THE VALUE OF INVESTING IN YOUR PEOPLE

Turning Workforce Development Into Organizational Value

An executive brief for leaders in business, higher education, government, nonprofit, workforce, association, and community-based organizations.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION
Organizations invest in people every day through compensation, benefits, recruitment, onboarding, supervision, technology, and time. The question is whether those investments are intentionally building the capabilities needed to achieve organizational goals.

Development Is an Investment - When It Is Connected to a Need

Training and professional development can strengthen performance, leadership capacity, adaptability, engagement, and retention. But development creates the greatest value when it is tied to an identified organizational or performance need rather than treated as an isolated event.

Current professional guidance reinforces this point. ATD emphasizes identifying performance gaps and desired outcomes before developing a learning solution, while SHRM describes learning and development as a strategic driver of workforce capability and organizational performance. Gallup's research also links manager development and employee growth opportunities with important performance and retention outcomes.

A BETTER QUESTION THAN 'WHAT DOES TRAINING COST?'
What is the organization already paying for when people lack the preparation, clarity, tools, leadership, or capabilities required to perform effectively?

The Cost of Underdevelopment Can Show Up in Many Ways

Repeated mistakes	Inconsistent service or quality	Avoidable rework
Weak supervision	Communication breakdowns	Stalled initiatives
Role confusion	Preventable turnover	Limited succession readiness
Low confidence in new responsibilities	Poor transfer of knowledge	Difficulty adapting to change

These conditions are not proof that training is the answer. They are signals that leaders should investigate the root cause before selecting a solution.

Sources: Association for Talent Development (ATD); Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM); Gallup workplace research. See references on page 4.

TRAINING IS NOT ALWAYS THE ANSWER

A performance problem may look like a training problem when the real barrier is somewhere else.

Before purchasing a course, workshop, or large development program, leaders should determine what is actually preventing the desired performance. A skills or knowledge gap may require training. Other problems may require a different response.

Possible Barrier	A More Appropriate Response May Include
Knowledge or skill gap	Training, practice, coaching, job aids, or structured development
Unclear expectations	Role clarification, performance standards, communication, or supervision
Ineffective process	Process review, workflow redesign, technical assistance, or policy improvement
Insufficient tools/resources	Technology, staffing, materials, access, or resource allocation
Leadership or management gap	Leadership development, coaching, accountability systems, or management support
Organizational structure issue	Role redesign, decision-right clarification, coordination, or organizational development

ASSESS BEFORE YOU PRESCRIBE.
A strong development strategy starts by identifying the performance or organizational gap, understanding why it exists, and then selecting the intervention that best addresses the cause.

Price and Value Are Not the Same

The lowest-cost option is not automatically the best value, and the highest-cost option does not automatically produce the best result. Value depends on fit: the right solution, for the right need, delivered in a way that participants can apply.

A generic program that does not address the actual problem can consume time and money without changing performance. An expensive engagement can also be wasteful when a simpler intervention would be sufficient. Responsible investment means matching the scope and cost of the solution to the importance, complexity, and desired outcome of the need.

INVESTMENT AND EXPECTATIONS SHOULD ALIGN.
Organizations should not expect sustained high-level performance while consistently underinvesting in the preparation, tools, leadership, systems, and development people need to succeed. At the same time, investment should be purposeful and connected to measurable expectations.

FROM TRAINING ACTIVITY TO ORGANIZATIONAL VALUE

A practical framework for making development more intentional

ASSESS	What is happening now? What evidence identifies the need or performance gap?
ALIGN	What organizational goal, responsibility, standard, or outcome should the effort support?
DEVELOP	What intervention best fits the need - training, coaching, curriculum, facilitation, technical assistance, process improvement, or another solution?
APPLY	How will participants and leaders transfer the learning or improvement into actual work?
EVALUATE	What changed? What evidence will show whether the investment created value?

What Organizational Value Can Look Like

The desired result will differ by organization. Depending on the need, value may appear as stronger supervision, improved consistency, better customer or student service, increased confidence in new responsibilities, reduced rework, improved collaboration, stronger leadership pipelines, better onboarding, improved compliance, greater adaptability, or more effective implementation of organizational priorities.

The key is to define the desired result before the intervention begins. ATD recommends starting learning initiatives with desired organizational and behavioral outcomes, and SHRM emphasizes strategic alignment, assessment, design/delivery, and measurement as elements of a stronger development strategy.

DEVELOPMENT IS MORE THAN ATTENDANCE.
The goal is not simply to count how many people completed a workshop. The stronger question is whether people can apply what they learned and whether the organization is creating the conditions that support that application.

Questions Leaders Should Ask Before Purchasing Training

1. What problem, opportunity, or organizational priority are we trying to address?
2. What evidence tells us this is the real issue?
3. Is training actually the appropriate intervention?
4. What should participants be able to do differently afterward?
5. What conditions could prevent them from applying what they learn?
6. What support will managers or leaders provide after the learning experience?
7. How will we determine whether the investment created meaningful value?

BEYOND A WORKSHOP: BUILDING CAPACITY

How Walter-James Supports Organizations

Walter-James Business & Development Center works with organizations to move beyond one-size-fits-all training. Support can begin with a specific learning need or with a broader organizational challenge that requires assessment before a solution is designed.

Engagements can be designed for a single team, department, program, leadership group, workforce initiative, or broader organizational effort and adapted to the organization's goals, audience, environment, and available resources.

Needs Assessment	**Customized Professional Development**
Leadership Development	**Workforce Development**
Curriculum & Program Design	**Technical Assistance**
Strategic & Organizational Development	**Facilitation**
Implementation Support	**Evaluation & Continuous Improvement**

Leadership Reflection

Before approving - or eliminating - a development investment, consider:

• What capability does our organization need more of?

• Where are people being asked to perform without adequate preparation or support?

• Which problems are truly learning gaps, and which require a different organizational response?

• Are our development investments connected to current priorities and future needs?

• What would meaningful improvement look like six months from now?

• How will leaders reinforce and support application after development occurs?

THE BOTTOM LINE
Investing in people is not simply about providing more training. It is about building the individual and organizational capacity necessary to perform, adapt, lead, and achieve results. Strong investments begin by understanding the need, selecting the right response, supporting application, and evaluating what changed.

Walter-James Business & Development Center
Empowering Businesses. Strengthening Organizations. Building Better Communities.

Selected References

Association for Talent Development (ATD). *Overview of Training Needs Assessment*; *Defining Behavioral Outcomes*; *Needs Assessment Certificate*.

Gallup. *Manager Development: What It Is, Why It Matters and How It Works*; *Addressing the Barriers Blocking Employee Development*.

Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). *2026 L&D; Executives: Priorities and Perspectives*; *A Comprehensive Guide to Development and Training*; *Know What's Needed Before Choosing Assessment Tools*.