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**Ensuring that rules
and regulations
are met**

**an interview with
Lynda S. Hilliard**

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Evaluating your training effectiveness

- » Review ways to measure compliance effectiveness training.
- » Understand how a knowledge survey works.
- » Develop metrics that support your underlying training objectives.
- » Select metrics that are not counterproductive to your goals.
- » Realize that training programs may fail for various reasons, including the underlying culture.

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Although training may appear to be straightforward to most healthcare leaders, the effectiveness of follow-up is anything but clear-cut. There is an investment of resources, cost per employee, supplies, test fees, and lost revenue in terms of time away from the employees' current job duties when a hospital allows long-term instructional courses to be offered during regular business hours. If the hospital is going to offer their employees 20, 40, or even 80 hours of instruction, management wants to know if the training was effective. After training is completed, the primary focus is on the individual employee's behavior. Did the employees learn the material, and can they use it effectively in their current or future role? If, at the end of the training program, there is a certification test, the goal is to have all the trainees pass. If there is no official certification test, management stills want some type of assurance that the employees have



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learned the course material, and they know how to apply it. How does management gain that assurance?

Years ago, training evaluation focused on "after the fact" reporting. It's quick and numbers-based (i.e., completion rates, attendance participation, and due date tracking), but this is just reporting on efficiency and operational activities. It's not evaluating the training's effectiveness.

Measuring the training's effect

The HCCA-OIG *Measuring Compliance Program Effectiveness: A Resource Guide*,¹ issued in March 2017, provides ideas on what to measure and how to measure the effectiveness of an organization's compliance program. Because training is a part of an effective compliance program, the ideas offered can be applied to all types of training.

The *Resource Guide* measurement tips to evaluate the effectiveness of compliance education include:

- A review of the organization's documents to determine if the organization has established a method for evaluating the effectiveness of the program;

- ▶ A review of post-training incident logs to determine if employees' behavior has changed because of the training;
- ▶ The use of post-training tests or evaluations that include employee feedback and subsequent modifications of the training material, if needed; and
- ▶ The use of a knowledge survey post-training and up to six months after the training.

Effectiveness requires one to validate the results in a meaningful way to determine whether the employees learned the material or not. If not, technical assistance or other assistance may be provided before the participant moves on to the next subject or more advanced training modules. Training is always done with specific objectives. Validating through measurable metrics based on the specific objectives gives leaders the answers they need regarding the training's effectiveness.

Most professional associations that offer some type of certification maintain data on their pass/fail rate and, at times, will hold that data tight rather than release it through their website or other means. If the association's training curriculum states that 70% of trainees who attend the full course pass the certification exam the first time they take it, the hospital's management has a basic fact-finding benchmark to use to judge the success of their training. If ten employees were in the course and only four passed the certification test, the results are below the benchmark, and leaders need to dig deeper into the why. When participants do not learn what was intended from the training, it should prompt the training material to be revised or the instructor to deploy a different training methodology. If the training material has generated the desired results with other instructors, perhaps it is the instructor, rather than the students, who requires additional mentoring or training.

Evaluating the instructor

Acquiring knowledge from experts (i.e., instructors) is not always an easy task. The instructor may be an expert in the field, but may not know how to coherently share their knowledge. The instructor being tested may have displayed a distinct set of behaviors when they were observed or interviewed, but not when they were teaching. At times, there can be interpersonal communication factors that may affect the instructor's ability to properly relay the knowledge to the employees/students.

Let's assume the following:

- ▶ The training objectives are sound and specific.
- ▶ The training material is accurate, complete, and easy to follow.
- ▶ The instructor is knowledgeable and a proven teacher.

Too often, the poor outcome is brushed off as a fluke. Often, organizations may hand the participants a course evaluation form when the training is over. It is an effortless way to get feedback, but it is not the best way to measure the training's effectiveness. Frequently, course evaluation forms are focused on meaningless items, with questions on the length of the program, the temperature in the room, and whether the donuts were fresh. Some organizations have moved these post-training feedback evaluations to a new level, a level in which the content of the training is evaluated with an assessment as to whether the participant knows more about the subject after training than before.

Choosing the metrics

What management needs to know is if the training material is retained for longer than the time it takes to fill out the post-training evaluation form. Commonly referred to

as knowledge assessment, the goal is to measure knowledge retention long beyond the “pass the test” phase—at least six months after the training event. The drawback for a knowledge assessment tool is it requires time to develop an effective pre- and post-assessment. When the long-range objective is to affect behavior, passing the test, whenever it is given, does not guarantee the knowledge is going to be used by the employees when they are performing their daily duties. In fact, research by Robert Brinkerhoff of Western Michigan University, found that a lot of the training that is successfully delivered and confirmed by knowledge assessments does not get used at all or declines over time when not practiced or routinely used. Brinkerhoff advocates that the real test is how well the organization uses the training to get business results.²

What metrics do you use to evaluate your training effectiveness? There are no set metrics to use to measure an organization’s training effectiveness. What is important is that any metrics selected must be meaningful, decided on prior to the training event, and tracked over set time periods. It is important for Operations, Compliance, and Human Resources to agree on the metrics and how to report them to leadership to avoid overreaction to the data. The data alone provides little value. Its interpretation is a key factor, because it may include a root cause analysis to a known or unknown problem or lead to improvements in both additional training programs, operations, and the overall culture of the organization.

One thing to avoid in selecting the metrics is to inadvertently incentivize negative behavior. For example, it would be counterproductive to measure the increase in

coding productivity without factoring in the quality of the work following a training program on new CPT or ICD-10 codes. When designed, managed, and tracked properly, metrics are a valuable tool to help determine the effectiveness of your training programs.

Conclusion

When your basic fact-finding numbers indicate the training is not working, (i.e., six out of ten participants fail the exam), what action should leaders take? The easy answer is to label the training as ineffective, whether it was due to the design of the program or the instructor’s skill set. The tougher answer may be assessing whether the failure of the training is a symptom that the organization’s culture is not in tune with the training objectives. A well-designed pre/post knowledge assessment process would validate that the stated training objectives and programs designed for all employees, such as compliance training, were not only ineffective, but also identify why the training did not accomplish the desired behavior downstream. The root cause might be that management does not behave in a manner that demonstrates compliance is important to them, resulting in a misalignment between the specific training objectives and the reality of what is, rather than what the organization wants to pretend it is. In such a case, the outcome will not only be poor training metrics, but also overall poor compliance effectiveness throughout the organization. 📍

1. HCCA-OIG Compliance Effectiveness Roundtable: *Measuring Compliance Program Effectiveness: A Resource Guide*. January 2017. Available at <http://bit.ly/2nFBFCZ>
2. Robert O. Brinkerhoff: “Maximizing the Value of Learning & Development” slide deck. Available at <http://bit.ly/2FZ6D2y>