line managers approach the learning staff to nurture these relationships. In some organizations, line managers do not want to develop

relationships or to be bothered with the time it may take to work through these issues. They may see no need for the relationship and may consider it a waste of time. This requires the learning and development staff to properly assess the situation, plan the strategies, and take appropriate actions, routinely and consistently, to ensure that the process is working.

For this process to be effective, the executive/manager responsible for the learning and development function must take the lead and involve others as appropriate and necessary. The direction must come from the top. Although this responsibility cannot be delegated, it can involve many other members of the learning and development staff, if not all. Two critical issues are involved. The first, and perhaps most important issue, deals with the specific steps necessary to actually develop a partner relationship. Second, a set of principles must be followed when building and nurturing the relationship.

Steps to Develop a Partner Relationship. The steps to develop an effective partnership relationship are:

1. **Assess the current statuses of partnership relationships.** The first course of action is to determine the current condition. Table 3 shows some of the key issues involved in determining current status. It is recommended that the instrument be completed by the key staff members of learning and development to determine present status and that it be used to plan specific issues and activities. In essence, this instrument provides information for planning and provides an opportunity to determine progress in the future. Some of the most important actions to enhance support follow:
 - Utilize pre-program agreements and commitments to determine specific goals and objectives for participants in the program.
 - Clearly define responsibilities of all stakeholders in the learning and development process.
 - Prepare the participants for the program by providing clear instructions and expectations.
 - Encourage managers to attend programs designed for their subordinates.
 - Conduct follow-up discussions with participants to determine success with application of the skills and knowledge.
 - Encourage managers to provide advice and counsel to the learning and development department about key issues and concerns.

A total score of 20 or less on the Table 3 assessment indicates that a partnership is non-existent and the potential for a partnership developing is weak. If the score is in the 21-50 range, several problems exist with the partnership or anticipated partnership. Some progress can be made, but it will be difficult. If the score falls in the 51-60 range,

the partnership is working effectively or has great potential for working. A score of 61 or better reflects an outstanding partnership relationship or a great potential for one. By providing the appropriate up-front attention, it may be possible to assess the potential before spending a significant amount of time on the relationship.

Assessment of Partnership Potential for Success

Scale

- 1 = definitely no
- 2 = more no than yes
- 3 = neither yes nor no
- 4 = more yes than no
- 5 = definitely yes

Circle One

1. Choice of partners (Is this a strategically valuable partner for learning and development?)	1	2	3	4	5
2. Willingness to become a partner (Does this party desire to become your partner?)	1	2	3	4	5
3. Trust (Is there an adequate level of trust or the possibility of achieving it?)	1	2	3	4	5
4. Character and ethics (Does this partner operate in an ethical manner?)	1	2	3	4	5
5. Strategic intent (Are the long-term aspirations of both partners compatible?)	1	2	3	4	5
6. Culture fit (Do the partners come from compatible cultures?)	1	2	3	4	5
7. Common goals and interests (Are the goals and interests of the partners shared fairly equally?)	1	2	3	4	5
8. Information sharing (Can both partners freely share information?)	1	2	3	4	5
9. Risks shared fairly (Are the risks to both partners fairly equal?)	1	2	3	4	5
10. Rewards shared fairly (Are the rewards and potential gains for both partners fairly equal?)	1	2	3	4	5
11. Resources adequately matched (Do both partners have adequate resources to support the relationship?)	1	2	3	4	5
12. Duration mutually agreed upon as long term (Do the partners agree on a long-term partnership?)	1	2	3	4	5
13. Commitment to partnership by both (Is there a fairly broad level of commitment by both partners?)	1	2	3	4	5
14. Value given and received (Do both partners have similar perceptions of the value the other brings to the partnership?)	1	2	3	4	5
15. Rules, policies, and measures (Do these key issues reinforce the desired partnership behavior?)	1	2	3	4	5

Total Score:

Table 3

1. **Identify key individuals for a partnership relationship.** Building a partnership works best when it clearly focuses on a few individuals.
2. **Learn the business.** An effective partnership relationship cannot be developed unless the learning and development staff member understands the operational and strategic issues of the organization.
3. **Consider a written plan.** The process is often more focused when it is written with specific details for each manager.
4. **Offer assistance to solve problems.** The learning and development staff exists to support managers.
5. **Show results of programs.** When results are achieved, quick communication with managers is important to demonstrate to them how a program achieved success. In addition, the results achieved from other programs should be communicated to these key managers.
6. **Publicize partners' accomplishments and successes.** Every opportunity to give proper credit to the accomplishments of the partner should be taken.
7. **Ask the partner to review needs.** Whenever a needs assessment is requested or undertaken as part of an overall macro-level assessment, the partner should be asked to review the information and confirm, or add to, the needs.
8. **Have partner serve on an advisory committee.** A helpful approach to provide guidance and direction to the learning and development staff or a particular program is to establish an advisory committee.
9. **Shift responsibility to partner.** Although learning and development has multiple responsibilities, the primary responsibility for learning and developing employees must lie with the management group.
10. **Invite input from the partner about key plans and programs.** Routinely, these key managers should be asked to provide information about key issues, such as needs assessment, critical program issues, the implementation of new technology, program design and delivery, and follow-up evaluation.
11. **Ask partner to review program objectives, content, and delivery mechanisms.** As a routine activity, these managers should review the objectives, content, and planned delivery for each new program or major redesign in their individual areas.
12. **Invite partner to conduct/coordinate a program.** If appropriate, the partner should be asked to help coordinate or conduct a part of a program.
13. **Review progress and re-plan strategy.** Periodically the partnership process should be reviewed to check progress and re-adjust or re-plan the strategy.

Key Principles. As the specific steps listed above are undertaken, it is important to preserve the nature and quality of the relationship with a partner. Several essential principles serve as an operating framework to develop, nurture, and refine this critical relationship. Table 4 lists these key principles, which should be integrated into each step.

Key Principles When Developing a Partnership Relationship

1. Have patience and persistence throughout the process.
2. Follow win-win opportunities for both parties.
3. Deal with problems and conflicts quickly.
4. Share information regularly and purposefully.
5. Always be honest and display the utmost integrity in all the transactions.
6. Keep high standards of professionalism in each interaction.
7. Give credit and recognition to the partner routinely.
8. Take every opportunity to explain, inform, and educate.
9. Involve managers in as many activities as possible.
10. Eventually, ensure that a balance of power and influence is realized between the two parties.

Table 4

The Manager's Workshop

One effective approach to prepare managers to support evaluation is to conduct a workshop for managers, "Manager's Role in Learning and Performance." Varying in duration from one half to two days, this practical workshop shapes critical skills and changes perceptions to enhance the support for learning and development, and performance improvement. Managers leave the workshop with an improved perception of the impact of learning and a clearer understanding of their roles in the learning and performance improvement process. More important, they often have a renewed commitment to make learning work in their organization.

Due to the critical need for this topic in management training, this workshop should be required for all managers, unless they have previously demonstrated strong support for the learning and development function. Because of this requirement, it is essential for top executives to be supportive of this workshop and, in some cases, take an active role in conducting it. To tailor the program to specific organizational needs, a brief needs assessment may be necessary to determine the specific focus and areas of emphasis for the program.

Workshop Design Issues

Needs Assessment. To tailor the program to specific organizational needs, a brief needs assessment may be necessary to determine the specific focus and areas of emphasis for the program. Input for the needs assessment can come from several sources, including the following:

- Interviews with the learning and development staff.
- Questionnaires or surveys with the learning and development staff.
- Interviews with the management group.
- Questionnaires or surveys with the management group, such as the instrument presented in Exhibit 1.
- Surveys of participants to determine areas of need and areas of non-support.

This process usually identifies needs that are very common and are outlined later in the section on program content.

Target Audiences. While the target audience for this program is usually middle-level managers, the target group may vary with different organizations. In some organizations, the target may be first-level managers and in others, the target may begin with second-level managers. Three important questions help determine the proper audience:

- Which group has the most direct influence on the learning and development function?
- Which management group is causing serious problems with lack of management support?
- Which group has the need to understand learning and development evaluation so they can influence learning transfer?

The answer to all these questions is often middle level managers.

Timing. This workshop should be conducted early in the management development process before non-supportive habits are delivered. When this program is implemented throughout the organization, it is best to start with higher-level managers and work down the organization. If possible, a version of the program should be a part of a traditional development program provided to supervisors when they are promoted into managerial positions.

Selling the Concept to Top Management

Because convincing top management to require this program may be a difficult task, three approaches should be considered:

1. Discuss and illustrate the consequences of inadequate management support for training, learning, and performance. The statistics are staggering in wasted time and money.

2. Show how current support is lacking. An evaluation of an internal learning program will often reveal the barriers to successful application of learning. Lack of management support is often the main reason, which brings the issue close to home.
3. Demonstrate the savings that can be achieved with managers more involved in the learning and development process.

The endorsement of the top management group is very important. In some organizations, top managers actually attend the program to explore first hand what is involved and what they must do to make the process work. At a minimum, top management should support the program by signing memos describing the program or by approving policy statements. They should also ask provoking questions in their staff meetings from time to time. This will not happen by chance. The L&D manager or Chief Learning Officer must tactfully coach top executives.

Workshop Content

The program will usually cover the topics outlined below. The time allotted for each topic and specific focus will depend on the organization, the experience and needs of the managers, and the preparation of the management group. The program can be developed in separate modules where managers can be exempt from certain modules based on their previous knowledge or experience with the topic. This module concept is recommended.

The Overall Importance of Learning and Development. After completing this module, managers should perceive L&D as a critical process in their organization and be able to describe how the process contributes to strategic and operational objectives. Managers need to be convinced that learning and development is a mainstream responsibility that is gaining in importance and influence in the organizations. They need to understand the results-based approach of today's progressive HRD organization. Data from the organization is presented to show the full scope of learning and development in the organization. Tangible evidence of top management commitment should be presented in a form such as memos, directives, and policies signed by the CEO or other appropriate top executive. In some organizations, the invitation to attend the program comes from the CEO, a gesture that shows strong top management commitment. Also, external data should be included to illustrate the growth of L&D budgets and the increasing importance of learning and development. Perhaps a case showing the linkage between HRD and strategy would be helpful.²

The Impact of Learning and Development. After completing this module, managers will be able to identify the steps to measure the impact of learning and development on important output variables. Too often, managers are unsure about the success of learning programs. Reports and studies should be presented, showing the impact using

measures such as productivity, quality, cost, response times, and customer satisfaction. Internal evaluation reports, if available, are presented to managers, showing convincing evidence that learning is making a significant difference in the organization. If internal reports are not available, other success stories or case studies from other organizations can be utilized.³ Managers need to be convinced that learning and development is a successful, results-based tool, not only to help with change, but also to meet critical organizational goals and objectives.

Learning and Development Process. After completing this module, managers should be able to describe how the learning process works in their organization and understand each critical step from needs assessment to ROI calculation. Managers usually will not support activities or processes that they do not fully understand. They need to be aware of the effort that goes into developing a learning program and their role in each step of the process. A short case, illustrating all the steps, is helpful in this module.⁴ This discussion also reveals various areas of the potential impact of learning and development.

Responsibility for Learning and Development. After completing this module, managers should be able to list their specific responsibilities for learning and development. Defining who is responsible for formal learning and development is important to the success of the process. Managers must see how they can influence learning and development and the degree of responsibility they must assume in the future. Multiple responsibilities are advocated, including managers, participants, participant managers, facilitators, and developers. Case studies or articles are appropriate in this module to illustrate the consequences when responsibilities are neglected or when there is failure to follow-up by managers. One article is available which was designed for this purpose⁵. In some organizations, job descriptions are revised to reflect learning and development responsibility. In other organizations, major job-related goals are established to highlight management responsibility for learning and development. Overall, this session leaves participants with a clear understanding of how their responsibility is linked to the success of learning and development.

Active Involvement. One of the most important ways to enhance manager support for L&D is to get them actively involved in the process. After completing this module, managers will actually commit to one or more ways of active involvement in the future. Table 5 shows twelve ways for manager involvement identified for one company. The information in the table was presented to managers in the workshop with a request for them to commit to at least one area of involvement.

Management Involvement in Learning and Development

The following are areas for present and future involvement in the Learning and Education Process. Please check your areas of planned involvement.

	In Your Area	Outside Your Area
▪ Attend a Program Designed for Your Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Provide Input on a Needs Analysis	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Serve on an HRD Advisory Committee	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Provide Input on a Program Design	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Serve as a Subject Matter Expert	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Serve on a Task Force to Develop a Program	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Volunteer to Evaluate an External L&D Program	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Assist in the selection of a Vendor Supplied L&D Program	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Provide Reinforcement to Your Employees After They Attend a Learning Program	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Coordinate an L&D Program	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Assist in Program Evaluation or Follow-Up	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Conduct a Portion of the Program, as a Facilitator	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Table 5

After these areas are fully explained and discussed, each manager is asked to select one or more ways in which he or she will be involved in learning and development in the future. A commitment to sign up for at least one involvement role is required. If used properly, these commitments are a rich source of input and assistance from the management group. There will be many offers for involvement, and the learning and development department must follow through with the offers. A quick follow-up on all offers is recommended.

Exercises and Activities

Checklists, exercises, mini-cases, and skill practices are all helpful to illustrate and reinforce concepts necessary in this workshop. As with any management learning program, active involvement is essential. Mini-cases help illustrate the problems of lack of support for training. For example, one case, which is commercially available, illustrates the consequences when a manager fails to follow-up and support the learning and development effort.⁶ In this setting, a supervisor attends an advanced supervisory development program only to find his manager unenthusiastic about his participation. The manager develops a negative attitude toward training and the follow-up evaluation process. This case stimulates significant discussions and insight from the manager's point of view. In a typical reaction, managers see their own behavior in the case and alter their attitude about supporting training.

Three very important exercises focus directly on the management support and management perception issues. The first exercise involves transfer of learning. As a first step, the learning and development staff should estimate the percent of total content of the typical program that is transferred to the job in three categories: immediately, at the end of six months, and at the end of one year. Of course, this time can be varied to include, for example, immediately, one month, and three months, and one year. The target programs for this exercise are those normally supported by the management group. These numbers are tabulated and are available for use in the workshop. During the workshop, managers are asked to estimate the percentage of the content of the typical program that is transferred to the job, using the same categories. This is obtained from the management group being questioned in the workshop, and their averages are compared with those from the learning and development staff. Typically, manager estimates will be lower than the learning and development staff. As a variation, the headings of what should be transferred into the different categories could be asked of both groups with appropriate comparisons. This exercise will clearly show the following conclusions:

1. A large portion of the skills learned from a program is not transferred to the job.
2. Managers are less optimistic about transfer than the learning and development staff.
3. Both estimates are below what could/should be accomplished with proper transfer strategies in place.

A second exercise involves the perceptions of support offered by managers when compared to the level of support perceived by their direct reports. Data from a follow-up study is presented to show the profile of manager behavior after a participant attends a formal learning program. The same profile of behavior is collected from the managers and compared to the input from participants. Table 6 shows the two sets of actual data from a follow-up of a program designed for first level managers. There is a marked difference in manager behavior as perceived by the participant who attended the program and the manager's own perception of actual support. These differences are typical. Managers may take issue with the data comparison. (To show managers how their support may differ significantly from what is perceived by others, the same experiment may be repeated with follow-up data from the organization.) This action may lead to management ownership of the follow-up survey. This exercise emphasizes the following major points:

1. Manager support is not as effective and helpful as managers typically perceive it to be.
2. Participants usually rate manager support as being ineffective.
3. Management support is an extremely important issue in transferring training to the job.

The Contrast of Perceptions of Management Support

Participant responses concerning manager support:	
My manager told me to forget what I've learned; it doesn't work here	12%
My manager said to be very careful about using the material; it may not work here	22%
My manager said nothing	53%
My manager said that I should (could) try to use what I've learned	8%
My manager said that he/she expects me to use this material	5%
My manager coached and supported me through the application of the material	0%
Manager responses concerning his/her support:	
I told him/her to forget what was learned; it won't work here	0%
I told him/her to be very careful about using the material; it may not work here	0%
I said nothing	4%
I told him/her to try (consider trying) to use what was learned	11%
I said that I expected him/her to use the material	36%
I coached and supported him/her through the application of the material	49%

Table 6

The third exercise involves the perception of manager influence on results. The managers are presented with the matrix, shown in Figure 1, which shows various roles and time frames involved in the transfer or learning and development on the job. When presented to the managers, the blocks are blank.

Role Time Combinations for Transfer of Learning

		TIME FRAME		
		Before	During	After
ROLE	{ Manager	1		2
	{ Participant			
	{ Facilitator			

Figure 1

Managers are asked to identify the top two blocks that have the greatest potential for influencing results. Each block represents activities, involving a particular role and time frame, which can influence results. Managers rarely check a block that involves them, identifying the participant and facilitator as the principal influencers. However, the research shows that the number one role/time combination is the manager discussing expectations before participating in the learning program. The number two combination is the manager following up on post program results.¹ Managers are usually surprised, underestimating their influence. This exercise highlights the following conclusions:

1. Managers have more influence on learning application and impact than they perceive.
2. Managers should/could do more to influence results
3. A variety of activities in different roles and time frames may influence results.

Facilitation

The material used in this workshop must be practical and easy to understand by the management group. It must be free of typical learning and L&D jargon. It should be targeted to the specific needs of managers and presented from the perspective of the manager. "Nice to know" topics should be avoided.

Because of its importance, the most effective facilitators who have much credibility with the management team must conduct this program. Sometimes external consultants, who enjoy an excellent reputation in the learning and development field, are utilized in the workshop. Although the capabilities may exist internally, sometimes managers prefer to hear it from the external "expert." This helps reinforce to managers that their involvement in this process is occurring in other organizations -- not just theirs. It is important to show top management support for this program especially if attendance is required. Memos from top management should explain the program and outline expectations. Participation by a top executive or a CEO would be ideal.

Other Workshop Features

Although the workshop format and presentation may vary, some common variations are:

- The program is held off-site to take participants away from job pressures and distractions. This can help them to focus directly on the workshop material without interruption.
- Pre-work is required. Having participants complete the survey and read cases in advance can be helpful.
- Cross-functional groups are used so that participants see the perspectives of learning and development from different areas in the organization.

- The workshop is an excellent opportunity to present impact studies or other data that shows the business results from learning and development.
- Reference materials are provided. Several books are available on the manager's role in learning and development and are listed in the bibliography. Although the books may not be read completely or even referenced regularly, managers feel some comfort that the material is there, if needed.

Payoff of the Workshop

The success from this workshop should appear in many forms because many of the barriers to successful learning and development are caused by lack of management support. There should be increases supportive actions measured in follow-up surveys of participants. Many follow-up evaluations collect data on the extent and level of management support after participants attend formal programs. When managers fully understand the process and their role in it, they have a "renewed" determination to make it work. Manager attitudes toward training should be more positive and learning and development programs should be more successful because of increased support. Table 7 presents a summary of these payoffs and how they are measured.

Workshop Evaluation

Measurement Area	Evaluation Method	Level of Evaluation
1. Manager Perception of Learning Program Effectiveness	Pre and post scores on 30 item instrument shown as Exhibit 1.	Knowledge, skills, perception changes
2. Management support as perceived by participants	Collected before and after the workshop with routine follow-up surveys and questionnaires.	Application
3. Management involvement	Monitoring involvement activity on a commitment sign up sheet and comparing before and after workshop	Application
4. Participant attendance in voluntary programs	Average attendance in programs is monitored before and after program	Indicators/Business impact
5. Improved success of training programs	Follow-up evaluations reveal improvements in job performance and business results	Business impact

Table 7

These measurement areas provide a full array of improvement opportunities that estimate the success of the workshop. Some additional explanation can illustrate how this measurement process can work.

First, manager attitudes about learning effectiveness should be more positive as measured on a post program assessment, using the same instrument as in the pre-program assessment presented in Exhibit 1. This is a direct measure of changes in knowledge, skills, and perceptions.

Second, future follow-up surveys should show increased supportive actions from managers. Most follow-up evaluations collect information on the extent of management support provided to participants when they attend learning and development programs. Before and after comparisons should reveal improvements in support.

Third, the individual manager commitments for active involvement are tangible evidence of success. Each planned action is easily monitored and documented. Involvement activity monitored before and after the workshop provides evidence of improvement with involvement.

Fourth, attendance in all learning and development programs should improve, where attendance is voluntary. Average attendance rates for the same programs before and after the workshop should reveal improvement data.

Fifth, learning and development programs should be more successful because of increased support. Follow-up evaluations should yield improved job performance and business impact from learning after this workshop is conducted.

Conclusion

This report presents information necessary to build management support and commitment for learning and development. An important strategy presented is a special workshop for the management group. This workshop, "The Manager's Role in Learning and Performance," is designed to radically transform the managers' perception of learning and development and alter his or her involvement in the process. As a result, learning and development will receive increased support and its effectiveness and scope of influence will dramatically change. The results will be a significant improvement in the success of learning and development.

References

- ¹ Broad, M.L. and Newstrom, J.W. Transfer of Training. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1992.
- ² Rothwell, W.J. In Action: Linking HRD with Organizational Strategy. Alexandria, VA: American Society for Training and Development, 1998.
- ³ Phillips, J.J. In Action: Measuring Return on Investment. (Vol. 1, Vol. 2, Vol. 3) Alexandria, VA: American Society for Training and Development, 1994, 1997, 2001.
- ⁴ Ford, D. In Action: Designing Training Programs, Alexandria, VA: American Society for Training and Development, 1996.
- ⁵ Phillips, J.J. and Phillips, P.P. "Eleven Reasons Why Training Fails and what can be done about it." *Training*, September 2002.
- ⁶ The case, "International Electric," is available from The ROI Institute, PO Box 380637, Birmingham, AL 35238-0637.

Bibliography

1. Smart Training, The Manager's Guide to Training for Improved Performance, Clay Carr, McGray-Hill, Inc. New York, New York (1992)
2. What Every Manager Should Know About Training, Robert F. Mager, Atlanta, GA: CEP Press (1995)
3. Bottomline on ROI, Patricia P. Phillips, Atlanta, GA: CEP Press (2002)

How Results-Based Are Your Training and Performance Improvement Programs?

AN ASSESSMENT SURVEY FOR MANAGERS

OVERVIEW

The amount of management support needed for organization development, performance improvement, training and development, and human resource development programs is very critical to their success. In most situations the amount of support managers are willing to provide is directly linked to their perception of the effectiveness of the programs. If the programs are achieving results and helping the organization reach its goals, managers are often willing to support the programs, provide resources to make them successful, reinforce specific behavioral objectives, and become more actively involved in the process.

The following instrument provides an assessment of the extent to which managers perceive that programs are achieving results. It provides the organization with an assessment of the effectiveness of performance improvement, training and development, human resource development, and organization development as perceived by the managers.

USE

The instrument can be used in the following ways:

- ✓ It can serve as a benchmark for specific efforts, events, and activities aimed at enhancing the level of support.
- ✓ In efforts to increase the effectiveness of programs, this instrument will serve as a periodic assessment of the progress made.
- ✓ It can serve as a useful discussion tool in workshops for managers where the goal is to enhance their support for the training, performance improvement, or organizational development function.
- ✓ It is a helpful tool to compare one group of managers in a division, plant, region, or subsidiary company with others to determine where specific attention may be needed.

TARGET AUDIENCE

The target audience for the instrument is middle and upper managers who provide support to the performance improvement, training and development, and organizational development function. These are the managers in the organization who can influence the success of those efforts.

ADMINISTRATION

The instrument should be administered without discussion. Participants and managers should be instructed to provide very candid responses. The results should be quickly tabulated by the respondents and discussed and interpreted in a group discussion.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS ASSESSMENT: A SURVEY FOR MANAGERS

Instructions. For each of the following statements, circle the response that best matches the Training and Development function at your organization. If none of the answers describe the situation, select the one that best fits.

Select the most correct response.

1. The direction of the Training and Development function at your organization:
 - a) Shifts with requests, problems, and changes as they occur.
 - b) Is determined by Human Resources and adjusted as needed.
 - c) Is based on a mission and a strategic plan for the function.
2. The primary mode of operation of the Training and Development function is:
 - a) To respond to requests by managers and other employees to deliver training programs and services.
 - b) To help management react to crisis situations and reach solutions through training programs and services.
 - c) To implement many training programs in collaboration with management to prevent problems and crisis situations.
3. The goals of the Training and Development function are:
 - a) Set by the training staff based on perceived demand for programs.
 - b) Developed consistent with human resources plans and goals.
 - c) Developed to integrate with operating goals and strategic plans of the organization.

4. Most new programs are initiated:
 - a) By request of top management.
 - b) When a program appears to be successful in another organization.
 - c) After a needs analysis has indicated that the program is needed.
5. When a major organizational change is made:
 - a) We decide only which presentations are needed, not which skills are needed.
 - b) We occasionally assess what new skills and knowledge are needed.
 - c) We systematically evaluate what skills and knowledge are needed.
6. To define training plans:
 - a) Management is asked to choose training from a list of canned, existing courses.
 - b) Employees are asked about their training needs.
 - c) Training needs are systematically derived from a thorough analysis of performance problems.
7. When determining the timing of training and the target audiences:
 - a) We have lengthy, nonspecific training courses for large audiences.
 - b) We tie specific training needs to specific individuals and groups.
 - c) We deliver training almost immediately before its use, and it is given only to those people who need it.
8. The responsibility for results from training:
 - a) Rests primarily with the training staff to ensure that the programs are successful.
 - b) Is a responsibility of the training staff and line managers, who jointly ensure that results are obtained.
 - c) Is a shared responsibility of the training staff, participants, and managers all working together to ensure success.
9. Systematic, objective evaluation, designed to ensure that trainees are performing appropriately on the job:
 - a) Is never accomplished. The only evaluations are during the program and they focus on how much the participants enjoyed the program.
 - b) Is occasionally accomplished. Participants are asked if the training was effective on the job.
 - c) Is frequently and systematically pursued. Performance is evaluated after training is completed.
10. New programs are developed:
 - a) Internally, using a staff of instructional designers and specialists.
 - b) By vendors. We usually purchase programs modified to meet the organization's needs.
 - c) In the most economical and practical way to meet deadlines and cost objectives, using internal staff and vendors.

11. Costs for training and OD are accumulated:
 - a) On a total aggregate basis only.
 - b) On a program-by-program basis.
 - c) By specific process components such as development and delivery, in addition to a specific program.
12. Management involvement in the training process is:
 - a) Very low with only occasional input.
 - b) Moderate, usually by request, or on an as needed basis.
 - c) Deliberately planned for all major training activities, to ensure a partnership arrangement.
13. To ensure that training is transferred into performance on the job, we:
 - a) Encourage participants to apply what they have learned and report results.
 - b) Ask managers to support and reinforce training and report results.
 - c) Utilize a variety of training transfer strategies appropriate for each situation.
14. The training staff's interaction with line management is:
 - a) Rare, we almost never discuss issues with them.
 - b) Occasional, during activities such as needs analysis or program coordination.
 - c) Regular, to build relationships, as well as to develop and deliver programs.
15. Training and Development's role in major change efforts is:
 - a) To conduct training to support the project, as required.
 - b) To provide administrative support for the program, including training.
 - c) To initiate the program, coordinate the overall effort, and measures its progress...in addition to providing training.
16. Most managers view the Training and Development function as:
 - a) A questionable function that wastes too much time of employees.
 - b) A necessary function that probably cannot be eliminated.
 - c) An important resource that can be used to improve the organization.
17. Training and Development programs are:
 - a) Activity-oriented (All supervisors attend the "Performance Appraisal Workshop").
 - b) Individual results-based (The participant will reduce his or her error rate by at least 20%).
 - c) Organizational results-based (The cost of quality will decrease by 25%).
18. The investment in Training and Development is measured primarily by:
 - a) Subjective opinions.
 - b) Observations by management, reactions from participants.
 - c) Dollar return through improved productivity, cost savings, or better quality.

19. The Training and Development effort consists of:
 - a) Usually one-shot, seminar-type approaches.
 - b) A full array of courses to meet individual needs.
 - c) A variety of training and development programs implemented to bring about change in the organization.
20. New Training and Development programs, without some formal method of evaluation, are implemented at my organization.
 - a) Regularly
 - b) Seldom
 - c) Never
21. The results of training programs are communicated:
 - a) When requested, to those who have a need to know.
 - b) Occasionally, to members of management only.
 - c) Routinely, to a variety of selected target audiences.
22. Management involvement in training evaluation:
 - a) Is minor, with no specific responsibilities and few requests.
 - b) Consists of informal responsibilities for evaluation, with some requests for formal training.
 - c) Very specific. All managers have some responsibilities in evaluation.
23. During a business decline at my organization, the training function will:
 - a) Be the first to have its staff reduced.
 - b) Be retained at the same staffing level.
 - c) Go untouched in staff reductions and possibly beefed up.
24. Budgeting for training and development is based on:
 - a) Last year's budget.
 - b) Whatever the training department can "sell."
 - c) A zero-based system.
25. The principal group that must justify Training and Development expenditures is:
 - a) The Training and Development department.
 - b) The human resources or administrative function.
 - c) Line management.
26. Over the last two years, the Training and Development budget as a percent of operating expenses has:
 - a) Decreased
 - b) Remained stable
 - c) Increased

27. Top management's involvement in the implementation of Training and Development programs:
 - a) Is limited to sending invitations, extending congratulations, passing out certificates, etc.
 - b) Includes monitoring progress, opening/closing speeches, presentation on the outlook of the organization, etc.
 - c) Includes program participation to see what's covered, conducting major segments of the program, requiring key executives to be involved, etc.
28. Line management involvement in conducting training and development programs is:
 - a) Very minor; only HRD specialists conduct programs.
 - b) Limited to a few specialists conducting programs in their area of expertise.
 - c) Significant. On the average, over half of the programs are conducted by key line managers.
29. When an employee completes a training program and returns to the job, his or her supervisor is likely to:
 - a) Make no reference to the program.
 - b) Ask questions about the program and encourage the use of the material.
 - c) Require use of the program material and give positive rewards when the material is used successfully.
30. When an employee attends an outside seminar, upon return, he or she is required to:
 - a) Do nothing.
 - b) Submit a report summarizing the program.
 - c) Evaluate the seminar, outline plans for implementing the material covered, and estimate the value of the program.

INTERPRETING THE TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS ASSESSMENT

Score the assessment instrument as follows. Allow:

- 1 point for each (a) response
- 3 points for each (b) response
- 5 points for each (c) response

The total will be between 30 and 150 points.

The interpretation of the scoring is provided below. The explanation is based on the input from dozens of organizations and hundreds of managers.

Score Range	Analysis of Score
120 - 150	<u>Outstanding Environment</u> for achieving results with Training and Development. Great management support. A truly successful example of results-based Training and Development.
90 - 119	<u>Above Average</u> in achieving results with Training and Development. Good management support. A solid and methodical approach to results-based Training and Development.
60 - 89	<u>Needs Improvement</u> to achieving desired results with Training and Development. Management support is ineffective. Training and Development programs do not usually focus on results.
30 - 59	<u>Serious Problems</u> with the success and status of Training and Development. Management support is non-existent. Training and Development programs are not producing results.