



White Paper

Closing the Gap
From Training to Proficiency

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Introduction

Let's start with a common scenario that managers face relating to new employees and their performance proficiency:

Mark has just completed 3 days of training on operating the CRM software in the telecommunications company he started working at a week ago.

Mark's manager Carol expects him to hit the ground running and begin showing results quickly, but is also aware of the often-quoted statistic that on average, people remember only 20% of what they learned during training sessions.

Furthermore, even if Mark absorbed 50% of the information, he's still liable to make a series of mistakes, and repeatedly ask for assistance, in the early period following the completion of the training sessions.

Carol is therefore restrained about Mark's initial progress, and is looking forward to the day when he will be fully comfortable and familiar to operating the CRM software effectively.

A central challenge of employee development is mending the gap between the knowledge attained during the initial training sessions for new employees and the moment reached at which such employees can perform their required tasks independently and proficiently. Although employees learn a lot during training, once the initial process ends, much of the knowledge is lost and full competence is still far from achieved.

It's not that it's the trainer's or the instructional designer's fault. Even in the most engaging, innovative and well-executed training event, the proficiency gap still exists.

Experienced learning and development leaders recognize the basic fact that most learning takes place beyond the initial formal learning sessions. It's simply the way the human mind learns new materials.

There is a natural tendency to learn by repetition and practice, following the initial stage of discovery and observation.

Whether it's a child learning to ride a bicycle or an adult learning to operate a particular enterprise software, training takes time. The saying is of course that "practice makes perfect," not "hearing makes perfect".

Key Questions for Planning Your Training Strategy

Learning Diversity

Question: How do we ensure that employees properly apply what they have learned during training sessions?

The answer to this question begins with the realization that learning differs from individual to individual, as each person absorbs and retains knowledge in different ways. One must recognize the diversity of learning styles, including those who learn by experimentation, observation, inquiry or patterning.

It's not about choosing one learning style over another – all can be considered when designing your training.

That being said, learning can be personalized, within reason, to create a much more engaged and proficient workforce.

Trainers must avoid at all costs imposing their own learning style and focus on the most varied teaching styles possible: from videos, games and examples to analogies, case studies, presentations, open discussions, teamwork and experiential exercises.

The Importance of Relevance

Question: How can we make sure that what we are teaching in training is directly relevant to an employee's daily work?

In addition to embracing the diversity of learning styles, the challenge of getting employees to apply what they learn also brings us to the importance of relevance in employee training.

Continuing with the idea that learning can be personalized, it's worthwhile to emphasize that employee training strategies should be focused not on the theoretical, and into the direct actions that workers will need to perform in their everyday tasks. When the link between training and task performance is crystal clear, it's easier to apply what you have just learned.

Making Sure that Training is Relevant

Let's now outline three main ways that will help you make sure that your training is relevant:

1. Putting Emphasis on the 'How':

How to do it is the best way to help your employees find relevance and value. Therefore it is important that you focus on the 'how to' areas. Try to make it as simple as possible, but also make sure that you are specific. Details will help your employees understand better. So will practical examples and demonstrations.

2. Practice Makes Perfect:

As the saying goes, 'Practice makes perfect'. By making use of practical examples, you will be able to offer a more tangible way to do things to the employees. Therefore, it is best to make sure that your training sessions incorporate a sufficient number of examples and demonstrations, rather than just speeches and theoretical explanations. Provide opportunities to your employees to participate. In such a way they will be more involved in the training sessions, and at the same

time they will be able to understand better and acquire relevance and value. You can incorporate assessments, test groups and coaching.

3. Set standards and expectations:

Every course or training activity should have a set of standards. These will be the goals which will need to be achieved by the end of the training. Your employees will be more motivated if they are given a set of realistic standards that they need to meet. Benchmarking and assessments need to be carried out in a friendly manner, so as not to put too much pressure on the participants. However, they are important, and they should always be used so as to establish more relevance and value.

Post-Training Musts

So the initial training sessions have ended, and as mentioned previously, you're arrived at the "gap" period. That is, the stage when the employee has acquired knowledge that is critical to their work, yet they are not yet fully ready to perform their tasks error-free nor without making repeated requests for assistance from managers, veteran employees, or the helpdesk.

In order to accelerate this interim stage toward full proficiency, it's imperative to follow a series of guidelines to help bridge the gap.

1. Properly Evaluate the Training

The first thing that executives have to do after the initial training period is to evaluate its results, at least on an initial level. In this regard it's important to have a look back at the original training objectives determined before the training began.

These objectives serve 2 main purposes. The first of them is to define exactly what knowledge has been transferred to the employees

throughout the training. The second is the ability to answer how this has been achieved, if the training session has been successful.

If the training session has been developed properly, than both these objectives will be specific and measurable, and thus able to tell employers exactly what their workers have to do, pay more attention to, or stop doing altogether.

Yet it is of not so simple. As mentioned earlier, people learn in different ways and at different paces. For this reason, if a certain employee does not get off to a fast start or fails to achieve the proposed performance objective in a specific time frame, that does not mean he lacks the potential to reach it. Everyone is different and should be provided with the adequate learning tools in order for the company's ROI to increase.

Diversity needs to be enhanced, while the training strategy needs not to overwhelm the learner through all-at-once material. Also, the focus should be no more on training as an initial event, but rather as a long-term, continuous employee training strategy.

2. Get Workers to Apply Knowledge Quickly

It's essential for executives to not waste too much time in getting employees to apply the knowledge gained once the training ends. Such approach has few specific benefits.

First of all, it enforces the message that employees learned something practical and not just general or "good to know" information. Secondly, it aids managers in assessing the training's results fast.

And finally, it allows the learners to get a real grip of the information they learned throughout the preparation sessions. There's no reason to let time pass by, as any gaps should be filled in as quick as possible.

3. Get Trainee Feedback

A relatively easy way in which employers can understand what needs to be done to improve things around is to get employees' feedback.

This can be done directly and on an individual basis, both after the training has ended as well as at regular intervals of time.

You can ask them in person how useful they believe the training session was and which are the key areas (if any) where they still need help. Alternatively, you can choose to send surveys in which to ask learners' about their satisfaction degree regarding the courses.

4. Monitor Their Skills Closely

Aside from the initial training success assessment that you get from the employee feedback, it's very important to monitor their skills closely throughout the immediate time period.

Most of the times, results fail to show up immediately, so it's better for employers to monitor their workers over a long period of time, while also taking care to bridge any gaps in their knowledge.

5. Make Use of Technology

An important aspect which needs to be repeated here is represented by the technological aids. They simply represent the easiest way to get employees on the right track, and if used properly, they can boost an organization's performance in a very short period of time.

Managers should encourage workers to make use of social media, blogs, forums and online videos in order to perfect their skills and help each other out. Additionally, performance support technology is more diverse and available than ever, and plays an important part in the early post-training support.

Performance Support Tools

What role do post-training performance support tools play in performance proficiency and assisting fresh employees in getting up to speed quickly?

The fastest and most cost-effective way to shorten the waiting time is by far through the use of technological tools. Technology's impact on employee learning is truly amazing, and is transforming the established norms and methods in more ways than one.

Such tools efficiently raise the bar when it comes to knowledge adoption and help employees find their way around the office more easily with no extra effort on your side.

Managers should note that these tools are extremely effective in post-course training, as they efficiently strengthen the bond between the knowledge gained during training and the way it can be implemented in the various office activities.

Much has been written about continuous learning – that is, looking at employee learning as a long-term process long beyond the initial training event - and its importance in strengthening employee performance. Jane Hart (industry analyst) also wrote [about 5 characteristics of contemporary knowledge workers](#), in which she also stresses that learners learn best within the flow of work, immediately in the moment and continuously.

[WalkMe](#), an interactive online guidance technology, is able to deliver learners a valuable performance aid, which gives them simple and easy to understand step-by-step instructions in the exact real-time moment they need to perform a particular task.

WalkMe empowers training managers to enable employees, as they work, to successfully complete even the most complex tasks. By using a series of interactive tip balloons overlaid on the software they are using, employee tasks are broken down into short, step-by-step guided

instructions. As a result, both during the initial training process and beyond, trainers can empower their employees so that they no longer need to focus on the technical aspects of operating the software, freeing them to become more productive and avoid mistakes.

In the absence of such technology, learners often struggle to figure out how to manage and operate their newly familiar software, whereas technology of this kind can guide them easily and quickly toward their final objective in a much faster way.

And also give you an accurate assessment of individual workers and overall progress by providing analytics dashboards full of helpful information.

The employees can then spend less time waiting for helpdesk assistance, and can learn the most effective way possible – immediately and directly relevant to the task they are required to perform.

About WalkMe

WalkMe™ helps training managers to accelerate employee time to competence and improve training effectiveness, ensuring a lasting impact on employee productivity while reducing training costs. We call it *training your software* to work with your employees.

WalkMe™ provides training managers with an indispensable tool to enable new and existing employees, as they work, to easily and successfully complete their desired tasks. By using a series of interactive tip balloons overlaid on the software they are using, employee tasks are broken down into short, step-by-step guided instructions. As a result, both during the initial training process and beyond, trainers can empower their employees so they no longer need to focus on the technical aspects of operating the software, freeing them to become more productive and avoid mistakes.

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