



The Five Drivers of Learning Impact

Organizations invest billions of dollars each year on training initiatives, with the goal of fueling growth and improving organizational vitality.^{9,13,23}

Critical skills are identified to meet business objectives, such as:^{1,11,18}

- Improved quality of leadership
- Heightened revenue growth
- Increased pace of change and innovation
- Improved employee engagement and retention
- More inclusive and diverse culture
- Better teaming and collaboration



Training initiatives are designed and delivered to help staff members meet these objectives. However, training won't make a difference if learners don't apply their newly acquired knowledge and skills.⁴ It's called the "learning-transfer gap," and it's a reality that many people try to avoid. At Blanchard®, we know that to develop leaders at scale, it is essential to use a systematic approach to driving learning impact.

Research originally conducted by Scott Blanchard, president of Blanchard, and the late Richard Whiteley, business author and CEO of The Whiteley Group, identified best practices for helping organizations structure training initiatives that drive measurable impact.¹⁴ Later research by Blanchard chief product officer Dr. Jay Campbell validated and updated these practices into what Blanchard today calls The Five Drivers of Learning Impact.⁶ Each of these drivers must be in place to ensure the greatest level of traction with learners and measurable performance outcomes from learning and development initiatives.

The Five Drivers of Learning Impact



1. Key Influencer Support

Sponsorship and Involvement from Executives and Supervisors



2. Strategic Integration

Clear Connections to Organizational Objectives



3. Effective Design & Delivery

Learning Approaches Optimized for Impact



4. Follow-up & Reinforcement

Encouragement and Accountability That Drives Behavior Change



5. Demonstrated Tangible Value

Credible Progress and Success Measures

Key Influencer Support

Key influencer support addresses two specific groups: an organization's senior executives and the supervisors of the target learner population. Senior sponsors' visible support should set the tone for any learning initiative.¹⁵ This includes high-profile messaging, email, or video communications in which the sponsor establishes the value, sets the tone, and creates excitement for the initiative. Other forms of executive support include securing funding, participating in training, and role-modeling new behaviors. This can include executive coaching for the sponsor to help them articulate and model the behaviors desired and identify connection points to organizational priorities.

Given their powerful impact on their direct reports, supervisors of participants are critical influencers in training initiatives.^{5,7,8,9,10,24,25,30,36} If leaders approve of the training, ask about learning progress, and provide even light support for applying new skills on the job, learning transfer can soar. Don't underestimate the influence of learners' managers on training impact.



Strategic Integration

High-impact learning is best achieved when specific, measurable goals are fully supported and in alignment with organizational objectives.^{2,3,19} Learners are much more likely to implement training from the classroom back on the job when they can see a direct correlation to the work they are doing.

Strategic integration aims to create clear connections to organizational objectives. Otherwise, learning can be seen as nonessential, with participation and adoption viewed as optional.

To address this, organizations must overtly connect the objectives of the program to key organizational pillars, values, and strategic initiatives, and even consider creating specific assets to demonstrate these linkages.



Effective Design and Delivery

Effective learning and development initiatives require a systematic, scalable, and repeatable delivery approach that resonates with learners. Elegant and modern learning experiences that are spaced over time and provide relevant content make it easier for workers to learn.^{12,29} These experiences can include a blend of formal and informal delivery approaches for cohort or group learning as well as digital, self-directed learning. The best designs integrate rich practice opportunities and real work tasks into the learning so that participants are doing work while they learn.^{19,21,33,35} These designs also should offer time for reflection on what worked, what should be done differently, and how learning can be applied to solve work challenges.

Consider these additional best practices of effective design and delivery:

- Create personas and/or perform activities to best empathize with and understand the target audience.²⁶
- Build in frequent practice and reflection activities that cause learners to actively plan how they will use their new skills at work.¹⁹
- Leverage the benefits of social learning by using cohort groups, team activities, and peer support.^{20,27,34}
- Tailor/contextualize content to demonstrate strategic integration.³²
- Include leaders of participants to create a shared understanding and to support learning.⁹



Follow-up and Reinforcement

Effective follow-up and reinforcement help bridge the gap between learning and doing. When development is solely event-based with no sustainment measures, learners typically struggle to apply new skills and behaviors on the job.

Reinforcement can be as simple as reminders and email campaigns with links to content or opportunities to practice or reflect.^{22,28} Application sessions a few weeks after a class can create support and momentum before new skills are forgotten.¹⁷

Another powerful technique is soliciting and sharing success stories and testimonials.³¹ Coaching is also an extremely effective reinforcement method, allowing learners to get personalized support for applying what they learned in the workplace.



Demonstrated Tangible Value

Well-designed learning initiatives create behavior change and long-term impact. Be sure to include an ROI component in the overall design. Organizational leaders want to see how their investment in learning generates a real return.¹⁶ Invest in credible measurement practices that show how the training creates change, demonstrates value, and makes a positive impact on people and performance.

Don't forget to connect the investment to the organization's vision, mission, and strategic plan. Blanchard recommends a simple but powerful approach to measurement that includes confidence and competence indices, success-case interviews, and pre- and post-training multi-rater assessments, together with pulse surveys held over time to demonstrate value.



Summary

Maximizing the impact of an organization's learning investment means driving behavior change. It is dependent on the way training and development is framed and implemented within the organization. To identify gaps, organizational leaders must be willing to answer the tough question, "Where are we falling short on these Five Drivers of Learning Impact and what can we do about it?"

This raises the bar and sets a new standard for excellence that inspires and transforms people. Achieving real impact requires a proven process, a clear commitment, and consistent follow-through.

Blanchard is passionate about making a difference by transforming individual contributors, leaders, and teams. Our research and experience in working with thousands of organizations over the past four decades have consistently pointed to the powerfully positive impact that can be achieved when proven content is set up and delivered through a systematic process that maximizes productivity, performance, results, and, ultimately, success for people and organizations.



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