Stop Wasting Your Money: Development that Sticks!

ICC

INNOVATE
COACHCONSULT

Getting the Most Out of Your Learning & Development Programs

Ask any employee in your company what they remember from the last training class they attended, and, more than likely, they will draw a blank. At best, they may remember a point or two, still a minimal amount of information compared to what was presented and practiced during the training session. Next, ask them whether or not they have applied anything they learned back to their job. More blank stares?

Companies spend (and lose) heavily on leadership development, especially at high-level positions. Bersin recently found (2014) that, on average, companies spent $4,716 per participant on mid-level, $10,179 on senior-level, and $12,210 on executive-level leadership development. What's more (literally), top performing companies spent 24%, 75%, and 150% more on their mid-level, senior-level, and executive-level leadership development, respectively.

With such grand investments, how can a company be sure its development practices are the most effective? What offers the most bang for the development buck?

Employees are demanding opportunities to learn, and companies need future managers and leaders to be ready for the challenge of next-level leadership. With these large development expenditures comes a reasonable expectation that not only will employees learn something, but, more importantly, that they will change their behaviors in ways that boost individual and company performance. Yet, traditional training methods do not allow for retention of material nor for applied behavior change despite the huge investment.

> **ON AVERAGE COMPANIES SPEND $4,716 TO $12,210 PER PARTICIPANT ON LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT YET NEW KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS START TO FADE AWAY AS SOON AS YOUR PARTICIPANTS WALK OUT THE DOOR**

The Forgetting Curve

The fact that people forget much of the information they take in has been known for more than a century. In the late 1800s, a German psychologist named Hermann Ebbinghaus pioneered an experimental study of memory and developed the notion of the *Forgetting Curve*. According to Ebbinghaus' Forgetting Curve, within one hour, people forget 50% of new information when there is no specific attempt to remember. After 24 hours, they have forgotten more than half of the information, and by 31 days later, they have forgotten more than 80%. For corporate learning and development, that's a lot of forgotten material for the time and money that are put into the programs.

Forgetting Curve
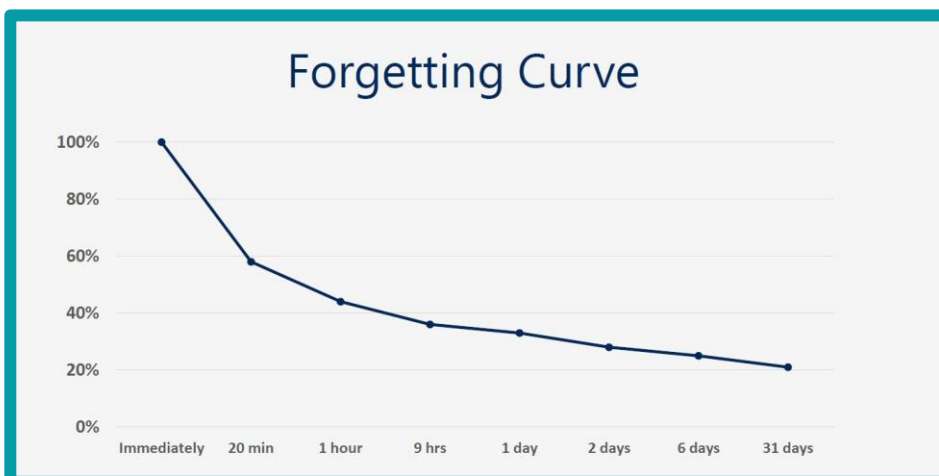
Getting the Most Out of Your Learning & Development Programs

As one might expect, there is variation in level of retention depending on the way in which information is presented. Not surprisingly, the more interactive and experiential the learning is, the greater the retention rate.
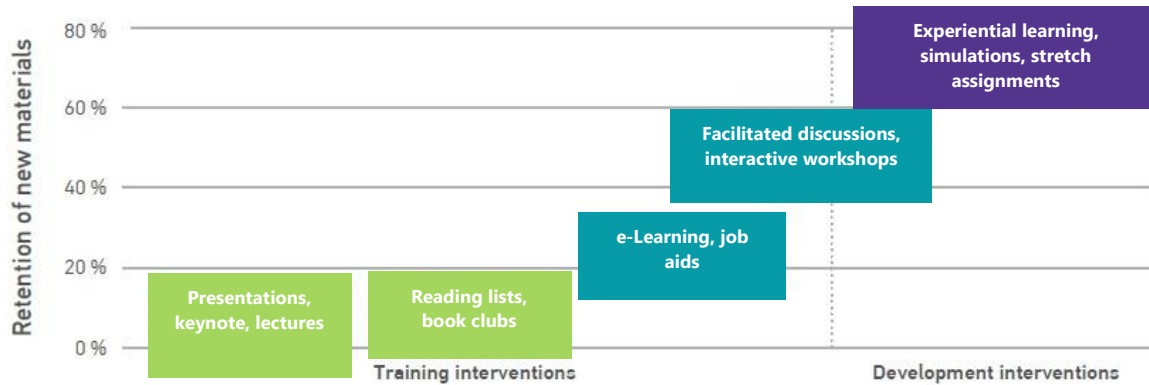
In addition to engaging employees and enabling them to practice skills through interactivity, how else can retention be improved? We have found that with some small adjustments and additions to learning opportunities, retention of learning content — and corresponding change in behavior — can be vastly improved. ICC's learning philosophy considers three primary methods to improve retention and ensure companies stop wasting development dollars: Short Bursts of Learning, Reinforcement Activities and Group Coaching.

1 SHORT BURSTS OF LEARNING

Today's employees are overwhelmed with information and tend to be distracted and impatient. As much as we might want to try to reverse these trends, when it comes to learning programs, it is important to work with them. We know that most learners will not watch videos longer than 4 minutes, and learning facilitators have between 5 and 10 seconds to capture employees' attention before they tune out. Furthermore, research on the Modern Learner suggests that 1% of a typical workweek is all that employees have to focus on training and development (Bersin, 2014).

We have found that pulling employees out of the workplace for a full day or more at a time is not the most effective learning approach. Long days sitting in a class – even with interactive and engaging learning activities – are exhausting for participants, and their attention to absorb new information for such periods of time is minimal. Instead, short bursts of learning – 2 to 4 hours at a time – tend to be far more effective (especially when the learning is supported with reinforcement activities, discussed below). Shorter learning sessions focused on just one or two learning modules of content does not overwhelm learners with too much information at once or fight against tendencies for distraction. Participants have time to absorb, reflect and apply the focused learning content before the next burst of learning**.**

Getting the Most Out of Your Learning & Development Programs

> **CASE STUDY:** In a recent study, ICC followed 25 leaders in a six-month Emerging Leaders Program, where the participants came together once a month for a learning session. Overall findings conclude that by using ICC's learning methodology, both learning retention and leadership effectiveness grew by over 40% in 30 days and approximately 71% over a six-month period.
>
> In addition, three of the participants were promoted within one year. One participant was promoted while in the program and another immediately following graduation from the program. The Emerging Leaders Program, as provided by ICC, is proving to be a valuable addition to the organization's succession planning and development efforts, feeding highly prepared managers into the future leader's pipeline for the organization.

2   REINFORCEMENT ACTIVITIES

The positive side to Ebbinghaus' Forgetting Curve is that active attempts to remember information greatly improve knowledge retention and behavior change. Engaging "reinforcement activities" following a learning session do precisely this.

Reinforcement activities are focused on the same learning objectives as the classroom or online learning session. They do not just repeat learning content in smaller pieces, but they build upon that content. There are a variety of different types of reinforcement activities as illustrated below.

Measure Behavior Change
Repeating Survey Questions

Measure Knowledge
Quiz Questions

Action/Evaluate
Assignment/Evaluate

Measure Opinions
Single Survey Questions

Self-Reflection
Open Questions

Content
Learning/Pitfalls

REINFORCEMENT IS NOT A REMINDER

Reminder services simply remind participants of what they learned. Reinforcement is more than just remembering training curriculum. Each reinforcement message is expertly crafted to help guide learners through additional content, increase knowledge retention, practice new skills, and drive lasting behavior change.

When a series of reinforcements are presented to participants following a learning session, the results can be quite powerful. The spacing across time of the reinforcements is an important consideration. The *spacing effect* is the phenomenon whereby learning is greater when it is spread out over time. For example, when studying for an exam, learning retention will be higher if a student studies for two hours each day for five days rather than ten hours in one day. Similarly, reinforcements after a classroom or online learning session are more effective if they are spread out every day or two over a period of 4 to 8 weeks rather than presented to participants all at once.

Getting the Most Out of Your Learning & Development Programs

Participants access learning reinforcements through the Internet or via an application on their mobile devices. ICC's use of reinforcement series also includes receiving scores for answering questions within a certain period of time, which creates friendly competition among participants. The easy access and "gamification" of reinforcement activities help them to be particularly engaging and enjoyable for participants while at the same time enhancing learning. We have found that 80% to 100% of participants in ICC's learning programs complete all of the reinforcement activities for their program.

> **CASE STUDY:** In another of ICC's leadership development programs, 18 new managers came together every 2-4 weeks for a learning session and participated in a series of reinforcement activities between each session.
>
> Through the use of short, identical quizzes administered before and after each learning session along with the reinforcement data, we were able to track learning retention over time. In particular, we found that participants answered 36% of pre-test questions correctly and 84% of post-test questions correctly. They answered 90% of the same questions correctly 1-2 months later.
>
> These findings indicate that the use of reinforcements effectively supported the learning content, enabling it to "stick" and even grow over time.

THE MODERN SOLUTION FOR THE MODERN LEARNER

ICC INNOVATE COACH CONSULT

41% Leadership effectiveness increased

63% Time spent training new hires decreased

83% Sales volume increased

121% Customer satisfaction ratings increased

THE KEY... MANAGER SUPPORT

How often do we hear, "My boss didn't hold me accountable." or "Has my boss been through this program?"? Development efforts will fail without buy-in from managers and giving managers the tools to support individual and team development. Involving managers in the reinforcement process gives participants confidence that they will get support for making changes back on the job, accountability to apply new skills and monitoring of their progress. Managers must play a critical role in reinforcing development efforts.

ICC's learning programs offer the capability for managers to have their own set of reinforcement activities, which encourage them to engage in their direct reports' learning. For example, managers may be prompted to ask specific learning-related questions of their direct reports who attended a particular session and rate those participants on their on-the-job application of skills learned in the class. Structured support tools enable managers to reinforce participants' learning through more effective development conversations and to drive improved performance and growth.

Getting the Most Out of Your Learning & Development Programs

3 GROUP COACHING

MOTIVATION AND PEER ACCOUNABILITY

We have also found that group coaching sessions held between training sessions greatly boost knowledge retention and behavior change. Group coaching sessions are facilitated by an ICC certified coach and provide participants with opportunities to ask questions and further process what they learned in the training session.

Group coaching helps to keep learning content and objectives in participants' minds and provides accountability for targeted behavioral changes. Because the goal of training is performance improvement on the job, providing space for participants to discuss how well those changes are going and how they can work through any obstacles is very important to support on-the-job behavior changes.

Another one of the greatest values of group coaching is the opportunity for social learning. Participants learn from each other by sharing experiences, challenges, and solutions during the sessions. Many times, participants build strong relationships with one another so that the social learning continues through day-to-day interactions outside of coaching sessions, boosting the rate at which organizational silos break down, internal peer-mentors are formed, and colleagues create a more collaborative atmosphere.

> "I wanted to extend a thank you for everything you have done this year to help me be successful and learn more about myself. With your help and assistance, I moved into a Manager role with the Operations team and have gained friends and colleagues that support me in my development. I truly don't think it would have been possible without the classes, coaching, your influence and help."
>
> - Participant in one of ICC's Emerging Leaders Programs

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Developing leaders is one of the most important pursuits of any organization. Recent research indicates that 6 in 10 leaders consider a lack of leadership capabilities to be a major cause of their company's inability to deal with business change (Bersin, 2013). Preparing leaders to effectively navigate this world of ongoing change and expand their business is critical. Furthermore, leadership is a critical component for overall employee engagement and retention.

The business impact of using mature leadership development initiatives over traditional one-and-done training methods reaches far beyond the data presented by ICC — companies that invest in these more effective leadership development practices that stress learning reinforcement reap many benefits (Bersin, 2013):

Getting the Most Out of Your Learning & Development Programs

BUSINESS IMPACT	RESULTS FOR MATURE ORGANIZATIONS
Overall Employee Retention	**20X GREATER**
Engagement and Retention of Leaders	**6X GREATER**
Bench Strength of Leaders	**8X GREATER**
Business Growth	**12X GREATER**

This evolution in development practices means higher returns on learning investments than ever before. Current employee and organizational demands require learning programs to make big shifts to ensure that learning sticks and has positive impact on business outcomes. New technologies enable these shifts. In total, companies spend upwards of $60 billion each year on leadership development (Bersin, 2013). Every company contributing part of that tremendous investment needs to be used as wisely as possible, so they can best prepare their people and the organization for the dynamic future.

REFERENCES

Bersin (2013). Five trends in leveraging leadership development to drive a competitive advantage.

Bersin (2014). Research Bulletin: Meet the Modern Learner.

Bersin (2014). Leadership development factbook 2014: Benchmarks and trends in U.S. leadership development. Available to research members at www.bersin.com/library.