



Five Critical Steps to Measure Your eLearning

The need is greater than ever for learning and development to embrace data, measurement and analytics to efficiently meet business objectives.

Research from KnowledgeAdvisors confirms the positive financial impact learning measurement can make on your company:

"A group of companies with high learning and development measurement acumen outperformed the Standard & Poor's 500 Index in terms of share price appreciation."

For designers, developers and trainers, measurement is a weighted word. Employee performance is difficult to measure objectively - as is the success of a training program. As a result, measuring learning initiatives often falls into the pattern of measuring production - "X courses developed" or "Y training programs offered" - because these are factors L&D can control.

With limited budgets, the fast pace of business and pressure to produce more with fewer resources, it's easy for L&D departments to fall into the "putting out fires" mode. What really matters for an organization is not how many manuals L&D creates, but how many behaviors or outcomes L&D changes.

Immersing yourself in data-driven decision making enables you and your team to use organizational resources effectively. Ultimately, the ability to harvest, discuss and process this information correlates to improved financial outcomes for large organizations.

In an interview, Jeffrey Berk, VP of KnowledgeAdvisors, shared his key advice for learning leaders getting started with metrics: *"We always recommend a balanced approach, with three types of metrics:*

- 1. Efficiency - How much you've done;*
- 2. Effectiveness - How well you've done, meaning the impact of the training on the participants; and*
- 3. Outcomes - How well it was aligned to a business metric or result."*

Berk also recommends an incremental approach to measurement: "You just have to get started. Maybe you turn a smile sheet into a smart sheet, asking questions that can be benchmarked - and then you move on to the next step. Make sure your efforts are practical, scalable and repeatable."

5 Steps to Getting Started with Learning Measurement



Step One: Identify Goals

Start program design with the basics: Goals. Ask straightforward questions: What skills must participants have when they finish the program? What new responsibilities are they qualified to take on next? What organizational goals are you seeking to influence?

To develop specific and measurable goals, get specific guidance from your target audience and involved stakeholders to understand their needs and the related business goals.

Step Two: Identify the Preconditions

Each goal will have a chain of preconditions or dependencies - incremental changes or steps needed to achieve the final state. Ask yourself, in order to reach your targets, what steps have to happen in between? How can you create a path for people to achieve the target incrementally?

Step Three: Develop Indicators

After you've identified the final state and the path to getting there, assign a measurement value to each step. Maybe it's a completed task, a "yes, no, maybe" assessment from a supervisor, or passing a test.

A comprehensive skills assessment should include measurement of both soft skills, like leadership, communication, and cooperation, and specific job skills.

Step Four: Write the Narrative

The final step in the design phase involves creating a narrative: A model describing how your initiative will create change to achieve your program goals. This is more than just a pretty story: This is an opportunity to test your logic in plain English. When you create your narrative, this is a document you will share with your stakeholders to make sure that the steps you outline *make sense* - and that the data measures you identify connect accurately to the program goals.

Step Five: Implement, Iterate, Improve

Once you've designed a program, it's time to implement it, collect data, and use that data to make adjustments and improvements.

Case Study: Job Training for Teens

The Anchorage Youth Employment in Parks (YEP) program hires teens in Anchorage, Alaska to complete park improvement projects while learning job skills in trail building, construction, and habitat restoration. In partnership with a variety of community organizations, this program accomplished two key goals: Complete park improvements and train teens in in-demand job skills.

To secure public job training funds for this program, YEP organizers needed to demonstrate that the program successfully develops employment-ready teens. After the program's pilot year, program partners worked with a University of Alaska sociologist to create a data model to measure the YEP program's effectiveness.

Step One: Identify Goals

Organizers identified specific program goals: At the end of the program, students should be able to demonstrate competence in streambank restoration, trail-building and forestry.

Step Two: Identify the Preconditions

Program managers worked with experts in each of the subject areas (trail-building, forestry, and watershed restoration) to assess each step along the path to technical competency.

Step Three: Develop Indicators

YEP organizers first identified the characteristics they wished to measure, like education and employment status, and also developed their desired outcomes from the program. The YEP program developed detailed assessments for teens to complete at the beginning and end of the program and a shorter, simpler questionnaire filled out on a weekly basis. Organizers also asked crew leaders to complete detailed assessments of the teens' skills and abilities.

Step Four: Write the Narrative

The narrative ties together all the disparate threads of the program design, measurement and iteration. The YEP narrative told the story of teens with little employment experience gaining income, leadership ability and marketable job skills to help them change their futures.

Step Five: Implement, Iterate, Improve

Program managers used the measurement model to provide both structure in the program design and metrics to measure its effectiveness. Data are invaluable for assessing, improving and iterating - and quickly reveal any lapses in planning.

To learn more about the Youth Employment in Parks program and its measurement model, please visit the [OpenSesame blog](#).

Measuring Learning: Implement, Iterate, Improve

As you work through the learning initiative design process, the key challenge is to balance strategy with tactics: Connecting specific actions that accomplish high level goals. The narrative step also challenges you to explain the connections: An excellent exercise for testing assumptions and discovering gaps.

Berk also recommends thinking about measurement as a process, rather than an event. "When you project-ize learning measurement, you make it hard to repeat. Leverage technology to make measurement part of your process."

Developing a Program Narrative

1. What are your initiative's goals? To develop functional goals, you need stakeholder buy-in, alignment with organizational goals and specific descriptors. Make sure you're not developing goals in a vacuum.
2. Whether conscious or unconscious, everyone makes assumptions. A key step in developing a functional initiative is ensuring that you understand what variables you will hold neutral as you target changes in your organization.
3. Work backwards from your goals to the preconditions that must be met. Limit the scope of your discussion to the changes that can be affected through training and development activities.
4. Outline specific initiatives you will undertake. Ensure that you outline how those initiatives connect with your preconditions and goals.
5. Develop specific metrics based on your goals. Ensure that you have a variety of metrics at each level and step of your initiative. Make sure you can assess specific factors so that you can, in turn, make specific improvements to your learning initiatives.
6. Set expectations. Ensure that you and your colleagues understand and agree on goals and reasonable expectations for results.



Conclusion: Why does data matter?

Adding the data analytics component to your learning and development programs will take time. It will require a change in the way you think and work. But staying close to the data means *you know what's going on*. And when something works (or doesn't work), you'll have the information you need to assess what differentiated that project from your other projects.

When you're working hard to improve your program, you won't be overwhelmed by too much data. In contrast, you may even regret all the questions you *didn't* ask. Building processes for collecting and analyzing performance data in your organization will empower you to make informed decisions, allocate training department resources effectively and focus on the changes that will make the biggest improvements.

Further Reading:

- [“Evaluating Non-Formal Learning Using Kirkpatrick’s Four Level Model”](#), Michael Hanley
- The **Theory of Change** website provides excellent [case studies](#)
- [“Talent Development Reporting Principles”](#), Dave Vance
- [“Measuring Success and ROI in Corporate Training”](#), Kent Barnett & John R. Mattox (free download from Sloan Consortium)