

Six Keys to Getting the Most from OD

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Your company invests a significant amount in training and organizational development each year to stay competitive and help create the next generation of leaders. But most companies aren't getting the maximum return on their investment. Too many still treat organizational development as an isolated series of events, rather than as a business process that needs to be managed, measured and continuously improved like any other business process.

For the past seven years, we have been studying the characteristics that distinguish highly-effective programs from less-effective ones (Wick et al., 2006). We have discovered six disciplines that transcend industry, corporate structure, and program focus:

- 1. Define Business Outcomes**
- 2. Design the Complete Experience**
- 3. Deliver for Application**
- 4. Drive Follow-Through**
- 5. Deploy Active Support**
- 6. Document Results**

Applying these six disciplines when you implement the great ideas and concepts from the Best of Organizational Development Summit will help you maximize both the value of the Summit and the effectiveness of your programs.

1. Define Business Outcomes

Effective training and development efforts are an integral part of the company's business strategy. They focus on business outcomes and are planned and delivered with an eye to what people will do better and differently as a result. They are clear about how the program will benefit participants' careers and the organization as a whole. Less effective training and development departments are inwardly focused. They define program objectives purely in terms of the learning that will occur as opposed to the business benefits.

2. Design the Complete Experience

A second difference between effective and ineffective OD organizations is that effective departments consider the learner's complete experience; less effective organizations focus only on the event – the course or module. In the end, development depends more on what happens before and after the formal learning event than what happens in the course itself (Broad 2005).

The complete experience includes all three phases of learning.

To maximize the return on training and development, manage all three phases of the learning process:

- ◆ set the right expectations prior to training;
- ◆ emphasize application throughout;
- ◆ hold learners accountable for using the material on-the-job;
- ◆ provide support for follow-through, transfer and application.

3. Deliver for Application

- ◆ clearly articulate the business rationale
- ◆ provide 360 feedback
- ◆ illustrate theories with relevant examples
- ◆ have people reflect on how they can apply what they have learned to their own situations
- ◆ provide opportunities for guided practice.

4. Drive Follow-Through

The Achilles' heel of most development programs is the lack of follow-through. No matter how good the training is, it is wasted unless new knowledge it is put to work.

- ◆ optimize the post-course environment to which newly-trained people return
- ◆ put in place follow-through processes and systems
- ◆ ensure that participants are held accountable for continued development
- ◆ provide access to coaching and other forms of support
- ◆ encourage continued learning through reflection and sharing with peers.

5. Deploy Active Support

Employees need support to maximize the probability of achieving their development objectives. Support is especially critical in the period immediately following training when participants are trying to develop new and more effective norms of behavior. Highly-effective OD organizations make sure that they prepare and motivate managers to provide support for newly-trained employees. Other sources of support include:

- ◆ Peers (other participants in the same program)
- ◆ Instructors and facilitators
- ◆ Online content and guidance systems
- ◆ Internal or external coaches

6. Document Results

The sixth and final key to effectiveness is to document results. Collect credible and relevant data to show that the program is producing the desired results and to identify opportunities for further improvement. Measures of activity (number of programs, participants, hours of instruction) or of immediate reaction (participant satisfaction) are insufficient; for development programs, level 3 measures are essential. The results should be communicated to key stakeholders including:

- ◆ line managers (to justify continued investment)
- ◆ current and prospective employees (as evidence of the investment the company makes in its workforce);

- ◆ customers, to illustrate continuous improvement
- ◆ investors

Summary

There are six keys to maximizing the return on the investment in organizational development:

1. Define the desired outcomes in business terms so that the strategic purpose and relevant measures of success are clear;
2. Design the complete experience so that it is “all of a piece” and so that the post-course environment supports personal and organizational development;
3. Deliver for application – make sure that participants know how to use what they have learned and are motivated to do so;
4. Drive follow-through – put systems in place to hold participants accountable for using what they have learned and to track progress;
5. Deploy active support to give learners the best possible chance to achieve their objectives; and
6. Document the results in compelling and credible ways to justify continued investment and to support continuous improvement.

References

Broad, M. (2005) *Beyond Transfer of Training: Engaging Systems to Improve Performance*. San Francisco: Pfeiffer.

Wick, C., Pollock, R.H.H., Jefferson, A. McK., & Flanagan, R. (2006). *The Six Disciplines of Breakthrough Learning: How to Turn Training and Development into Business Results*. San Francisco: Pfeiffer.

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