IN PRACTICE
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Getting to ROI through a Performance-Centered Framework
By Ron Drew Stone

As we go about the business of identifying performance needs and designing, developing, and delivering training for clients, we focus on the learning requirements. After all, we are the sponsor of learning, the champion, the steward, the expert in learning and training delivery. It is our mission and passion. But the underlying reason most clients ask us to deliver training comes back to job performance and business outcome requirements. So we are not just in the training business, we are also in the performance business.

Performance deficiencies and needs in the dynamic workplace of the 21st century are rarely defined by "training only" solutions. Even when knowledge or skills are a root cause of a performance gap, other issues and needs enter the picture that will deter and even prevent learning transfer to the work setting. Training professionals often fail to identify non-training issues and needs because they approach needs assessment and learning transfer with an inadequate performance framework.

The four elements of my Performance-Centered Framework provide a platform to identify needs, address learning transfer, and educate clients and stakeholders about performance and their active partnership role in the process. All are key factors in achieving an ROI. The framework, described below, takes a positive approach to the issue of management reinforcement and support of training and performance solutions.

Business outcome identifies the desired business or organizational result.

Execution in the work setting identifies what a specific population should be doing or not doing, and how individual or team performance may influence the status of business outcome measures.

Performance readiness identifies individual or team compatibility, ability, confidence, and willingness to execute in the work setting. Also identifies ineffective habits and the influencing factors of active management reinforcement (AMR) and how they affect execution in the work setting.

Preferences identifies client and population's preferences regarding design and delivery of the solution, (examples; likes, dislikes, learning style preference, delivery preference, operational constraints).

This performance-centered framework provides a basis to visibly link the key elements of performance and identify the end-in-mind. We can then focus on and addresses the key influences to achieve the desired result, up to and including ROI. Linkage to the desired business outcome begins with the proper identification of

- the existing or potential performance gap
- the root cause as to why the performance gap exist
- what people must do or not do (execution) to achieve the targeted business outcome
- a solution (training and/or non-training) to influence execution and close the gap.

The solution should not be identified until the execution requirements and performance gap are known along with the reasons why the gap exists.

Getting to ROI

The business outcome and ROI of a solution depend upon linkage and alignment. Historical evidence demonstrates that one of the most significant linkage issues is inadequate learning transfer to the work

setting. Evidence shows that inadequate management reinforcement and old, ineffective habits of job performers are key deterrents when trying to transfer learning to the workplace. So, how can this performance-centered framework be useful to address learning transfer? Given space limitations, let's focus on one element of the framework, performance readiness.

Performance readiness

There are five key components of performance readiness that should be explored when looking for root causes, determining needs, and recommending a solution to influence execution. Two of them, compatibility and active management reinforcement, are non-training factors for the targeted population. Two more, confidence and willingness, could be training or non-training related. The fifth, ability (knowledge and skill), is very much training related. Our challenge as workplace learning professionals is to determine which components will most influence execution in a given situation. Proper execution in turn should influence the desired business outcome. The five key components of performance readiness are defined as follows:

Compatibility. An individual's compatibility to do the assigned work. This is not a knowledge or skill issue. It is a mental or physical challenge. It is the right person in the right job or assignment. Following the 80/20 rule, compatibility is not usually the crucial performance issue. If it is, partner with the HR department to address it.

Ability. An individual's knowledge, skill, expertise or competence to do the assigned work. It involves information, awareness, principles, concepts, facts, processes, procedures, techniques, methods, and so on.

Confidence. A personal comfort level stemming from a level of mastery and active management reinforcement that will stimulate a performer to use knowledge/skill, or exhibit a specific behavior in the natural work setting. Even when skill exists, or once existed, other things can erode confidence and deter execution. For example, a supervisor can be overly critical of a team member and tear down an individual's confidence.

Willingness. An individual's attitude, and a personal frame of reference. The willingness of an individual to learn and adopt targeted knowledge, skills, and behavior; discontinue old ineffective habits; and execute in the work setting

Active management reinforcement. AMR addresses actions of the performer's immediate manager to reinforce performance, reflect sponsorship and be supportive of execution in the work setting, including

- advanced communication of information and negotiation of expectations, including goals and requirements regarding work roles, work load distribution, and responsibilities
- performance incentives and consequences
- timely feedback, coaching, recognition, and support
- adequate tools, equipment, technology, and resources
- proper design of work space, job, tasks, policies, procedures, and processes.

A solution approach that addresses performance readiness as opposed to a learning only approach is illustrated below. Following the training, the AMR strategy plays an important role in achieving learning transfer by influencing the readiness and willingness of the performer.

Participant	Immediate Manager
The training and performance solution is implemented with a focus on what it will take to execute in the work setting. Ability plus confidence, minus old ineffective habits equal readiness to execute.	A strategy is implemented to influence active management reinforcement (AMR). Managers practice AMR to influence participants' readiness and willingness to execute new skills/behavior in the work setting.

The above approach gives ready and willing participants the best opportunity to execute following delivery of the solution. AMR should be encouraged for a period of time following the training delivery until participants abandon old ineffective habits and achieve competence by adopting the new skills and behavior. This usually takes weeks or months depending on the factors involved in the specific situation. An AMR strategy may also include other stakeholders who can influence the performers' willingness to execute behaviors in the work setting. These stakeholders are typically identified during the needs assessment process.

Historically, most training professionals have done an admirable job of addressing the ability component (knowledge and skill) when conducting needs assessments and designing and implementing solutions. However, other performance readiness components are often ignored, which then leads to inadequate learning transfer. Inadequate learning transfer equates to inadequate work setting execution of the learned knowledge and skills. The consequence is inadequate linkage to the desired business outcome and a negative ROI.

Ron Drew Stone is president of the Center for Performance and ROI, Inc. He is an author, international consultant and presenter, and one of the world's most recognized and accomplished authorities on improving training and performance interventions and measuring results. He provides measurement and performance consulting for Fortune 500 companies and government organizations in North America, Europe, Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East. Ron's Performance Alignment and Linkage Process provides a methodology and tools to help determine which components of performance readiness are lacking and what to do about it. This article is derived from concepts in Ron's book, Aligning Training for Results: A Process and Tools That Link Training to Business, to be published by Pfeiffer in October of 2008. You may contact Ron at DrewRoi@aol.com.

Field Editor Holly Burkett is principal of Evaluation Works in Davis, California. A certified ROI professional, she has over 18 years' experience assisting public and private sector clients design and measure outcome-based learning, performance improvement, and change management initiatives. Sample clients include the Community Healthcare Association of the Dakotas, Premera Blue Cross, the California Department of Transportation, and Apple Computer. Editor of ISPI's Performance Improvement Journal and an ASTD Field Editor, she is a frequent conference presenter, workshop leader, and author on measurement issues. Publications include co-authoring The ROI Fieldbook (2006) with Jack and Patti Phillips and Ron Stone. Holly can be reached at burketth@earthlink.net.