

Perspectives

How to Maximize Your Training Investment A Process for Closing the Learning-Doing Gap

Organizations invest millions of dollars to provide training in the hopes of developing their people to their full potential. Sadly, the best training in the world won't make a difference if there isn't a process in place to create sustainable results.

Today, more than ever, top management is demanding that training not only culminates in results, but that it supports the organization's business objectives and strategies. To achieve this, an organization must focus on delivering training through a deliberate process that supports sustainability.

Scott Blanchard, the newest generation of the Ken Blanchard family visionaries and founder of Coaching.com, a coaching services division of The Ken Blanchard Companies®, believes that in order to create sustainability—training that delivers tangible value and results in productivity and profitability over time—organizations must follow a systematic approach in order to achieve sustained learning and results.



Creating Impact and Sustainability through Training and Development

In 2003 Scott Blanchard and Richard Whiteley, best-selling author and principal with The Whiteley Group, conducted extensive research to identify the key criteria for helping organizations create a sustainable approach to training and close the learning-doing gap.

Based on this research, The Ken Blanchard Companies has established a system for ensuring the transfer of learning from the classroom to the work environment.

The data from this research clearly shows that five critical success factors must be in place to make training initiatives successful and that the fifth success factor is the cornerstone to successful delivery and integration.

The Five Critical Success Factors

1. Top Management Buy in
2. Follow-Through and Reinforcement
3. Demonstrating Tangible Value
4. Strategic Integration
5. The Four Keys to Effective Learning
 - Setting the Context
 - Acquiring New Concepts and Skills
 - Practicing New Behaviors and Skills
 - Applying New Skills on the Job

1. Top Management Buy In—

Senior management must set the tone for any learning initiative. Top management creates the excitement and passion needed, as well as the strategic link between what is being learned and achieved by the individual and the mission, vision, and values of the organization.

2. Follow-up and Reinforcement—

Follow-up and reinforcement are the ongoing processes that provide the backbone to bridging the gap between learning and doing. It is critical that organizations spend at least 10 times the energy in reinforcing training as they do in delivering it.

3. Demonstrating Tangible Value—

It is critical that training pays off where and how you want it to. So it must be clear how training creates change, demonstrates value, and makes a positive impact on people and performance.

4. Strategic Integration—

Training and learning must be a strategic and ongoing process linked to specific business objectives. An organization's vision, mission, and strategic plan must be clearly linked to training objectives so that strategies, competencies, and critical tasks are in alignment and people are equipped to make a difference.

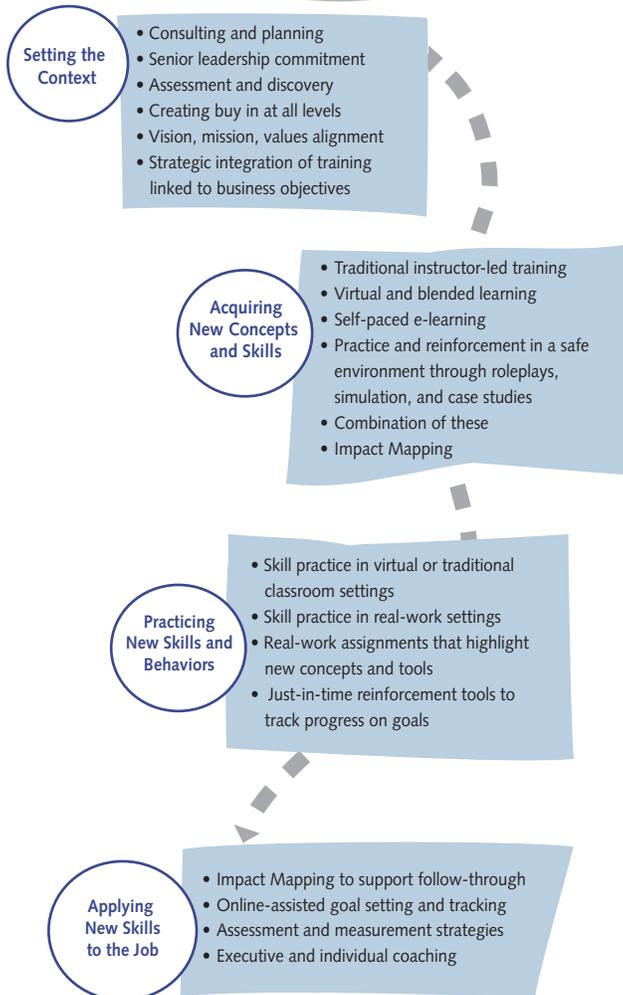
5. The Four Keys to Effective Learning—

In order for training to pay off it must be an ongoing process, delivered in a way that maximizes each individual's learning preferences and creates sustainability. Our systematic approach ensures that participants will be three to four times better equipped to apply their new learning and skills and thus significantly impact business issues.

The Fifth Critical Success Factor: The Four Keys to Effective Learning

The fifth critical success factor includes four stages. These stages ensure that training creates tangible results for the organization. One of the most critical is that training departments must focus their training so that it is relevant for the learner and that new skills will be explicitly and specifically connected to each individual's job. Finally, training must be structured as a process, and not a one-time event.

The Four Keys to Effective Learning



Setting the Context

Unless the organization sets the appropriate context for training, only 10–23% of individuals will do something different as a result of being in a training. Setting the context ensures that training is aligned with the vision, goals, and strategies of the organization and is supported by top management. The organization must make this training relevant to the participant and clarify how the training is specifically and explicitly connected to each participant's job.

If participants understand and care about the training and how it will help them do a better job, then 75–95% will use what they have learned and do things that are different as a result of being in the training.

Blanchard uses Impact Mapping technology to connect training to business results and clarify how individual work, roles, responsibilities, and goals relate to the organization's goals and strategies. Impact maps track and link specific roles, strategic competencies, critical actions, and key results connecting training to each individual's job.

Acquiring New Concepts and Skills

Once the context has been set, the organization is ready to equip people with new skills. Ideally, the training delivery should mirror individuals' learning preferences. In addition, training should be offered via a blend of delivery approaches, either customized or off-the-shelf, delivered over time in ways that are relevant to the learner.

The learning should be experience divided into manageable segments so that your people acquire, retain, and apply new concepts more easily. This ensures your people will transfer learning into action and maximize the sustainability and impact of their new information, behaviors, and skills in ways that are most relevant to their specific jobs.

Lastly, the appropriate number of individuals should be trained to ensure support and sustainability in the culture and create the critical mass necessary to support change.

Practicing New Skills and Behaviors

In order to cement new skills, participants must practice what they have learned by interacting with the material through exercises, roleplays, games, simulations, doing real work, etc. In actual practice during training, it is ideal to move back and forth between acquiring skills and practicing and applying them.

If learners are going to really internalize and apply what they are learning, they need to practice new skills with feedback from peers, experts, and ideally, videotape. Learners need opportunities to practice new behaviors and conversations with peers or mentors before attempting them with direct reports.

It is important to provide multiple touch points with the content and follow-up training to reinforce learning. Utilizing online activities and discussions can also help build a sense of community and allow individuals to mentor each other.

Applying New Skills to the Job

In order for individuals to apply their new skills, organizations must spend 10 times the energy in the follow-up and reinforcement of training than they did in the delivery. It is at this stage that the true application of new skills and behaviors begins to gain traction, since the focus is on helping participants take what they have learned thus far and apply it to the job.

Coaching is essential in this stage for maximizing skills. Research shows that learning, productivity, and morale improve dramatically when training is combined with coaching. The Ken Blanchard Companies uses powerful, results-oriented coaching for individuals, leaders, and organizations that reinforce learning and deliver results.

In addition, Blanchard utilizes the 5-Minute Follow-Through™, a web-assisted goal-setting, tracking, and monitoring system. This increases the efficiency of learning transfer, delivers results more quickly, and boosts the return on investment (ROI) from training and development.

Finally, individuals need to be held accountable for using what they have learned, so learning needs to be hard-wired into the systems of your company, such as your performance management system.

About The Ken Blanchard Companies®

The Ken Blanchard Companies® is a global leader in workplace learning, productivity, performance, and leadership effectiveness that is best known for its Situational Leadership® II program—the most widely taught leadership model in the world. Because of its ability to help people excel as self-leaders and as leaders of others, SLII® is embraced by *Fortune* 500 companies as well as mid-to small-size businesses, governments, and educational and non-profit organizations. Many Blanchard® programs for teams, customer loyalty, change management, and leadership effectiveness blend the use of assessments with instructor-led and online learning. Using best practices based on the company's continual research, Blanchard's world-class trainers and coaches support people in making the shift from learning to doing and drive organizational and behavioral change into all levels of organizations. To learn more, visit www.kenblanchard.com.

Summary

Today, more than ever, top management is demanding that training not only culminates in results, but that it supports the organization's business objectives and strategies.

Maximizing training is dependent on the way the training is set up and followed up in the company. Most training departments and training vendors over-emphasize the training itself. But training that is not set up properly and/or supported well on the back end will yield poor results.

In order to change and evolve, organizations must be willing to look at themselves and answer the tough question, "what's wrong with the way things are now?" This raises the bar and sets a new standard for excellence that inspires and transforms their people. Sustainability requires process, commitment, and follow-through. As Scott Blanchard puts it, "hope is not a sustainability strategy."

"What executives want from training department leaders," Scott continues, "is not ROI studies with shaky numbers, but hard evidence that participants are using skills taught on the job, and are making a positive contribution to the business."

Delivering training is about making sure that people receive the support, the expectation, and the accountability that they will do things differently as a result. Our process ensures that money invested in training produces changed behaviors on the job and clear results for the organization.

The Ken Blanchard Companies is passionate about making a difference through a training that transforms your people, leaders, and teams. And while we believe that training is a critical component in unleashing the potential and power of people, it is critical that training be set up and delivered through systematic process that ensures, productivity, performance, results, and, ultimately, success for both the individual and the organization.

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