

WHITE PAPER

# Impact Evaluation

# DEMONSTRATING THE BUSINESS IMPACT OF TRAINING

Measuring the results of training is often a perplexing task for training professionals. On one hand, training departments have realized that being able to document the measurable impact of training is a necessity, rather than the “nice to have” that it was considered just a few years ago. Tough economic times have resulted in leaner training functions (fewer hands perform the same amount of work), leaner training budgets (every training dollar must count!), and leaner organizations (training has to prove its right to exist). For these reasons, it is critical that training departments are able to demonstrate that they are actively contributing to bottom-line organizational results.

On the other hand, establishing a process for measuring training’s contribution is a challenge that organizations often struggle to meet. Most training departments do a good job at “smile sheet” evaluation and mastery testing. However, as learners take their learning back to the job, trainers are often faced with this question:

“How can we effectively, yet with reasonable expenditures of time and money, measure what/how learning is being applied and what the business results of those applications are?”



## THE IMPACT EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

*Innovative Learning Group's (ILG) answer to this question is an impact evaluation methodology based on these key principles:*

- An efficient, effective, and valid way to identify the business impact of training is to talk to those learners who represent the full range of results from the training (high, mid, and low successes).
- When you investigate the impact of training, you also need to look at what happens before and after the training. (The training may have worked well but the environment may have gotten in the way of impact.)

## A REAL-LIFE EXAMPLE

*The following case study describes the impact evaluation methodology in action.*

A major manufacturing firm had established a critical organizational goal to further improve the safety of its consumer products. Increased safety was directly related to increasing customer satisfaction, enhancing the company's reputation, and raising profits. Through its own analysis, the organization discovered that inconsistent and ineffective use of its Failure Modes and Effects Analysis (FMEA) process during product and process development was primarily responsible for safety-related product issues. To solve this problem, the organization revamped its FMEA training program so it focused on ensuring consistent, correct, and timely implementation of FMEA process steps. The audience for this training included everyone involved in process and product development.

Since product safety was a critical business issue, the company determined it needed data to demonstrate the extent to which the training was achieving its intended goal and returning tangible benefits to the organization. As a result, the company contracted with ILG to conduct an impact evaluation.

The first step in the evaluation of the training was to survey all employees (approximately 160) who participated in the revised training over the nine months prior to the study's start. The purpose of this electronic survey was to gather population-wide data on the new/improved behaviors that resulted from the training and the related business results. Sixty-five survey recipients (40%) responded to the survey.

The next step in the process was to interview a sample of 25 survey respondents (and a few non-respondents). Selected interviewees represented all reported levels of impact and all of the company's regions. The purpose of these interviews was to probe more deeply into the nature of the organizational impact and the factors that contributed to, or impeded, impact. ILG's questions related to contributing/impeding factors were based on the six cells of Gilbert's Behavior Engineering Model.<sup>1</sup>

Once the survey and interview processes were completed, the data was analyzed and results were reported for each of the three groups. The report included findings, conclusions, and recommendations to improve training and the workplace environment.

<sup>1</sup> Gilbert, T. F. (1996). *Human Competency: Engineering Worthy Performance* (Tribute Edition). Amherst, MA: HRD Press.



*A presentation of the final report was made to key business and training leaders. Major results identified through the study included:*

- The training itself was instructionally sound and building the targeted skills and knowledge in learners.
- Despite this, only one-third of survey participants reported applying learning from the training on the job. The overwhelming reason the other two-thirds of participants did not apply learning was, quite simply, that they had no opportunity to do so. The process/product development process is long, and many learners' projects were not at a point where FMEA would be performed.
- Where learners did apply new skills and knowledge on the job, results achieved included improved and earlier identification of potential failures, improved decisions about product safety, increased efficiency in product and process development, and ultimately, safer products.

*As a result of the impact evaluation:*

- Even though the training's impact was not as high as hoped, the business owner of the training had credible data and real impact "stories" to share with executive leadership. The data was found to be so valuable that the company asked ILG for additional impact evaluation work.
- The company revisited how it enrolled learners in this training so as to increase breadth of impact. (Participation is now tied more closely to opportunity to apply.)

## **WHAT MAKES THIS APPROACH VALUABLE?**

*Over the years, ILG has conducted numerous impact evaluations, and with our clients, have seen these benefits:*

- An impact evaluation project does not require a committee of eight, a statistician, hundreds of hours, or a quarter of the training budget. Rather, one or two people, assigned part time, can complete a typical evaluation project over a span of 10 to 12 weeks.
- The process yields broad systems and survey data and in-depth interview data on the application and measurable results of training. Especially compelling for line management are case studies developed in each evaluation. These studies document in measurable detail the results achieved by representative learners.
- The method reveals not only the results of training, but also the full range of factors that contributed to or impeded those results. This gives both the training department and line management the data they need to continuously improve the business results of training.

## **CONCLUSION**

As with any approach to evaluation, not all training is a suitable subject — there needs to be a business rationale for collecting the data. Where this business reason exists, ILG's impact evaluation method has proven itself easy to implement. More important, it has returned powerfully convincing results on how to get the most value from training.



# About Innovative Learning Group

A performance-first learning company, Innovative Learning Group, Inc. creates custom training and tools that help employees of Fortune 1000 companies do their jobs more effectively. Headquartered in Troy, Michigan, ILG is a privately held, certified Women's Business Enterprise founded in 2004 by CEO Lisa Toenniges.



1130 Coolidge Highway  
Troy, Michigan 48084

248.544.1568  
info@innovativeLG.com  
www.innovativeLG.com