60th Anniversary

The More Things Change … The More They Stay the Same

THROUGHOUT 60 YEARS of ASTD's monthly magazine, there have been many changes—from name changes (*Industrial Training News*, *Journal of Industrial Training*, *Journal of the American Society of Training Directors, Training Directors Journal, Training and Development Journal, Training and Development, and T+D*) to a change in the focus (from a magazine that revealed this profession's themes and moods to one that delivers the industry's emerging trends and best practices). The look has changed too, from a small *Readers Digest*-style association publication to a professional industry magazine.

But through all of those changes, one thing hasn't changed, and that's the need to justify training's return-on-investment.

If you peruse the last 60 years of this publication, the way you measure ROI, the importance of measuring it, and the tools used to measure it may have changed over the years with the evolution of business, but the need to justify that training has not changed. Over the years, many articles in *T+D* have showed this evolution.

1954

In the July-August 1954 issue of the *Journal of the Am-erican Society of Training Directors*, George S. Odiorne of Rutgers University wrote, "Are Training Costs Justified?" This article examined the misconceptions and metrics of training, and how to assess training need.

To a very large degree the company's return on its training outlay can never accurately be measured. For example, if production increases 10 percent in the year following a foreman training program, if the accident rate falls, if there is lower turnover, fewer grievances going to arbitration, fewer customer complaints, less spoilage, and greater life to machines and tools, the training man can only assign himself some estimated credit for the savings. Countless other factors enter the picture which might have affected improvements in these areas.

As the years progressed, determining the true costs of training to obtain a comprehensive return-on-investment became more important.

1984

Thirty years later, industry professionals were touting the develop- ment of evaluation methods based on hard data that show training's impact on a company's bottom line. In an August 1984 issue of *Training and Development*, Ann I. Kelley, Robert F. Orgel, and Donald M. Baer wrote "Evaluation: The Bottom Line Is Closer Than You Think."

Evaluation of training programs is critical to the economic survival of training departments and, ultimately, to that of their organizations. The development of evaluation methods that identify a training program's benefits and costs accurately and thoroughly may become the most important contribution of training and human resource development in the 1980s.

We agree that evaluation is a necessary and vital function of training departments, and we suggest three further steps: gathering additional data, performing graphic as well as statistical analysis, and implementing the slightly different experimental designs that facilitate graphic analysis. These modifications will help training departments and organizations determine the bottom-line costs and benefits of training.

2002

By the new millennium, companies were looking at more than ROI to evaluate the importance of training. The relationship between business strategies, HR policies, and performance is evaluated significantly by company stakeholders. In a June 2002 *T+D* article, Reinout van Brakel wrote, "Why ROI Isn't Enough."

Training evaluation in Europe usually consists of a lot of Level 1 (reaction) and Level 2 (learning) measurement and almost no Level 3 (job performance), Level 4 (impact), or Level 5 (ROI). Although Level 3 measurement is often perceived as a challenge, knowing performance enablers and barriers is equally perceived as adding value. The need to know the drivers and outcomes of training only further endorses the need for a complete cycle of evaluation.

The changes have been evident and have come through the sophistication of business, but getting management to commit to training, even back in the 1940s and 1950s, hinged on proving the training's ROI.

EDITOR'S NOTE: In celebration of *T+D*'s 60th anniversary, this column will appear monthly in 2006. If you have a favorite memory of *T+D*, please email us at rdavenport@astd.org.