



Amping Up the Value and Return of Your Learning Investment

A Process for Closing the Learning-Doing Gap and Providing Measurable Results

Organisations invest millions of dollars to provide skills training and development to help their people reach their full potential. But the world's best training won't make a difference if there isn't a process in place to create sustainable results. Studies with dubious numbers won't impress skeptical executives, but hard evidence and data that show participants who use their skills to make positive contributions to the business become champions of the value of leadership development.

A rapidly changing workplace has made organisational leaders and stakeholders demand that employee development (for both formal and informal development work) achieve its promised results. That means it must be considered modern (think consumer grade), culturally connected, forward thinking, and tightly knitted with business objectives. To achieve this, a rapidly changing workplace has made organisational leaders and stakeholders demand that employee development (for both formal and informal development work) achieve its promised results. That means it must be considered modern (think consumer grade), culturally connected, forward thinking, and tightly knitted with business objectives. To achieve this, an organisation must focus on developing their people—whether it's leadership, onboarding, technical skills, or sales

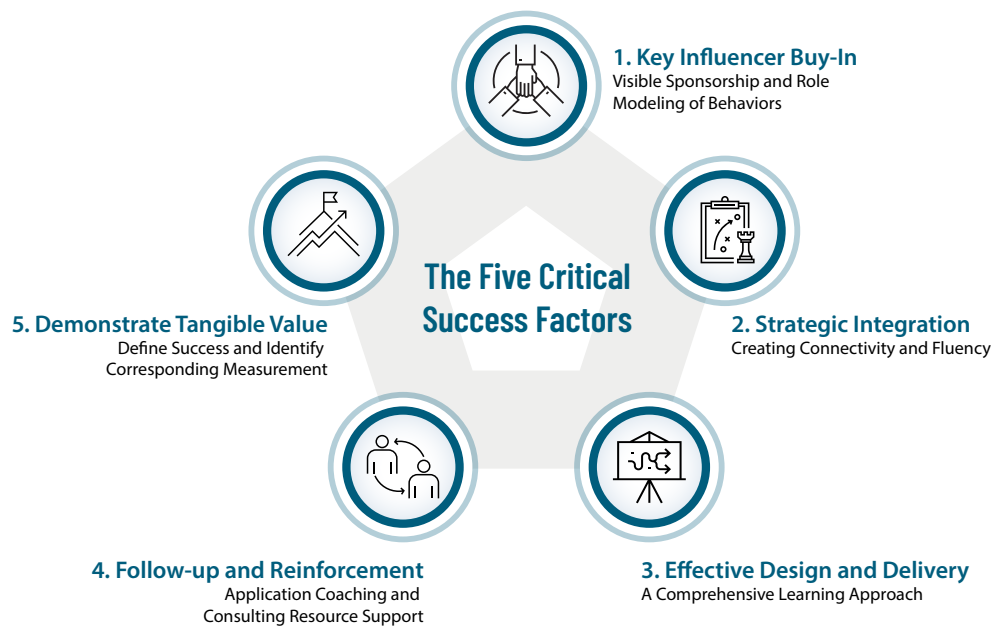
skills—using a deliberate process that is easily accessible, engaging, sustainable, and reliable.

At Blanchard®, we believe that to deliver on the promise of exceptional leadership development experiences, it is essential to use a systematic approach that produces sustained learning and results.

Creating Impact and Sustainability through Training and Development

According to Blanchard’s 2022 Learning Trends Survey, learners are fatigued and “too tired to learn,” and L&D is stretched and dissatisfied with recently converted digital and virtual training offerings. In addition, 47% of L&D respondents want to funnel new resources for reinforcing learning and holding learners accountable. Couple the findings of the Trends survey with the industry mandate to prove the value of the development experiences being offered, and L&D professionals have a tough order to fill.

These assertions substantiate research by Scott Blanchard, president of Blanchard, and Richard Whiteley, best-selling author and principal with The Whiteley Group, which identified the key criteria for helping organizations create a sustainable approach to training and to closing the learning–doing gap. We call them the Five Critical Success Factors, each of which must be in place to ensure the greatest level of traction with learners and measurable performance outcomes as a result of learning and development initiatives.



1. Key Influencer Buy-In

A senior sponsor’s or stakeholder’s visible support should set the tone for any learning initiative. This includes high-profile messaging, email, or video communications in which the stakeholder sets the tone and expectations on what this initiative means to them and to the organisation. The sponsor creates the necessary excitement and passion and sets the stage for the overall value (both within and outside of work) that participants will gain from being part of the experience. Often, this includes executive coaching for the sponsor to help them articulate and model the behaviours desired and connection points to organisational priorities.

2. Strategic Integration

Learning initiatives need to be directly connected to what's happening in the organisation. Otherwise, the initiative will be seen as a nice training program that gains little traction on outcomes or fails to result in scaled behaviour change. The objectives of the program must overtly connect to key organisational pillars, values, and strategic initiatives. This may mean even creating specific assets to demonstrate a connection between content and what it will impact, including performance management, career, engagement, sales processes, and customer experience.

3. Effective Design and Delivery

All learning and development initiatives require a systematic, scalable, and repeatable delivery approach that resonates with learners as well as a design that is elegant, relevant, and modern. It's time to evolve from learning events to experiences that happen over time and provide relevant content in ways that make it easier for workers to learn. These experiences should include a blend of formal and informal delivery approaches for cohort and group learning as well as digital, self-directed learning that teaches new skills and provides opportunities to apply them. They also should offer time for reflection on what worked, what should be done differently, and other refinements needed.

Keys for Creating Effective Training

- Create personas and/or perform activities to best empathise with and understand the target audience
- Follow best practices for a blended learning experience that integrates learning and brain science
- Tailor/contextualise off-the-shelf content or create customised content to demonstrate strategic integration
- Include leaders of participants to create a shared understanding and to support learning
- Develop a sustainability plan with reinforcement activities and a communication plan

4. Follow-up and Reinforcement

Follow-up and reinforcement bridge the gap between learning and doing. When development is an event-based moment with no sustainment measures, learners typically struggle to apply new skills and behaviors on the job. Often, reinforcement can be as simple as email campaigns with links to content or opportunities to practice or reflect. Another powerful connection, which also drives context, is soliciting and sharing success stories and testimonials. Coaching is also an extremely effective reinforcement method, allowing those who learn concepts to get personalised support for applying what they learned in the workplace while having a plan for achieving their career goals.

5. Demonstrate Tangible Value

Organisational leaders demand that learning generate a real return on the investment. We must provide compelling evidence that shows how the training creates change, demonstrates value, and makes a positive impact on people and performance.

Learning and development work should always be a strategic and ongoing initiative linked to business objectives and performance outcomes. In addition, development initiatives must connect to an organisation's vision, mission, and strategic plan. When development connects to performance outcomes and the vision, mission, and strategic plan, we create a clear measurement approach. Accomplishing this could include confidence and competence indices, success-case interviews, pre- and post-multi-rater assessments, pulse surveys held over time, and other instruments that prove a change in performance and its value.

Increase Learning Effectiveness (through resonating with the learner!)

For learning and development efforts to generate an actual return on investment, they must be ongoing. They must be delivered in a way that takes into account learner needs: the ability to learn at their discretion, ease of access, and sustainability activities. Our proven approach ensures that participants are better equipped to apply their new learning and skills.

We follow a learning approach that creates tangible results for our clients. One of the most critical is making training relevant for the learner and ensuring that new skills are explicitly and specifically connected to every job. Finally, training must be structured as a process and not as a one-time event.



Creating Context and Learner Relevance

Setting the context of the training ensures that it is aligned with the vision, goals, and strategies of the organisation and is supported by top managers. L&D teams need to offer ways that allow learners to discover the relevance of what they are learning. When it's relevant, it matters more. Find ways to help learners connect with how the training is specifically and explicitly connected to their job and to the employee and customer experience.

Increasing Resonance for the Learner

There are four components that are critical to increasing learning effectiveness, and they all keep the learner at the center of the design

Creating Context and Learner Relevance

- Focus first on who, not what
- Get visible; present senior leader buy-in
- Provide opportunities to self-assess
- Align the learning to individual's purpose and values as well as to organisational purpose and values
- Provide clear connection to strategic business objectives

Acquiring New Concepts and Skills

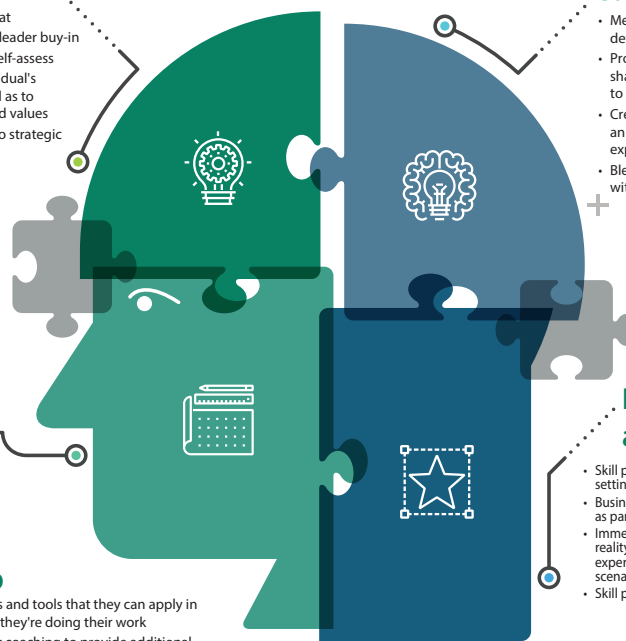
- Meet your learners where they are; provide development that works for them
- Provide opportunities to learn, discuss, and share what they're learning and what it means to them in their role and to their organisation
- Create an experience that blends modalities in an elegant way that simplifies the learning experience
- Blend meaningful modalities that resonate with the learner population you need to reach

Applying New Skills to the Job

- In-the-moment resources and tools that they can apply in the flow of their work, as they're doing their work
- Group, individual, or peer coaching to provide additional application and reflection opportunities and to hold learners accountable for applying what they've learned
- Assessment and measurement strategies that capture learner capability and confidence AND whether or not they are applying the skills on the job

Practicing New Skills and Behaviours

- Skill practice in virtual or traditional classroom settings
- Business simulations and case studies with peers as part of a learning experience
- Immersive simulations: computer based, virtual reality (VR), or augmented reality (AR) experiences that allow them to experience a scenario and make decisions with feedback
- Skill practice in real-work settings



When participants understand and care about what they are learning, 75% to 95% of them will use what they have learned. This fact highlights why L&D needs to explain why the training matters and how it will benefit learners.

Blanchard uses elements of design thinking to empathise with the audience by creating personas early in the design phase. As a result, the focus becomes *who* instead of *what*. Understanding those who are impacted by a learning experience allows for ideation that typically leads to a blended approach. This drives relevance through variety and context and by framing the content and viewing it through the lenses of those who receive it.



Acquiring New Concepts and Skills

Once the context has been set and the content is relevant, you're ready to share new skills with learners. Ideally, the training delivery should align with your audience's preferred ways of learning. For manufacturing employees, this may be a microlearning strategy that requires only a few moments at a time. For knowledge workers, it may be a series of virtual sessions with on-demand performance support. For technical-skill workers, it could be several online modules followed by application sessions with a facilitator or even the manager with scripted agendas or presentations.

The goal is to reach learners where they are, when they are free to learn. Technology has finally caught up with this mandate and can make challenges that were once difficult much easier to overcome.

Modern learning experiences are divided into manageable segments so that employees have the opportunity to learn, apply, reflect, and refine. This improves the likelihood that people will turn learning into action and that the use of new information, behaviors, and skills will be maximised.



Practicing New Skills and Behaviours

To turn new learnings into new ways of working, participants need to practice what they have learned. Ways to do this are interacting with the material through exercises, role plays, games, simulations, immersive scenarios, doing real work, and more. In practice during a learning experience, it is ideal to switch between acquiring skills and practicing and applying them. At Blanchard, we use a 30/70 approach: new skills knowledge accounts for 30% of learning time, with the remainder spent in applying, reflecting, and refining new skills.

If learners are to really internalise and apply what they have learned, they need to practice new skills while getting feedback from peers and experts. This provides a safe space for practicing skills where there could be risk (giving performance feedback, redirecting negative workplace behavior, etc.). Where possible, provide multiple touchpoints on specific skill areas to provide reinforcement after the formal learning is done and as part of the overall learning experience design. This could be done via peer coaching, group coaching, application sessions, or individual practice and reflect activities.



Applying New Skills to the Job

For individuals to apply their new skills, organisations must spend more energy in the follow-up and reinforcement of training than in the initial delivery. Real-world application of new skills and behaviors creates traction, since the focus is on helping participants take what they have learned and apply it to the job.

Coaching is an essential building block for maximizing skills. Research shows that learning, productivity, and morale improve dramatically when training is combined with coaching. Blanchard uses powerful, results-oriented coaching for individuals, leaders, and organisations to reinforce learning and deliver results.

Blanchard® is a global leader in leadership development, consulting, and coaching. For more than 40 years, Blanchard has partnered with organisations to maximize individual achievement and organisational performance – bringing measurable progress and true transformation. Blanchard’s SLII® is the global leadership model of choice, powering inspired leaders for more than 10,000 organisations worldwide. Blanchard also offers a suite of award-winning solutions through flexible delivery modalities to meet the specific needs of clients and learners.

Finally, individuals need to be held accountable for using what they have learned. This means learning needs to be hardwired into your company’s systems. It can include quarterly performance goals, 180° or 360° feedback processes, employee pulse surveys, the engagement survey, and the performance management system.

Summary

Our globalised, fast-paced work demands that organisational leaders create L&D initiatives that generate results and support the organization’s business objectives and strategies.

Maximising your investment is dependent on the way training and development is framed and implemented within your organisation. Most L&D teams and vendors overemphasize the experience itself. But development that is not thoughtful and/or supported well on the back end will yield poor results.

To change and evolve, organisations must be willing to answer the tough question, “Where are we falling short on these five critical success factors and what can we do about it?”

This raises the bar and sets a new standard for excellence that inspires and transforms people. Sustainability requires a process, commitment, and follow-through. As Scott Blanchard puts it, “Hope is not a sustainability strategy.”

Developing your people is about making sure you set expectations and that they receive the support and are accountable for doing things differently as a result. Our process ensures that money invested in training produces changed behaviours on the job and tangible results for the organisation.

Blanchard is passionate about making a difference by transforming your people, leaders, and teams. We believe that the formal learning component is critical to unleash the potential and power of people. We also know that it is essential that all development—formal and informal—is set up and delivered through a systematic process that ensures productivity, performance, results, and, ultimately, success for the individual and the organisation.