

June 30, 2011

Volume 6, Issue 29

How to Support and Improve Learning Transfer Using Fort Hill Company's ResultsEngine®

About the Author



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Introduction

In our research, the top priority for talent organizations has remained the same over the past three years – improving the effectiveness of L&D programs. This is a good sign, since it means that organizations are still focused on effecting the transfer of learning and aligning themselves with business priorities. Still another good sign is that, after two years of cutting costs, companies are now reinvesting in employee development – and are focused more heavily on hiring and skills transfer¹.

We know that organizations invest a good portion of their employee development budget on planning L&D programs, as well as on carefully designing the content, information and experiences that will (*ideally*) create new skills and capabilities for employees. Surprisingly though, very little is invested in follow-through to make sure the program has a positive impact on job performance. Not knowing whether or not training is being applied means organizations may be leaving precious value on the table. In a recent survey by McKinsey & Company, only one-quarter of executives felt that their investment in training actually improved performance.²

Why is that? Historically, many employees have participated in formal L&D programs (*you are probably one of them*) – only to return to their

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¹ For more information, *The Corporate Learning Factbook® 2011: Benchmarks, Trends and Analysis of the U.S. Training Market*, Bersin & Associates / Karen O'Leonard, January 2011. Available to research members at www.bersin.com/library or for purchase at www.bersin.com/factbook.

² Source: "Getting More from Your Training Programs," *McKinsey Quarterly*, October 2010.



ANALYSIS

“Having tools to support the transfer of learning is one of the key ways in which organizations can ensure formal learning is actually applied to the job. This is especially important today as organizations refocus their plans on skills transfer in the face of leadership and talent gaps, the need for deep specialization, and the desire to improve learning measurement and evaluation.”

*Josh Bersin, CEO
Bersin & Associates*

jobs feeling motivated, but lacking the support and feedback needed to transfer what was learned to their actual work. At the conclusion of the training, the employee is considered “trained” and leaves the session to get back to his / her “real work.” Without reinforcement and application, the employee quickly forgets what was learned.

Other times, organizations train only a fraction of users on a particular subject and expect them to transfer *their* learning to others. We often see this with a “quick-fix” method, like “train the trainer.”

A better approach is to recognize that training is not “once and done.” Training is part of a process called “**continuous learning**” – the ongoing development of skills, abilities and knowledge through different means as part of an individual’s professional lifecycle. To increase the return on investment (ROI) from training, L&D must now focus more attention on the transfer of learning and continuous learning.

How do you do that? We believe supporting learning transfer requires a framework that will address what is lacking in many programs – the need for follow-through. In short, we need an easier way to make sure that L&D programs and initiatives are actually being used on the job to produce value.

The Learning Transfer “Big Picture”

Learning happens in many ways. Sometimes learning is the product of a formal learning program, and sometimes learning happens as part of a structured practice, either directly on the job or within a simulation. However, more often than not, learning takes place in subtle, informal ways – as we learn from the results of our work, or from interactions with peers, mentors and managers.³ This is often the “follow-through” opportunity of formal training that we neglect.

Learning requires two fundamental activities. In the first, we acquire new knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviors and / or competencies; in the second, we apply what was acquired. “Transfer of learning” is the

³ For more information, *High-Impact Learning Practices: The Guide to Modernizing Your Corporate Training Strategy through Social and Informal Learning*, Bersin & Associates / David Mallon, July 2009. Available to research members at www.bersin.com/library or for purchase at www.bersin.com/hilp.



KEY POINT

Training is part of a process called “**continuous learning**” – the ongoing development of skills, abilities and knowledge through different means as part of an individual’s professional lifecycle. This continuous learning approach is what L&D must focus attention on in order to affect the transfer of learning.

process of applying new skills and knowledge from training to the person’s job.⁴

In our research, we found that more than one-quarter of learning leaders say improving transfer of learning support is a significant challenge. However, many of those same learning leaders do not think their organizations are very good at it. This is a significant opportunity for improvement.

Having a process in place to support transfer of learning is often missing in the design of corporate L&D. Sure, we consistently measure learner satisfaction, but that only provides us with information about the program itself and not the results of the program.

In the context of how work is done, learning transfer is “... *the process of putting learning to work in ways that improve performance.*”⁵

That is the premise of this bulletin – how to support and improve learning transfer. In this report, we profile one company, The Fort Hill Company, an organization that specializes in supporting learning transfer using a web-based learning transfer support system, called ResultsEngine®. We also explore what three organizations are doing to make sure training at their organizations is being applied on the job and, along with that, improving business results. One such company is Morgan Stanley Smith Barney. It used the 6Ds® Framework⁶, the methodology on which ResultsEngine® is built, to develop business outcome-focused programs.

⁴ Source: *Improving Learning Transfer*, Kirwan, C. / Gower, 2009.

⁵ Source: *The Six Disciplines of Breakthrough Learning: How to Turn Training and Development into Business Results*, Calhoun Wick / Pfeiffer, 2010.

⁶ The “6Ds Framework” represents the best practices used by organizations that produce the most value from their L&D efforts. Source: *The Six Disciplines of Breakthrough Learning: How to Turn Training and Development into Business Results*, Calhoun Wick, et al / Pfeiffer, 2010.



Case in Point: Morgan Stanley Smith Barney Builds Business Outcome-Focused Programs

Morgan Stanley Smith Barney is a global brokerage, investment and asset management firm with more than \$12 billion in annual revenue. Based in New York City, Morgan Stanley Smith Barney employs more than 17,000 financial advisors. The organization was the result of the merger of two companies – Morgan Stanley and Smith Barney.

Morgan Stanley Smith Barney partnered with The Fort Hill Company in order to “realize its greatest potential – the application of learning.”

Prior to partnering with Fort Hill, the organization conducted instructor-led training (ILT), but did not really think beyond the training or even with regard to who was attending. Employees were not engaged. Using ResultsEngine® and Fort Hill’s Six Disciplines (6Ds®) Learning Framework, the organization was able to “turn L&D on its head.”

The 6Ds Learning Framework was developed by Fort Hill, based on research that identified the traits of companies which are most efficient at turning L&D into business results. Those six disciplines are illustrated in Figure 1 and serve as the underlying methodology for ResultsEngine®. (See Figure 1.)

For Morgan Stanley Smith Barney, starting with business outcomes was a key success factor. This new approach fundamentally changed the way the organization trains. In fact, external trainers have noted how much more challenging it is to conduct training today at Morgan Stanley Smith Barney, as compared with just a few years ago.

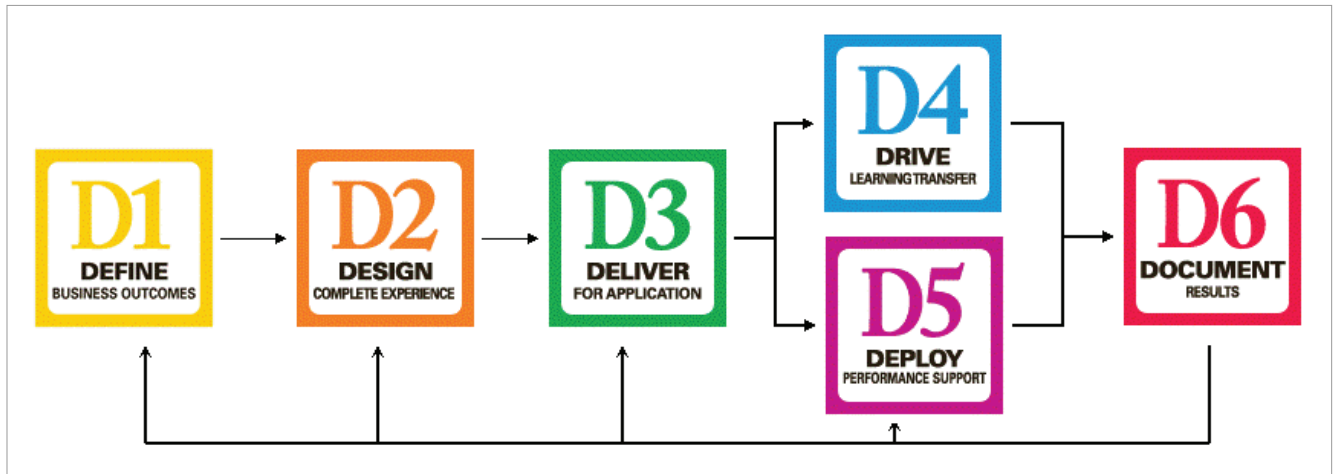
Part of the change includes the use of goal forms to define business outcomes. Morgan Stanley Smith Barney uses the forms for all internal *and* external training. On the forms, instructors are asked how employees will apply their training. If the instructor cannot clearly answer the application question, he / she will be poorly rated. This has resulted in a shift from the



KEY POINT

Organizations invest a good portion of their employee development budget on planning L&D programs, as well as on carefully designing the content, information and experiences that will (ideally) create new skills and capabilities for employees.

Figure 1: Six Disciplines (6Ds) Learning Framework



Source: The Fort Hill Company, 2011.

Case in Point: Morgan Stanley Smith Barney Builds Business Outcome-Focused Programs (cont'd)


simple presentation of content to the use of case studies and other types of active learning techniques. Now, employees are able to take action immediately.

ResultsEngine® provides the structure and support for this. The organization uses it on nearly every vendor and every program. While still dealing with some pushback from trainers (“not that type of program”), Morgan Stanley Smith Barney is committed to keeping the focus on learning transfer and return on investment.

The focus on business outcomes has meant L&D is now able to get behavioral changes and show ROI. A recent coaching skills program resulted in more employee engagement and optimism, as well as a 50 percent improvement in skills over those employees not using ResultsEngine®.

Morgan Stanley Smith Barney’s next challenge will be scalability. The company is taking what it has learned from Fort Hill and will be applying the 6Ds®, along with the ResultsEngine® software, for blended learning, as well as for instructor-led training.

Case in Point: Morgan Stanley Smith Barney Builds Business Outcome-Focused Programs (cont'd)

The business outcomes realized by the company have put L&D in a whole new and favorable light at Morgan Stanley Smith Barney. 

Putting a Process in Place to Support Learning Transfer

Without results, L&D programs fail to deliver value. Results flow from the successful transfer of learning. Based on our research, we anticipate that learning transfer support will be a major differentiator for high-impact learning organizations over the next 10 years.

One large, global pharmaceutical company has put a process, along with tools, in place – and has realized a substantial return on investment.



KEY POINT

In our research, we found that more than one-quarter of learning leaders say improving transfer of learning support is a significant challenge.

Case in Point: Global Pharmaceutical Company Gains 148 Percent ROI

One of the world's largest pharmaceutical companies wanted to accelerate the development of its leaders through training aimed at improving communication and listening skills, developing better coaching skills with direct reports, and advancing the way leaders articulated company values.

To achieve those goals, the company rolled out a leadership skills program and delivered it over the course of six months. Halfway through the rollout, the company began an ROI field study that sought to:

- Measure the effectiveness of the new leadership skills program; and,
- Measure the effectiveness of Fort Hill Company's learning transfer support system, "Friday5s®" (now known as *ResultsEngine®*).

The result was astonishing. The ROI field study showed that, for every dollar spent, the organization got back that dollar plus \$1.48 – proof that well-designed and -delivered training

Case in Point: Global Pharmaceutical Company Gains 148 Percent ROI (cont'd)

adds real value. To verify the ROI, learning leadership worked closely with the organization's finance department to account for salary, travel, cost of materials and delivery. The evaluators then adjusted those values downward, based on the level of confidence by employees in their ROI estimates.

The leadership skills program was a traditional instructor-led training program, at the end of which employees had to write about key areas and what they wanted to do when they were back on the job.

With ResultsEngine®, the pharmaceutical company was able to:

- Break down learning content into categories that fit learning objectives;
- Add very specific language and action items to reinforce the content.

Beyond that, the learning professional in charge of learning transfer and sustainability helped to expand the traditional relationship between the trainer and the learner to include the participant's manager and sponsor of the initiative.

This "follow-on," the company found, was much easier with the Fort Hill software than when it had tried to do post-program support manually.

ResultsEngine maximized learning transfer in a couple of ways. Learning transfer in this example was maximized by:

- Aligning learning more closely with the focus and thrust of the organization; and,
- Supporting that alignment, before, during and after the program.

This last step was crucial in making sure that the leadership skills were applied and "stayed alive." This was the sweet spot of return for the organization – "what gives you the bang for your buck that you were looking for."

**KEY POINT**

Having a process in place to support transfer of learning is often missing in the design of corporate L&D



KEY POINT

The pharmaceutical company felt that Fort Hill's transfer support tool provided the structure that tied the learner more closely to his / her manager and, with that, formal feedback.

Case in Point: Global Pharmaceutical Company Gains 148 Percent ROI (cont'd)

The field study showed that the web-based ResultsEngine® tool worked well. The company felt that Fort Hill's transfer support tool provided the structure that tied the learner more closely to his / her manager and, with that, formal feedback. The company's business outcomes included increased productivity, increased efficiency, better selection of new hires and greater retention. As well, the range for its completion rate improved from 40 percent to 50 percent, to 70 percent to 80 percent. The ROI reported by participants using ResultsEngine was almost 50 percent greater than for the same program without it.

The program was so successful that a small pilot study was later done in the manufacturing department. The company found that people who had used ResultsEngine® had much more interaction with their managers than when they did not use the tool. In addition, the depth of interaction was much more robust; it was not always just phone communication. Employees and managers started using a range of communication tools that broke down some barriers, an added benefit for the company. ↻

Realizing the importance of the human factor in learning, the learning transfer support system also helps to engage managers and to encourage collaboration. An example of that comes from a multinational conglomerate. It focused on pre-training activities to affect transfer after the training ended.

Case in Point: American Multinational Involves Managers before Training Starts

One of the world's largest companies, with \$150 billion in revenue in 2010, knew that involving employees' direct managers was a key success factor, both for any L&D program to be taken seriously and for participants to take follow-up action on what they learned. Without follow-up, results are unpredictable and training is incomplete.

To get employees to take L&D programs more seriously and to get more impact from instructor-led training, the company

Case in Point: American Multinational Involves Managers before Training Starts (cont'd)



KEY POINT

Many learning leaders do not think their organizations are very good at supporting the transfer of learning. This is a significant opportunity for improvement.

implemented the 6Ds principles, such as holding pre-course conference calls with learners and their managers. It found that action to be very powerful. Some of the managers had been to the same programs, so not only would they provide great testimonials, but the calls reminded managers that their direct reports would be out of the office for a week.

Two things happened. First, managers were, in effect, giving the participants their permission to totally disconnect for the week. So participants went to the training experience focused, knowing that they did not have any distractions during this time.

Second, the managers would meet with the participants beforehand and then delegate items from the participants' critical timetables, so that the participants clearly knew that everything was being taken care of. It also gave others on the participants' teams the opportunity to rise to the occasion and fill in, while the participants were at the training program.

Although this practice started with one course, it expanded to other courses, often with variations. For example, in one of the executive training programs, participants used flip cams to interview people. In another program, instead of interviewing people, participants took five minutes to film themselves describing how their managers supported them in this training.

L&D then collected all the video vignettes and put the best of the best onto a web portal for the program. Then it emailed the managers of participants going to future programs a message along the lines of,

"Because we know that you want to fully support your employee who is going to the leadership development program, we thought you might be interested in learning some best practices from other managers who have recently sent their employees to the program."

Watching the videos actually increased the support that participants received from their managers.

Case in Point: American Multinational Involves Managers before Training Starts (cont'd)

Building on managerial support for the program, the company also used Fort Hill's ResultsEngine®.

In designing the program, L&D used the Six Disciplines of Breakthrough Learning and began with the end in mind, in terms of business outcomes. L&D then created the program from that point. This was a departure from traditional learning objectives, which included factors, such as "appreciate the role of being a manager." Such an objective was clearly neither action-oriented nor tied to the business outcomes.

Designers started asking questions such as the following.

- *Do we want our managers to coach more often?*
- *Do we want to see an increase in the amount of time a manager spends coaching his / her direct reports?*
- *What is the outcome we are looking for, specifically?*

On the first day of the program, trainers informed participants that, at the end of the session, they would have to come up with two or three action items for either leveraging strengths or changing their behavior to improve their performance.

Trainers planted that seed on day one and, during reflection time, reminded learners that they needed to come up with action plans. On the second to last day, participants put together their action plans. By that time, they had received feedback from their peers throughout the week.

Fort Hill then entered the action plan in ResultsEngine® and email reminders began on the Friday after the class ended.

The company set up the program as a cohort group to intentionally allow all learners to see one another's goals and progress. The intent was to encourage people to "steal shamelessly" some of the best ideas from their colleagues.

ResultsEngine® provided a cohort for people to share best practices, based on their own goals. Since program participants often have similar goals, they can apply ideas from other people in their own working environments. ↻



KEY POINT

More often than not, learning takes place in subtle, informal ways – as we learn from the results of our work, or from interactions with peers, mentors and managers.

The Fort Hill Company

Fort Hill is a private company that was founded in 1999. Its core strength is enhancing learning effectiveness and, more specifically, learning transfer. The foundation of its approach is the *Six Disciplines of Breakthrough Learning*, a book by the company's principals that defines the six critical practices of high-impact learning.

The company focuses on the process of turning learning into results, rather than training "events." ResultsEngine is a key element of that process. A purpose-built, web-based tool, ResultsEngine enhances the transfer learning by engaging participants and their managers post-program. There are several aspects of the system that make it unique.

First, ResultsEngine is a research-based solution that is built on proven ways to increase transfer and performance improvement.

The second is its very specific focus on learning transfer support – it is not just writing a goal, but providing the framework for meeting that goal.

Third, ResultsEngine sits upon a deliberately simple Framework – which uses common Internet browsers and conventions. There is no software to install or special training needed.

The system is currently a standalone, turnkey system that Fort Hill customizes for each specific training program. It can also serve as a follow-up for individual development plans. The average implementation time is one to two weeks.

Here is how it works.

Participants in a training and development program set (*or are assigned*) goals for applying what they have learned.

On a set schedule following the training, the system reminds participants of the need to apply their learning and also provides a link to ResultsEngine. An email prompt is also sent to managers, since research shows that manager engagement has a strong, positive impact on learning transfer.⁷ Participants use the system to update their progress by answering these three questions.

⁷ Source: *Improving Learning Transfer in Organizations*, Holton and Baldwin / Jossey-Bass, 2003.



- *What have you done?*
- *How much progress have you made?*
- *What are you doing next?*

Figure 2: ResultsEngine® Collaboration Features

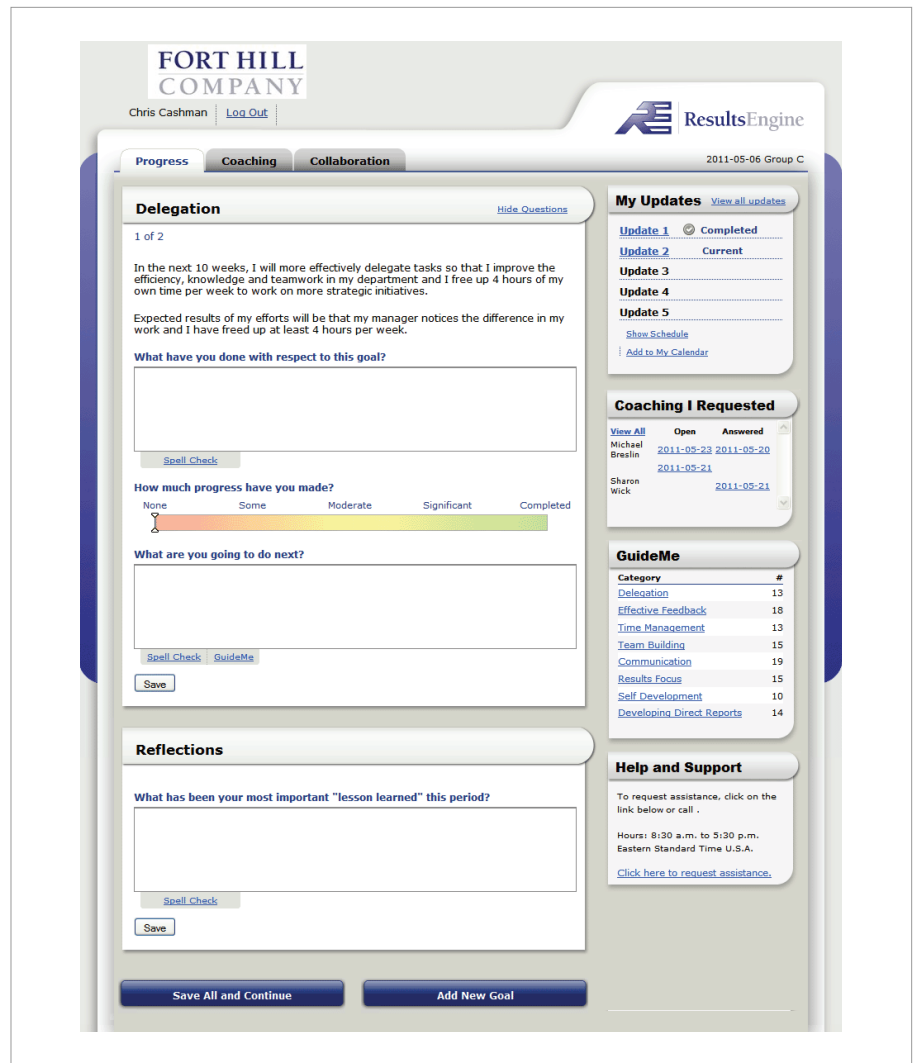


Source: The Fort Hill Company, 2011.

Figure 3: ResultsEngine® Learner Interface

KEY POINT

ResultsEngine is a research-based solution that is built on proven ways to increase transfer and performance improvement.



Source: The Fort Hill Company, 2011.

Participants reflect on their learning, using an online guide if needed. They then save the responses and advance to a coaching page through which they can simply “ask for feedback” from their manager, coaches or peers. On the collaboration page, participants can see how their individual progress stacks up with that of others in the program.

The typical practice is to provide biweekly reminders for 60 to 90 days after formal training. Typically, five updates are sent over the course of 10 weeks. Participants can complete each update in about 10 minutes.

After participants save their report, they can request feedback from their manager or peer and review the responses of others. Fort Hill



Figure 4: ResultsEngine® User Report

User Report [Print] [Close]

Goal 1. Developing Direct Reports

In the next 10 weeks, I will work with my direct reports to help them clearly understand their accountabilities, the deliverables associated with these. I will explain the method I will use to provide them with feedback about their performance so that we are sync with each other throughout the year. Evidence of my progress will include greater ownership of objectives by my direct reports and a positive uptick in our performance compared to the same quarter last year.

Actions taken?

Update 1: I held a team meeting to explain what I learned in the program about the importance of clear goals for both the team as a whole and for each individual contributor. People were definitely pleased; although some expressed a sort of "we have heard this before" attitude. That makes the stakes higher on my really following-through and not letting this be another management flavor of the month. I have given each of my reports a goal sheet to complete and have begun scheduling meetings.

Update 2: I have met with each of my direct reports to ensure alignment of expectations, and what deliverables they need to focus on. This was an extremely helpful exercise. The fact that I planned to make the goals public resulted in some initial panic, then some hurried re-writing to make them stronger.

Progress?

Update 1: Some

Update 2: Moderate

Actions planned?

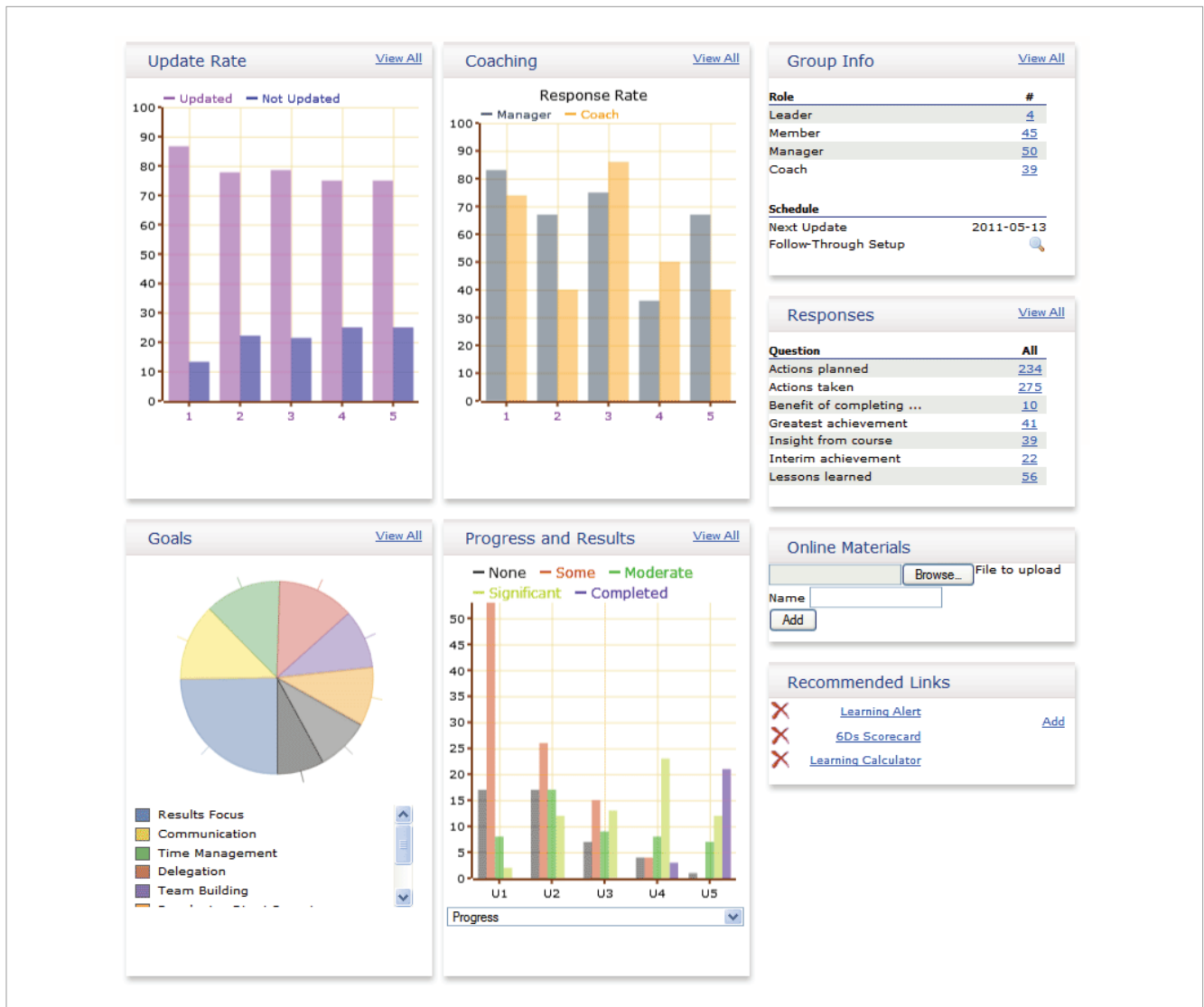
Update 1: Sit down with each direct reports and go over her/his goals. Once we agree, I ill post my objectives and each of my team member's goals outside my office so we are publically accountable.

Update 2: As an output of each meeting, I am going to create a team action plan to ensure that all deliverable milestones are met, and that

Source: *The Fort Hill Company, 2011.*

sees these as critical to continuing the learning. Their premise is that ending learning at class is incomplete. Participants of training need a process, support, and feedback as they strive to master new skills and approaches in order to get the most impact from ILT.

Figure 5: ResultsEngine® Dashboard



Source: *The Fort Hill Company, 2011.*

Fort Hill released a whole new version of ResultsEngine in 2010. Some more recent advances include data-tagging to support advanced analysis of results. Programs now can include identifiers (tags) such as the department, function, or location to help compare the results between groups.

The new system also has some impressive search features, such as sorting based on words. For example, the learning organization could pull up all the achievement stories where “money” was involved.



ANALYSIS

Leveraging transfer support technology, such as ResultsEngine®, makes supporting learning transfer easier and improves the value that L&D delivers to the business.

For learning leaders, checking on post-program progress is simple. Using the dashboard, the leader can see activity of individual cohorts, as well as the entire program. The leader can easily compare people that have been tagged and review the quality and quantity of coaching. Reports can be exported to MS Excel.

Conclusion

The percentage of learners who actually put their learning to work is low; it is estimated that as little as 10 percent to 20 percent of the knowledge or skills taught in training programs are effectively transferred to the workplace.⁸ That happens because there is usually no framework or methodology in place to support learning transfer, or because there are no resources to support people after training. As organizations focus more on aligning themselves with business priorities, L&D will need to hone in on the follow-through opportunities. It is the action of transferring new skills and knowledge to the learner's work that has a positive impact on business outcomes. This supports the idea of **continuous learning** – the ongoing development of skills, abilities and knowledge. Leveraging transfer support technology, such as ResultsEngine®, makes supporting learning transfer easier and improves the value that L&D delivers to the business.

⁸ Source: *Beyond Transfer of Training*, M. Broad . Pfeiffer, 2005.





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