Trouble-Shooting Your Training Program

Here's a common-sense approach to finding out why trainees aren't implementing what you taught them and how you can fix the program so they do.

If trainees fail to implement on the job what they have learned in training, it means you have to examine the program for weaknesses in objectives, instructional design, or delivery and for environmental barriers at the workplace. First let's look at the types of evaluation you'll have to use.

Evaluation types

In trouble-shooting training you'll have to use both formative and summative evaluation. Formative evaluation focuses on assessing the success of the individual stages and components of the program. The following are some basic formative considerations:

■ Was the needs assessment correctly accomplished?
■ Did the needs assessment correctly identify the training needs?
■ Are the objectives of the program correct?
■ Is the choice of trainees for the program on target?
■ Is the training content being delivered and received as intended?
■ Do the trainees actually apply the skills during the training?
■ Do the trainees transfer to the workplace the skills learned at the program?
■ Are the trainees achieving the performance goals they have established?

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The formative evaluation is followed by a summative one, which focuses on the relative success of the completed program. The summative evaluation focuses on considerations such as the following:
■ To what degree is the program accomplishing what it is supposed to?
■ Was this program cost effective?
■ Is it worthwhile to continue the program?

To trouble-shoot your programs, you must understand the purpose of formative and summative evaluations. Figure 1 depicts both evaluations' distinctions.

You usually will use a criterion- or norm-referenced measurement in your evaluation. Criterion-referenced measures help to establish how trainees or the program perform in relation to preset performance criteria. Criterion-referenced measure is binary in that it poses only one yes-or-no question: Did the trainees achieve the skill criterion level?

You generally will establish the criterion-referenced measure before conducting the program. The data you collect can be either objective or subjective. Objective data are observable, measurable, and verifiable while subjective data include attitudes, opinions, and values. Subjective data can become observable, measurable, and verifiable if you establish a scale for observer reliability.

Norm-referenced measures provide distinctions between trainees, groups, or programs. An example may be: How did this group of trainees compare with other groups who went through this program?

When trouble-shooting you should consider the program according to Kirkpatrick's four levels of training evaluation and locate the part of the program that needs correction or modification. Figure 2 shows a planning model you can use.

The planning model allows for a systematic approach to trouble-shooting. Each step of your program should build on the preceding step. A weakness at any step

Figure 1—Distinctions between evaluation types

Formative	Summative
• Is the program adequate?	• Do the results justify the input?
• Is there a correction needed?	• Can the resources be measured?
• Is the program working as planned?	• Is the program effective?
• Are the objectives being met?	• Is performance on target?

will create difficulties in successfully completing the next step. For instance, if the skill application step has a weakness, transfer to the job probably will be weak.

Lets look at each of Kirkpatrick's levels and how they relate to program trouble-shooting.

Trainee reaction

Measuring trainee reactions is usually subjective, using norm-referenced measures of subjective data. To collect this data, you usually use a survey or questionnaire where trainees record their reactions. Figure 3 is a sample subjective rating form.

Data from the trainees have implications for the design and delivery of the program. If the trainees are not motivated to learn the training content, there may be weaknesses in your delivery. You must make the subjective data observable, measurable, and verifiable. This requires the following steps:

■ Label the information collected about training in a way stakeholders in the program can understand.
■ Dimension the training steps in a meaningful way.
■ Rate the training by levels or steps either by quantity or number of times used.

Your ratings can go from the low end of the scale—the least-acceptable level—to the high end. Other ratings can be established between the two extremes, such as a minimum acceptance level.

Conducting the ratings with an advisory committee or some group of stakeholders in the program can help subjective data become useful. One advisory committee revised the form used in Figure 3 to come

Figure 3—Basic rating form

	Waste of time		Okay		Worthwhile
1. The training was:	1	2	3	4	5
2. The objectives were:	1	2	3	4	5

Figure 4—Expanded rating form

	Waste of time		Okay		Valuable
1. I found the training program:	1	2	3	4	5
	Fuzzy		Okay		Clear
2. The objectives of this program were:	1	2	3	4	5
	Not relevent		Okay		Relevent
3. The training content was:	1	2	3	4	5
	Poor		Okay		Good
4. The instructor was:	1	2	3	4	5
	Not addressed		Addressed		Fully addressed
5. My needs were:	1	2	3	4	5

Figure 2—Planning model

	Formative	Summative	Criterion-Referenced	Norm-Referenced	Objective	Subjective
Trainee Reaction						
Trainee Learning • Knowledge • Skill • Attitude						
Behavior on the Job						
Organizational Results						

up with the form in Figure 4. You can use the information you get from tabulating the data from either of these forms to make corrections or modifications in future programs.

Trainee learning

You can use data collected during the training program to make mid-course adjustments in relation to the trainee learning levels. For example, if trainees can't perform the targeted skill using the correct methods, tools, equipment and processes, you must examine their knowledge level.

On the other hand, if trainees can't demonstrate their understanding of the concepts, principles, and skill steps, you must examine their attitude level. If trainees don't seem to want to or be willing to learn the targeting skill, you should look for weaknesses in your training concept or delivery or in the program plan.

If the trainees can't perform the targeted skill, you must examine their skill level by asking questions such as the following:
■ Do the trainees have the information, concepts, and principles required to perform the skill?
■ Does the program allow for presenting and exercising the acquired skills?

Level two, in essence, is criterion-referenced. The question is: Did the trainee acquire the training content?

Trainee behavior on the job

If trainees applied the skill during the training program but failed to transfer it to the workplace, there are two areas you must examine.
■ Is the design at fault?
■ Did the on-the-job task change?

In either of the above cases, you may have to make corrections or modifications. To select the right corrective action, you must determine why trainees failed to transfer the training content.

The first question you must answer is whether trainees achieved the skill application criterion during the training program. If they didn't, there is a weakness in your training program.

If trainees did achieve the criterion, you must take a look at the application exercises. It is important that the exercise or practice simulations used in the training program are similar to the on-the-job environment.

If the exercises are closely aligned, you next must check the objectives. The train-

ing objective should be consistent with the on-the-job task. The objective should include the standards of performance, the conditions that the task is performed in, and the use of prescribed methods and processes.

If the objectives are correctly aligned, you then must find out whether there are on-the-job environmental barriers that trainees haven't been prepared to overcome. Barriers are things that will interfere or prevent trainees from performing the task properly. Training program design should consider any real-life barriers or obstacles that can cause skill transfer failure.

If there are no obstacles, you then must check for changes in the on-the-job task since the original program design. For instance, perhaps trainees now are encouraged to take shortcuts because they are taking too long. Or perhaps the supervisor now has different methods that he or she wants followed.

The essential concern for on-the-job behavior is: Did trainees transfer the skills acquired during the training program to their on-the-job tasks?

Organizational results

This step helps you ensure that the program design contributed to the organization's performance goals. The criterion-referenced measurement for this level is: Did the trainees achieve the performance goals, and do these performance goals reflect the organization's goals?

If the program achieves its performance goals, but those goals don't contribute to the organization's goals, you must revise the instructional design. In this era of constant change due to information explosion, goals often can shift while the program is in the design process. In such cases you will have to redo the program to reflect the changes.

The essential concern for organizational results is: Did trainees' learning of the on-the-job task have the desired effect on the goals of the organization?