

The Bottom Line on Training



For some people, challenging economic times raise questions about the value of investing in training. It's easy to question whether the money spent on learning and development produces a tangible result. One recent study suggests that some types of training lead to lower

shareholder value—which is, of course, a concern for the learning and performance industry.

This study also points out that companies should link training to their objectives and strategies. I couldn't agree more. It is clear that delivering training just for the sake of it isn't enough anymore. You and all of your colleagues in the training profession are being asked to become performance consultants to help your organization achieve *results* through learning.

ASTD has and always will recommend that organizations link their training investments to the strategies of the business and that they measure the return-on-investment for those expenditures. But to realize the broader impact of training, an organization cannot measure only the dollars spent or number of hours of training provided. New measures are emerging from several experts in our field suggesting that money spent isn't the sole indicator of performance.

These experts suggest that organizations also measure such factors as time to competence, cost-savings from e-learning, number of performance gaps eliminated, ratio of strategic skills needed to existing skills, and more.

Stepping back from the different measures mentioned above, I challenge you to consider this: Change, growth, and innovation—for individuals and organizations—rarely occur in the absence of learning. To sustain a competitive advantage in any industry, regardless of the economic conditions, organizations must invest in their employees and encourage them to learn new things, try new approaches, and unleash their creativity. If workplace learning programs don't address those vital skills, where will they come from?

The financial performance of an organization—whether public or private—is certainly a critical measure of success, but it's shortsighted to think that success ends there. Great organizations are built and sustain their position in the market through many other factors such as leadership, reputation, human capital (people), social responsibility, technological advances, innovation, and more.

Ultimately, organizations thrive because of their most important asset: people. The question is not *if* but *how* and *when* you develop the skills and abilities of your employees. It is paramount to your present and future growth. This Chinese proverb articulates the point nicely: "One generation plants the trees, and the next gets the fruit and the shade."

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ina Sung". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail on the letter "g".

President and CEO
ASTD