Why Training Isn't Being Applied on the Job

Results of a recently released global study show that organizations must become more fully committed and engaged in the transfer of learning to the workplace. Survey findings highlight several weak areas in the on-the-job application of learning, including manager support, trainee preparation, incentives, and an overall formal design and measurement process.

Positive indicators of learning transfer include employees leveraging an ever-expanding array of tactics to recall information learned during training, and the increasing use of just-in-time tools to apply knowledge and skills directly to the job.

More than 3,000 government and commercial training-related managers responded to the survey conducted by ESI Intl. It focused on three key areas in the application and transfer of learning:

1. Program design.
2. Motivation and preparation to attend training.
3. Post-training (back on-the-job application).

"The study points out some striking contradictions in how well organizations think they transfer learning and the lack of proof to back up their estimate of learning transfer or on-the-job application," said Raed S. Haddad, Senior Vice President, Global Delivery Services, ESI. "Client experience shows us that organizations often fail to establish success criteria or identify expectations for learning engagements. This is a key pre-training strategy in order to measure trainee performance against agreed upon standards."

Key Findings Included

The top three strategies indicated as the most important for the transfer of learning are:

1. Trainees have the time, resources and responsibility to apply learning (30 percent);
2. Manager support (23.8 percent);
3. The instruction approach simulates the actual work environment (21.8 percent).

While two-thirds of respondents estimate that they apply more than 25 percent of training knowledge back on the job, they have little concrete proof. Almost 60 percent say the primary method for proving or measuring this estimate is either informal/anecdotal feedback or "simply a guess."

Sixty percent of those surveyed indicate that they do not have a systematic approach to preparing a trainee to transfer, or apply, learning on the job.

When asked what specific rewards motivate trainees, almost 60 percent say the "possibility of more responsibility," followed closely by an impact on their human resources/performance review. Only 20 percent indicated that there was any financial reward or other incentives.

When it comes to post-learning tools and programs to help trainees recall and apply what they've learned, survey responses indicate a varied mixture of tactics, including:

1. Post course discussions with the manager/team leader.
2. On-the-job tools.
3. Informal support. such as social networks or online forums.
4. Communities of practice, such as peer groups/coaching.

Sixty-three percent say managers formally endorse the program, while only 23 percent of managers hold more formal pre- and post-training discussions.

"Employees need to know that the application of learning is a priority for management. This can be shown by aligning training with company strategy, motivating employees by setting expectations beforehand, and through incentives and sharing post-training reports on employee success or failure in applying what they learned," said Haddad.

The survey also asked respondents to share specific learning transfer tactics and identify best practices. However, the responses resembled a list of actions management or sponsors should do more of, which fell broadly into the following areas:

1. Incorporate real projects in the training and make it more relevant.
2. Conduct more training, and/or better marketing and communication on what exists.
3. Communicate a transparent measurement strategy.
4. Establish change management guidelines.
5. Increase managers' involvement before and after training.

Survey Methodology

ESI International sent an email invitation to the survey of one open- and 15 close-ended questions to training-related managers and leaders at government agencies and commercial organizations across the globe. The survey had 3,209 respondents. Not all respondents answered every survey question. The survey was anonymous unless respondents wanted to receive the results, in which case, they were asked to provide their details.

For a free copy of the full ESI study, "Applying Training and Transferring Learning to the Workplace: How to Turn Hope into Reality," please visit www.esi-intl.com/learningtransfer *[1]. For more information, please visit* www.esi-intl.com *[2]*.

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