

WHITE PAPER

Impact Mapping

FOCUSING LEARNING TO ACHIEVE ORGANIZATIONAL RESULTS

For years, learning practitioners have known that the key to developing “good” training was to identify the learning needs of the audience. Practitioners have gotten highly competent at implementing needs assessment processes that answer questions such as, “What are all the skills and knowledge needed to perform your job?” However, what most needs assessment processes do not ask is, “Which of these skills and knowledge are critical to ensuring that you help achieve your organization’s goals?” Knowing the answer to this question before a training curriculum or program is developed is crucial — especially today when every penny of every training dollar needs to count.

To ensure that learning solutions developed by Innovative Learning Group (ILG) are focused on achievement of organizational goals, we have built our needs assessment and curriculum design processes around a tool called the “impact map.”

The “impact map” was originally introduced by Dr. Robert O. Brinkerhoff (Brinkerhoff and Apking, 2001) as a tool to ensure that learning was focused on the most organizational-critical skills and knowledge from the start. Now in the public domain, this tool has been adopted by a number of organizations, including ILG, that have experienced the powerful applications of the map.



WHAT EXACTLY IS AN IMPACT MAP?

Very simply, the impact map displays, in table format, the linkages among organizational goals and the desired results, critical actions, and key skills/knowledge of a role.

The ultimate purpose of the impact map is to ensure that there is a clear line of sight from the skills and knowledge included in a learning solution to the identified organizational goals. In short, the map enables us to focus training on the skills and knowledge most critical to organizational (and individual) success.

ILG's approach to impact mapping involves starting on the right side of the map, with identifying the organization's goals. We then work our way towards the left, identifying key results that an individual achieves that contribute to the organizational goals, critical tasks the individual performs to accomplish the results, and finally, the skills and knowledge necessary to perform the critical tasks.

SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE	CRITICAL TASKS	KEY JOB RESULTS	ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS

Figure 1. Illustration of impact map format

Our specific impact mapping process includes the following steps:

1. Reviewing documentation related to the organization's goals and the desired results, key responsibilities, and necessary skills and knowledge of the role in question.
2. Identifying a small number of key executives, managers, and exemplar performers from whom to gather in-depth data related to the map.
3. Conducting in-depth interviews with the identified executives, managers, and exemplars.
4. Analyzing the data, drafting the impact map, and validating its contents.

Impact maps can be used to enhance the effectiveness of training in many ways:

- In the best-case scenario, an impact map is developed during the needs assessment phase of a training project and drives the learning objectives, the detailed course or curriculum design, and the actual development of the end training deliverables.
- The impact map can be used before and during training to help learners understand why building the course's skills and knowledge is critical to them and to their organization. It can (and should) also be used by the managers of learners to help learners establish learning goals for their participation in the course.
- The map also provides a picture of the intended organizational outcomes of learning solutions. This means it provides a baseline that can be used later to conduct an impact evaluation of the solution's actual results.
- Longer-term, impact maps can be used to establish individual development plans for employees. Managers and employees together can use the map to focus their discussion on employee strengths and areas in which skills and knowledge should be improved.

What makes impact maps so valuable? Over the years, we have developed a significant number of impact maps and, with our clients, have seen these benefits:

- The map helps ensure that training time and money are spent on the mission-critical goals of the organization and that there will be a positive return on investment of the training.
- The map educates employees and their managers on the importance of the skills and knowledge included on the map, which helps the organization to realize more benefit from its training.
- When the impact map is used to help employees set goals for training, the map helps achieve improved transfer of training. (The employee knows going in to training what to focus on and how to apply this learning after training.)
- The map provides a starting point for evaluating the impact of training and, in effect, makes the evaluation process simpler to perform.
- The map helps ensure, both short-term and long-term, that organizations have employees with the right capabilities to achieve organizational goals.

Above all, the impact map is a highly flexible tool, all the uses of which have likely not yet been identified. In addition, it's a tool that ILG has become an expert in developing and which enables us to set up our clients to get the most value from their learning solutions.

REFERENCES

Brinkerhoff Robert O. and Apking, Anne M. *High Impact Learning*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing, 2001.



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.



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