American Society for Training and Development
International Conference and Exhibition 2003
San Diego, CA

Session TU 313 Tuesday, May 20, 2003  1:30 – 3:00PM

Using the Success Case Impact Evaluation Method to
Enhance Training Value & Impact

Robert O. Brinkerhoff, EdD
Professor, Western Michigan University
Dennis E. Dressler
Principal Consultant, The Learning Alliance
The Learning Alliance
3809 Wedgewood Drive Suite 350
Portage, MI 49024-5533 USA

Brinkerhoff@wmich.edu  Ddressler@chartermi.net
(269) 629 4161        (269) 381 1972
“Data A and Data B” Exercise Discussion Questions

Please chat with a neighbor and discuss your responses to the following questions:

1) Why did people rely more on one source of data (Data A, or Data B) than the other when they needed to make a decision?

2) Rank order the following criteria, from most important to least important (as applied to evaluation methods and results).

   Rank
   _____ An appearance of scientific sophistication
   _____ Credibility
   _____ Quantitative graphs and charts
   _____ Trustworthiness
   _____ Relevance to decision-makers’ questions and needs
Strategy for Training Evaluation:  
Building Organizational Learning Capability

To Management

How much and how well is learning applied?  
How effective is performance?  
What obstacles and factors impede or enhance performance?  
What are managers doing that is working?

To Training Function

How much learning is being achieved?  
How closely is learning linked to business and performance needs?  
How well is training integrated with other performance systems and factors?  
How can learning designs be improved?

Actions to Improve

Evaluation Results

Enhanced Capability to Leverage Business Results from Learning Investments
The Success Case Method Evaluation Model

Initial Results

Follow Up Study

Immediate Results

Applications

Goals

Survey Representative Sample of Trainees

Conduct Evaluation Studies with a Few Successful Trainees

Knowledge of Factors that Enhance or Impede Business Impact

Stories of Documented Business Impact to Disseminate Within Company

Document impact And disseminate Evidence of value

Educate managers And help them gain increased impact

Develop more effective products and services

Greater Business Impact from training

Increased capability to achieve business results from learning

Greater capability to meet emerging business needs

Initial Results: Survey Representative Sample of Trainees

Follow Up Study: Conduct Evaluation Studies with a Few Successful Trainees

Immediate Results: Knowledge of Factors that Enhance or Impede Business Impact, Stories of Documented Business Impact to Disseminate Within Company

Applications: Document impact And disseminate Evidence of value, Educate managers And help them gain increased impact, Develop more effective products and services

Goals: Greater Business Impact from training, Increased capability to achieve business results from learning, Greater capability to meet emerging business needs
Success Case Steps

1. Clarify business goals and training process and costs; complete Impact Analysis Profile
2. Design and administer brief survey to sample of trainees
   (Conducted after training should be applied, by mail, e-mail, fax)
3. Analyze survey data; gauge scope of impact and identify success and non-success cases
4. Conduct success case interviews
   (Usually conducted by phone, can be in-person, 20-30 minutes)
5. Analyze all impact and performance support data
6. Articulate conclusions and recommendations and conduct debriefing with client
Anatomy of Training Impact

Some Key Characteristics of High Impact Learning Systems® Thinking Are:
- Training is conceived as a performance improvement process.
- There are as many training interventions as there are trainees (T...).
- Individual trainees (T...) have their own individual learning/application objectives.
- Immediate goal of training is to improve performance results (R) from X portion of job.
- Performance improvement objectives are derived from business process improvement needs.
- Learning objectives (O...) defined as “ability to perform X portion of job more effectively using Y training content.”
- Impact results when performance in X portion of job contributes to improved business performance and achievement of business goal.
- Primary customer of training is organizational “owner” of business process to which trainee’s performance contributes.
- Measures of success:
  - “Training” success proportion of trainees who achieve individual learning objectives.
  - Success of performance improvement initiative is proportion of trainees who improve performance that contributes to business goal achievement.
The Logic of Training Impact

Training Design  \( \times \)  Performance Support

\[
\begin{align*}
0 \text{ - } 100\% \quad & \times \quad 0 \text{ - } 100\% \\
& = \quad 0 \text{ - } 100\%
\end{align*}
\]
Success Case Method: Example Conclusions

Impact of training
- 60% of all trainees used their learning in a way that contributed to significant business results, such as reductions in errors in processing customer orders, increased revenues from sales, increased customer satisfaction, reduced cycle time in order fulfillment, and so forth.

ROI
- 20% of participants used their learning to help achieve business results worth more than $45,000 each. Compared to a cost of $5,000 per trainee to provide and support the training this represents an ROI of 900%.

Unrealized value
- Fully 47% of sales reps did not use the new targeted sales methods. Had half of these non-users applied their learning just half as well as those sales reps that did apply their training, sales revenues would have increased by more than $750,000.

- If 30% more sales reps applied usage of the “Establishing Customer Rapport” and “Targeting Benefits” modules, the company could achieve an increase in revenues of $360,000 and increased profits of at least $70,000.

Performance factors that aligned with impact
- The key factors in determining whether a sales district achieved worthwhile business results from the sales training were:
  - Whether their manager helped them prepare for the training and mutually set objectives
  - Whether the new commission structure was being faithfully applied in all sales transactions as per the new policy
  - Whether the training was provided within 3 months of new product introduction in the district (as per sales guidelines)

- Managers who sent reps to training but did not employ the follow-up performance module lost an average of $12,000 in quarterly district revenues. Managers who did employ the follow-up module tools earned an average increase of $24,000 in quarterly district revenues.
Success Case Example #1: Technical Training at Compaq

The business scenario
- A major new product (a server) being sold to key customers
- Rumors of training course inadequacy leading to service failures
- Political tension among course providers, course administrators, and managers of course participants

The training scenario
- Technical course intended to help service technicians install and configure key server components needed for optimum performance
- Two-week long residential course; mixture of lecture and lab simulation
- Waiting list for course due to field demand and course capacity constraints

The Success Case design
- Two-item email survey to all participants from past 12 months to identify those who had used training successfully with a customer
- Calls to a random sample of non-respondents to check for response bias
- SC interviews with random samples of high and low successes

Key Findings
- 60% of those who attended the training applied learning with customers
- All who used it reported successful customer outcomes
- High business impact: for example, the saving of a multi-million dollar order, high degree of customer satisfaction/loyalty, and hardware that worked for the customer as promised
- 40% of all trainees never used their learning nor had any plans to do so
- Significant reduction of ROI because of high non-use of expensive course
- Technicians enrolled in course even when they had no customers who owned the computer equipment that course taught technicians how to service

Conclusions
- A course that had high business impact potential was under-producing
- Course enrollment process employed by field leadership was eroding ROI
- Significantly more ROI could be gained by changing course enrollment procedures and practices

Results
- Field executive team reviewed and discussed SC report conclusions and recommendations
- Course enrollment practices changed
- Business impact increased; costs-per-successful trainee reduced; ROI increased

For more information, contact: Cheryl Brogan (Cheryl.brogan@hp.com) and Carmie Boutin (Carmie.boutin@hp.com)
Success Case Example #2: Executive Teamwork at ABC* Bank – Services Provided by Gap International

The business scenario
- Poor margins in retail banking in contrast to other Bank services
- Retail leadership not always on the same page strategically or tactically
- Very low staff morale at all levels in retail at ABC

The training scenario
- “Breakthrough ThinkingSM” immersion for 15 executive leaders in retail banking
- Each executive leader had a coach providing feedback and support
- Relational skills course provided to executives and their next level managers
- Abbreviated Breakthrough ThinkingSM course provided to retail banking staff

The Success Case design
- Six item survey sent to all 15 executive leaders – 100% response rate
- Interviewed six executives who indicated a high level of business impact
- Interviewed two executives who reported only modest impact

Key Findings
- Retail banking produced record margins at ABC
- ABC has purchased regional retail banks to extend their market reach
- The executive team reported a high degree of alignment – they indicate that they have never worked together more effectively
- Two executives have worked together to win a 30 million dollar annual contract servicing loans for another financial services institution. Prior to the Gap intervention, these two executives described their personal and work relationship as adversarial
- The Breakthrough language, when used by those immersed in the concept occasionally became a problem with others who had not participated.

Conclusions
- The Gap process at ABC Bank had high business impact
- Linkage to a pressing business need faced by executives was a key factor in achieving impact
- Participants needed to include others in understanding the “Breakthrough ThinkingSM” concepts and language

Results
- Bank executive team and Gap reviewed how they could help more people feel a part of the process without everyone participating in an intensive immersion
- On-going executive coaching was seen as essential to maintain the positive momentum

For more information, contact: Ara Yeramyan at ayeramyan@gapinter.com

*ABC is a fictitious name for an actual prominent East Coast financial services corporation
Success Case Example #3: Sales Leadership Coaching at Global Telecommunications Conferencing Company* (GTCC) – Services Provided by The Ken Blanchard Companies (Coaching.com)

The business scenario
- Best sales people being recruited to other high tech companies
- Many new competitors in market that were causing rate erosion
- Corporate set an annual revenue growth goal of 20% on a business unit that had already grown to $450 million in sales in five years

The training scenario
- Each of nine sales leadership positions started with an Impact Map (High Impact Learning, Perseus, 2001) identifying the key results and actions they needed to produce to help GTCC meet its strategic goals
- Ten coaching sessions provided to each sales leader, focusing on their Impact Map, plans, successes, and support needed

The Success Case design
- A seven item email survey was sent to each sales leaders – 95% response rate
- SC interviews with random samples of high (15) and low (3) successes

Key Findings
- Highest performer stayed with GTCC as a result of his manager’s efforts
- Rate per minute charged customers remained at premium levels
- Coaching process convinced several manages to stay with company during a particularly difficult unit reorganization
- Executive support for and participation in the coaching process was very helpful
- Those being coached sensed there was no “end game” strategy after their last session

Conclusions
- A coaching process anchored by business needs showed very positive results
- Executive sponsorship and participation enhanced impact significantly
- An “end game” strategy was needed

Results
- Many sales leaders have continued the coaching process, even going so far as paying for their own coaching
- Success stories were used to build program support
- Sales leaders continue to retain the highest performing sales reps
- Long-term commitment to staff development in place

For more information, contact: Scott Blanchard at: scottb@coaching.com

*GTCC is a fictitious name for an actual global telecommunications company
### Comparison of Success Case Approach to Kirkpatrick-based Evaluation Approaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kirkpatrick-based Models</th>
<th>Success Case Evaluation Method&lt;sup&gt;SM&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Define “impact” as business results derived from learning interventions</td>
<td>Define “impact” as business results derived from learning interventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implied assumption that “Training” is the cause of business impact</td>
<td>Recognizes that learning is a necessary but not sufficient condition; performance is the driver of impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempt to “isolate” the contribution of training to the impact achieved</td>
<td>Seeks information about how performance system factors and training interacted to achieve results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implicit assumption that failures – or successes - in training transfer (usage of training on the job) are due to failures – or successes – in the training program</td>
<td>Assumes that training usage depends mostly on the performance management system; successes of transfer are recognized as success of management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singular purpose of “proving” that training achieves impact</td>
<td>Purpose is partially to demonstrate training impact but more importantly to learn how to achieve increased impact in future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus is the training program or intervention and its results</td>
<td>Focus is the performance management system and the role that learning played in it to achieve results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROI and estimates of benefits based on statistical extrapolations and formulas that use subjective estimates of training contribution</td>
<td>ROI and statements of benefits derived from actual cases, verifiable records, and direct evidence of business value in specific cases of training usage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usually collect data from all participants and are thus both more costly and necessarily collect more superficial data</td>
<td>Focus on only a few cases and provide rich, in-depth data about impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Based on a quantitative reduction model that indicates mean (“average”) performance</td>
<td>Investigates extreme instances: highly successful participant cases, and highly un-successful participant cases</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Success Case Method: Summary

The Success Case Method developed by Robert O. Brinkerhoff is a quick and simple process that combines analysis of extreme groups with case study and story-telling. The essential purpose of a Success Case study is to find out how well some organizational initiative (e.g., a training program, a new work method) is working. A Success Case study also identifies and explains the contextual factors that differentiate successful from unsuccessful adopters of new initiatives. A recent study, for example, discovered that the factors that explained why some trainees were able to use their new training to accomplish worthwhile results (while others were not) were support from their supervisors, access to certain data bases, and access to training soon after being assigned new business accounts.

The Success Case study process has two fundamental parts. First, the evaluator identifies the few program participants who were the most, and least, successful. This is usually accomplished with a brief 3-5 item survey. That is, all participants are surveyed to determine, by self report, to what extent they are using the new methods and tools a new initiative intended them to use, and what results, if any, they are accomplishing.

Survey respondents are sorted into those few that are most and least successful. Then, one selects a random sample from among the most and least successful and, interviewing these people (usually by telephone) “digs deep” into their experience to determine the exact nature and extent of their success. More specifically, the evaluator seeks to discover:

- Exactly what they used, when they used it, how, when etc.
- What results they accomplished
- How valuable the results are (e.g., in dollars)
- What environmental factors enabled their application and results.

Unsuccessful persons are interviewed to determine why they were unable to use or benefit from the program. Specifically, they are asked what got in the way, what factors kept them from being successful, and so forth.

The results of a Success Case study are communicated in “story” form. That is, the evaluator finds the most compelling and descriptive examples of success the program has achieved,
then documents these examples in a few brief but richly detailed stories. In an evaluation of the business value of emotional intelligence training at American Express, for example, we told the story of how six different financial advisors, each in a different situation, had used their training to increase sales, increase customer revenues, and so forth. Comparing these stories with the stories of unsuccessful participants allowed us to pinpoint the several key performance system factors that enabled some to make very successful use of the program, while others were not nearly so successful. As a result, American Express was able to formulate new guidelines for program participation and support that were aimed at increasing the numbers of advisors who could successfully leverage the training into financial results.

The Success Case Method differs from typical more quantitative methods in that it does not seek to learn about the “average” or modal participant in an initiative, It intentionally seeks the very best that a program is producing, to help determine if the value a program is capable of producing is worthwhile, and whether it is likely that it can be leveraged to a greater number of participants. A “success story” is not a testimonial or a critical review. It is a factual and verifiable account – citing evidence that would “stand up in court” – that demonstrates how and how valuably a person used some new method or tool or capability. In the American Express study, for example, the stories of successful advisors cited actual data about their financial results that was verifiable and documented in office records and reports. When necessary, the evaluator seeks corroborating information from third parties, such as peers, customers, or supervisors.

References:
Success Case Method Frequently Asked Questions

The SC method is not a comprehensive and “one fix” sort of approach. It is a useful tool that change leaders and others can use to help them get information they need to more effectively guide change initiatives.

**Question: Isn’t the SC method biased since it looks only at a few cases?** Answer: Yes. It is biased. A SC study intentionally looks for the most successful (and the least successful) participants and outcomes. It is very helpful to learn from those few users of a new innovation – the “pioneers” – who are experiencing the greatest success and those who were not able to use it. Their experience can tell us a lot about how to make improvements and get even more success with more people.

**Question: How can you judge the whole success of a program based on just a few cases?** Answer: You can’t and the SC method does not try to. What we learn is this: If a program is working at all, then what is the best that it is doing? What seems to be working, and what is not? Decisions to keep or get rid of a program should usually be based on more information. But… if no one is using it, or the very best usage leads only to marginal outcomes, this may be enough to make the summative decision.

**Question: What about the “average” participant and the overall effect of a program?** Answer: The SC approach is not concerned with the “average” as in typical, or statistical mean performance. Almost always a new initiative will work quite well with some people, and not at all with others. When you add all these instances together and divide by the total number (as a quantitative analysis model requires you to do), you can misrepresent the reality of the program. In fact, there may be no such thing as the “mean” participant, since all the action is at the extreme successful and non-successful ends of the spectrum.

**Question: Is the Success Case method scientific?** Answer: Yes, it is based on solid rules and discipline of scientific inquiry. Success Cases must be supported by verifiable and pertinent evidence. The interview portion of the SC method relies on the rules of good naturalistic inquiry and reporting. Success Case stories should be supported with evidence that would “stand up in court”. The survey portion of a SC study follows the rules of good survey methods.

**Question: Do you have to be an evaluation expert to use the Success Case method?** Answer: No. People with a reasonable amount of interpersonal skill and common sense can implement many simple SC studies. But it would often be a good idea to get some expert assistance with some of the tasks if you are not familiar with surveys, interviewing, etc.

**Question: How is the SCM different from other evaluation approaches?** Answer: It is similar in that it uses many of the same tools of typical evaluation, such as survey, statistical analysis (sometimes) and interviewing. It is different, however, in that the SCM does not seek to be nor claim to be a comprehensive approach. Overall, the SCM is quite a bit more simple, faster, and often more credible, than more comprehensive and expensive evaluation methods.