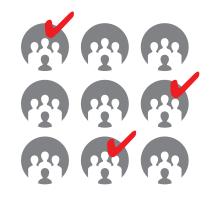# Training Transfer: Managers Make the Difference

BY KEN PHILLIPS, FIFTH IN THE PLA SERIES

What if you had a way to predict which managers are likely to do a good or a poor job of supporting the training they send their associates to attend? Now you do.

In the previous article, I explained how the Predictive Learning Analytics™ methodology enables you to predict which learners are most likely, at risk, and least likely to apply what they learned in a training program back on the job. This article explains the critical role managers play in determining whether or not the employees they send to training apply what they learned in the program back on the job.

In a 2009 T+D magazine article, Wick, Pollock, and Jefferson cite two research studies, one by Pfizer and another by American Express, that clearly show training transfer increases when managers actively engage learners following their participation in a training program.

In another study, Brinkerhoff and Montesino (1995) found that participants who had discussions with their managers before and after a training program reported significantly higher levels of job application of what was learned.:

Why do managers play such a critical role?

The answer is because employees take their cues from their manager about the value of training they are directed to attend. Managers who speak disparagingly about a learning program or who say nothing to an employee either before or after attending a training program undermine the value of the learning and reduce training transfer.

On the other hand, managers who engage employees in pre- and post-program discussions about the training dramatically increase training transfer back on the job. Pre-program talks might include things such as what to expect from the training, how it will benefit the employee, the manager's expectations for the employee after attending the training and so forth. Post-program discussions might cover topics such as what the employee learned, how the employee intends to apply what was learned, what changes in performance the employee expects to achieve as a result of the training and how the manager might assist the employee in implementing what was learned.

How can you identify which managers help — or hurt — training transfer?

You may recall from the previous article that the Predictive Learning Analytics™ methodology uses an algorithm to calculate individual Learner Application Index™ (LAI) scores and predict which learners are most likely, at risk and least likely to apply what they learned in a training program back on the job. Using the same data collected to calculate LAI scores, a Manager Training Support Index™ (MTSI) score also can be computed to predict which managers are likely to do a good or poor job of supporting the training they sent their employees to attend.

How does it work?

MTSI scores are calculated by first computing an average LAI score and an average manager training support score for any manager with three or more employees attending the training. Next, the average LAI score is subtracted from the average manager training support score resulting in an MTSI score. A positive score difference indicates that a manager is likely to do a good job of supporting the training and a negative score difference means a manager is likely to do a poor job. The chart that follows shows the calculations and which managers are likely to do a good or poor job of supporting the training.

Average LAI scores are determined by sorting the learners into groups according to their manager, summing the individual learner LAI scores and dividing by the number of learners in the group. Manager training support scores are computed by summing the responses to the two algorithm factors measuring the quality of the conversation a manager has with his or her associates before and after the training, dividing by two and then dividing the result by the number of learners.

Manager PLA #	# Direct Reports	Ave Mgr Score	Ave Learner Application Index (LAI) Score	Ave Mgr. Score minus Ave LAI
35250	4	6.75	5.91	0.84
35956	3	5.67	5.45	0.21
40086	4	6.00	6.00	0.00
43924	5	5.40	5.42	-0.02
44060	8	5.63	5.67	-0.05
39877	3	5.33	5.67	-0.33
43800	4	5.75	6.30	-0.55
34084	5	4.60	5.36	-0.76
33731	3	4.67	5.64	-0.97
33201	6	4.50	5.65	-1.15
43503	3	4.33	5.95	-1.61
Average (n=53)		5.38	5.72	-0.34

What does PLA mean to you?

Knowing which managers are likely to do a good – or a poor – job of supporting training enables you to target those managers with low or negative MTSI scores for help in improving their approach. Support activities you might provide include: a job aid explaining what to do before, during and after sending an employee to training, one-on-one coaching focused on helping a manager improve his/her approach to supporting training, or a training program covering what managers should do and not do when sending an employee to training.

With this MTSI information in hand, you now possess one more piece of the puzzle pinpointing the underlying causes of scrap learning associated with a training program. The next article will cover a third piece of the puzzle – obstacles to training transfer.

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