

Introduction: The 6Ds[®]

The training you provide must contribute — visibly and substantially — to fulfillment of customers’ business strategies.

— van Adelsberg and Trolley

In today’s rapidly-changing and fast-paced business environment, continuous learning is essential to remain competitive. Formal training programs are an important component of learning organizations. But not all programs are created equal. When we compared high-value to low-value training programs, we have identified six disciplines—The 6Ds[®]—that are practiced by the most effective learning organizations.

They are:

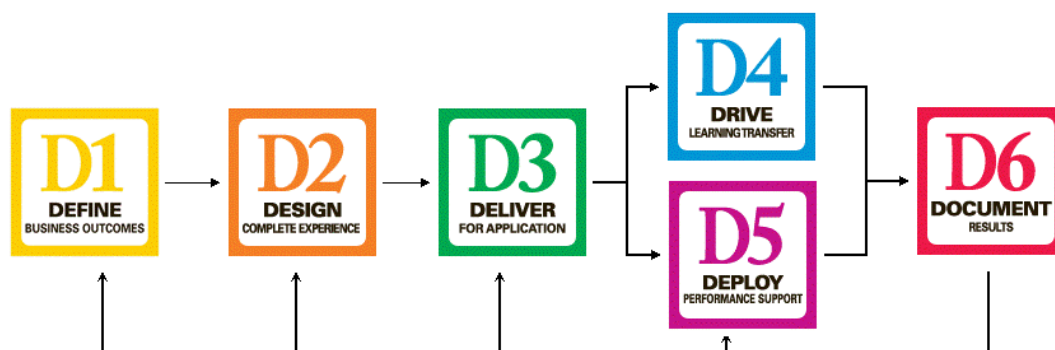


Figure I.1. The Six Disciplines that Turn Learning into Business Results

D1: Define business outcomes

Human capital is the single most important source of competitive advantage, especially for professional services firms, in today’s increasingly knowledge-based economy. Maintaining competitive advantage through human capital requires ongoing investment in employees’ development so that they stay current in a rapidly-changing world and so that they stay with the company.

Organizations invest in learning and development expecting a return in terms of improved performance. Therefore, the first discipline of high-impact learning is to rigorously define how the training will contribute to the organization’s mission and productivity. No program should be implemented until the desired business outcomes and what learners will do on the job have been clearly defined.

In this regard, traditional learning objectives are not sufficient; they define what will be covered or learned, but not how the learning will be used on the job to improve performance. A core concept of D1 is that program objectives should state the expected business outcomes and how success will be measured, rather than just what attendees will learn.

When a program’s business purpose is unclear, so is its value.

D2: Design the complete experience

A second theme that runs through this Workshop is that converting learning into business results is a *process*, not a one-off event. The real finish line of a training program is when performance improves; not when the class ends. Learning organizations need to be more explicit and deliberate about the process by which learning will be transformed into results (Figure 1).

Hope is not
a strategy.



"I think you should be more explicit here in step two."

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Figure 1: To ensure results, training and development needs to design the complete experience, not just hope for a miracle.

The real
finish line for
learning is
when
performance
improves.

Thus, D2—the second discipline—is to plan for and optimize the *complete* learning experience.

There are four phases to the process:

- **Phase I:** Preparing a foundation of knowledge, skills, or experience to optimize the value of formal instruction.
- **Phase II:** The structured learning experience, which may be virtual, instructor-led, e-learning, action learning, or any combination thereof.
- **Phase III:** Transfer and application—continued practice, reinforcement, and learning on the job.
- **Phase IV:** Assessment of achievement—"the new finish line" for learning. Completing the course should be defined as successful application to work; not just "showing up" for class.

Less effective learning organizations focus exclusively on Phase II, the structured learning experience. The research is clear, however: whether or not training produces value for the company depends as much on what happens before and after, as it does on the instruction itself.

D3: Deliver for application

For training to pay dividends, participants must be able to take what they learn and apply it to their daily work.

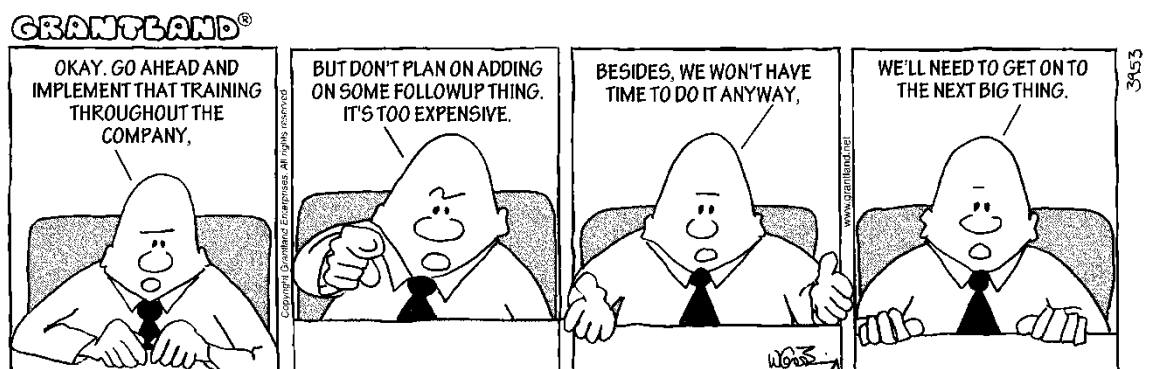
The third discipline that characterizes the most effective learning programs is that they deliver for application. That is, the course content is presented in ways that facilitate its use on the job. Each topic is firmly linked to business needs and realities. Ample opportunities are provided for practice with feedback. Examples and exercises are credible and relevant. Goal setting is taken seriously. Content overload and “Death by PowerPoint®” are avoided.

The core concept of D3 is that that learning creates value only when it is applied; therefore, the way in which learning is delivered should reflect and facilitate the way in which it will be used.

D4: Drive learning transfer

Ken Blanchard put it succinctly: “To change behavior and get the results you want, you need structure, support, and accountability.”

The fourth discipline of results-oriented learning programs is that they put in place systems and processes that drive follow-through, learning transfer, and application when people return to their jobs.



Companies invest in learning in response to business needs and opportunities. That means that learning objectives are actually *business objectives*. They should be treated as such: tracked, measured and rewarded. A core concept of D4 is that while the learning organization does not control the post-training environment, it can and should influence it, since the ultimate success of any training or development program depends on the post-course transfer environment.

D5: Deploy performance support

The fifth discipline practiced by the most effective organizations is that they provide learners with support after training to assist them in applying new methods and mastering new skills.

The core concept of D5 is that performance support should be an integral part of the design of every program. Sources of support include instructors, peers, and coaches (internal or external), as well as job aids and printed or online guides to application.

Engaging the immediate supervisors of trainees is critical. Research at American Express demonstrated that a direct supervisor can “literally make or break the success of any training program.” Effective organizations make sure that managers are provided with the resources they need to be successful and are held accountable for coaching to ensure training’s impact.

Learning objectives are *business objectives*.

Performance support should be an integral part of every program design.

Learning organizations should be models of continuous improvement.

D6: Document results

The bottom-line questions that must be answered about any learning and development initiative are: Did it make a positive difference? Did it achieve the results for which it was designed? Was it worth the time and money invested? How can it be made even more effective?

The most effective organizations treat investments in training and development like other corporate investments. That is, they measure the results and assess the impact.

The Sixth Discipline is to document results in a relevant, credible, and compelling way that justifies further investment and supports continuous improvement. Evidence of results is needed to justify continued investment. Insight into what is, and is not, working is essential to support a cycle of continuous learning, innovation, and adaptation that will ensure training keeps pace with the changing competitive environment, workforce, and business needs.

Summary

Learning programs are investments that a company makes to enhance the value and effectiveness of its human capital. Management has a fiduciary and ethical responsibility to ensure that those investments produce a return: results that improve performance and competitiveness.

The 6Ds® provide a framework for “running training like a business.” Companies that practice the 6Ds enjoy a greater return on their training investments. Learning organizations that practice the 6Ds enjoy greater respect and engagement than those that simply fill orders for training.



- Always start with business objectives
- Describe what the participants will do differently
- Agree on definition of success



- Include all four phases of learning
- Plan and manage learning transfer process
- Redefine finish line as on-the-job results



- Make relevance and utility clear
- Provide enough time for practice
- Use methods that make learning memorable



- Recognize transfer as a critical part of the process
- Engage participants' managers
- Put in place systems of accountability



- Provide job aids and performance support
- Make them an integral part of the plan
- Ensure availability of feedback and coaching



- Measure what matters to sponsors
- Use insights to drive continuous improvement
- Market the results to stakeholders

The 6Ds provide a framework for running training like a business.