

# 6Ds



## D1 Define Business Outcomes

In her book, *Strategic Learning Alignment*, Rita Smith (2010) succinctly summarized the core concept of D1: “The *only* reason that learning organizations exist is to drive business outcomes” (p. 10). In other words, organizations invest in training and development with the goal of improving performance in areas critical to their strategy and



objectives. Thus, training is valued to the extent to which it visibly and convincingly contributes to improved performance. When training consumes resources (time and money), but fails to demonstrably improve performance, it is seen as wasteful and expendable.

Therefore, the first and most critical discipline is to truly understand what the business needs to accomplish. As Patricia Gregory, senior director, and Steve Akram, director, North American Sales Force Development at Oracle explain in Case D1.1, focusing on business outcomes repositions training and development professionals from mere order takers to strategic business partners.

Conversely, failing to clearly define the business outcomes dramatically increases the risk of pouring time, effort, and money into a training program that won't actually scratch the itch. In Case D1.2, Sujaya Banerjee, chief talent officer and senior vice president, and her colleagues of the Essar Group, explain how investing the time to truly understand the business needs helped their Corporate Training Group avoid creating another "feel good" training program. By focusing on business outcomes, she and her colleagues were able to make a significant contribution to business transformation and produce results that the CEO recognized and applauded.

Key steps in the practice of D1 include:

- Understanding the business you support
- Talking to your stakeholders
- Deciding whether training is appropriate

- Completing the performance-gap analysis
- Differentiating learning objectives from business objectives
- Using business outcomes to explain the benefits

## **Understand the Business You Support**

A core principle of the 6Ds is that training is a business function. It follows that the better that training professionals understand the organization they serve—its goals, vision, mission, and operations—the better they are able to contribute, and the greater the respect they command. Training departments that are viewed by business leaders as truly aligned with their businesses enjoy much greater support than those that are seen as “doing their own thing” (Bersin, 2008, p. 82).

Use Quick Check D1.1 to evaluate your alignment with the business and to identify actions to take that will improve this important skill set.





## QUICK CHECK D1.1: BUSINESS ALIGNMENT

1. Can you succinctly explain how your organization makes money (or for nonprofits, fulfills its mission) and the key challenges it faces in doing so?



Yes	No
<p>Congratulations. Understanding the business you are part of is essential for you to become a trusted advisor rather than simply an order-taker.</p>	<p>You will increase your contribution and your value to your organization by deepening your knowledge of the business. Greater business savvy will allow you to design more relevant and more effective programs.</p> <p>Suggested actions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Find a mentor in the business who can help by explaining key terms and concepts.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Review the business plans for the units you support.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Ask to sit in on business reviews and planning sessions; ask your mentor about any aspect you don't understand.</li></ul>

## 2. How would the business leaders rate the alignment of your training department with their business needs?

Good to Excellent	Fair to Poor	I Don't Know
<p>Terrific. Training departments that are seen as aligned to the business's needs receive greater support and, interestingly, less scrutiny.</p>	<p>This is a problem. If Training is not seen as fully aligned with the business, then it will have to produce more data to justify its value and it is more likely to have its budget cut.</p> <p>Suggested actions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Interview business managers to find out where they feel there is misalignment.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Require a clear understanding of business needs before beginning any design work.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Interview business leaders using the Planning Wheel (page 173) to identify the real business needs and criteria for success.</li> </ul>	<p>You need to address this gap in your knowledge, as it could prove fatal for your department. If Training is not seen as aligned with the business, then it is likely to be viewed as expendable.</p> <p>Suggested actions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Survey or interview training's business clients to assess their perceptions of training's alignment with their needs.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Take appropriate action to rectify the situation based on the results.</li> </ul>



## Talk to Your Stakeholders

The business is training's customer. Directly or indirectly, the business pays for the cost of providing training and, in the end, decides whether or not the resulting value justified the expense. What the business "buys" from training is the expectation of improved performance; courses and programs are only a means to this end. Whether the training department stays in business depends on whether its customers feel they "got their money's worth" and are therefore willing to continue to invest.

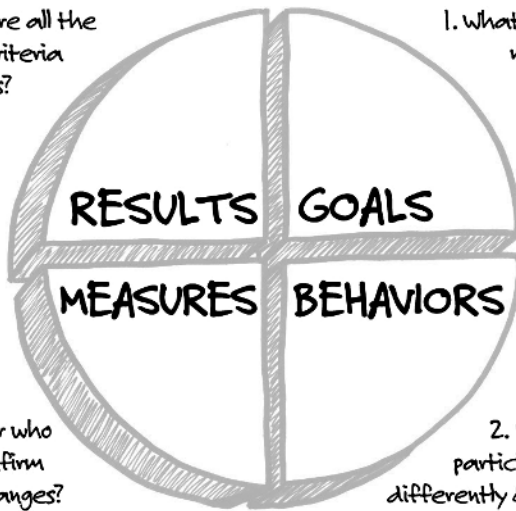
Customer satisfaction requires listening to the "voice of the customer" and understanding their goals, needs, and definitions of success. In this regard, keep in mind that in corporate training, the participants are *not* the ultimate customer; they don't usually make the purchasing decision. So while we need participants to be engaged, to learn, and to apply what they learned, it is the *business leaders* who need to be satisfied with the results. Thus, there is no substitute for talking directly to these stakeholders; they are the ones who should decide which training needs are the highest priority—not the training department.

A good starting place is the 6Ds Outcomes Planning Wheel™ (Figure D1.1). Although the wheel's four questions seem deceptively simple, they have helped both large and small organizations create much greater—and shared—clarity about the real business issues behind a request for training.

The "how-to" guide H2 D1.1 provides a brief introduction to using the Planning Wheel (Tool D1.1). Additional details can be found in Wick, Pollock, and Jefferson (2010, pp. 41–45).



4. What are all the specific criteria of success?



1. What business needs will be met?

3. What or who could confirm these changes?

2. What will participants do differently & better?

**Figure D1.1.** The 6Ds Outcomes Planning Wheel™

In Case D1.3 Hemalakshmi Raju, assistant general manager, and Anjali Raghuvanshi, program manager, at Tata Motors describe how they used the Planning Wheel to clarify the business outcomes for internal facilitators training. Russell Evans, managing director, and Clive Wilson, deputy chairman, of Primeast Ltd. describe in Case D1.4 how they used a comprehensive framework called PrimeFocus™ to ensure that they deliver the right intervention and achieve the business objectives. In Case D1.5, Richard Low, senior specialist, Learning and Development, Merck & Co., Inc., describes how adding the Planning Wheel to the Learning Services Tool Box has helped the Merck Polytechnic Institute better meet the needs of its clients in research and development.

Finally, in Case D6.1, Peggy Parskey, strategic measurement consultant with KnowledgeAdvisors, describes the use of logic modeling to help business leaders answer two critical questions:

- Why are you doing this?
- What do you expect to happen as a result of the training?





Logic modeling helps to ensure that there is a well-defined and logical “chain of influences” between the training and the expected business benefit.

When there is more than one key stakeholder, it is critical to speak to all of them, as they may have very different expectations. One of our clients found himself in exactly this dilemma. He used the Outcomes Planning Wheel to interview the four co-owners of a major training initiative. He discovered that they held widely divergent views on both the business objectives as well as the criteria for success.

Clearly, under these circumstances, nothing that the training department designed or delivered would have satisfied them all. So he circulated the results of his interviews to all four stakeholders and then convened a meeting to discuss them. What emerged—after some lively debate—was a clear consensus on the purpose of the program, the desired results, and the criteria for success. The point is that had he not used a structured approach to interview all four stakeholders, he would never have realized how divergent their points of view were and the program would have failed to deliver on expectations for some or all.

Use Quick Check Q1.2 to evaluate the extent to which you really understand the business drivers and to identify potential actions you can take to strengthen your alignment with the business.





## QUICK CHECK D1.2: BUSINESS OUTCOMES

1. Can you succinctly state the business need(s) the training is designed to address? (Remember that “training” is not a business need. Business needs are ultimately related to increasing revenue, improving productivity, lowering costs, etc.)

Yes	No
Congratulations. You are in possession of a key requirement for designing and executing effective learning interventions.	Don't proceed until you have clarity on this point. The only reason to invest in training is to (directly or indirectly) drive business outcomes. Suggested actions include: <input type="checkbox"/> Interview the business leader(s) using the Planning Wheel or related tool to gain clarity on the underlying business drivers.





2. Can you identify the key changes in on-the-job behavior that will result if the training and reinforcement activities are successful? (What will participants do better and differently?)

Yes	No
<p>Excellent. This is essential knowledge; only actions produce results. To improve performance, people have to behave in new and more effective ways. Or, as Einstein supposedly put it: "One definition of insanity is to keep doing the same thing and expect a different result."</p>	<p>Don't proceed until you can get clarity on this point. You need to be able to describe <i>actions</i> and <i>behaviors</i> (how the new skills and knowledge will be applied on the job) to deliver truly effective interventions.</p> <p>Suggested actions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Interview the business leader(s) using the Planning Wheel or related tool to get clarity on the desired change in behavior.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Compare the actions of more effective to less effective employees.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Keep asking questions until you get beyond "knowledge" to observable actions.</li></ul>

3. Have you discussed what would change or who would notice when the new behaviors are practiced?

Yes	No
<p>Carry on. This is important to know. It identifies the data source(s) for deciding whether or not the training is achieving its objectives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Begin thinking about which metrics you might use to assess training's impact and how you would get and analyze the data.</li> </ul>	<p>Stop and revisit this issue. While you can, technically, deliver successful training without considering who or what will confirm the changes, the problem is that you will never know one way or the other.</p> <p>Suggested actions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Think logically about the business goals and desired behaviors. Who or what will they impact?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Suggest and confirm potential sources of data (customers, company records, etc.) with the sponsor. Get a reaction to the relative merit of various sources.</li> </ul>



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#### 4. Are you clear about how the program sponsor defines success?

Yes	No
<p>Is it realistic?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p>Proceed to design the training. Include in your plans how you will gather the data to satisfy the sponsor's "conditions of satisfaction." Stress management's role in achieving the results.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>You need to have a "crucial conversation" with the sponsor in which you help him or her understand why the training is unlikely to produce the desired results given the available time, resources, management support, and so forth.</p>	<p><b>Stop!</b> If you do not know how the manager will decide whether the training is a success, then you are very likely to fail, since you may be operating on an erroneous set of assumptions.</p> <p>Suggested actions include:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Ask the business sponsor directly: "What will it take for you to conclude that the training was a success?"</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Try to gain clarity on "how much, by when?"</p>

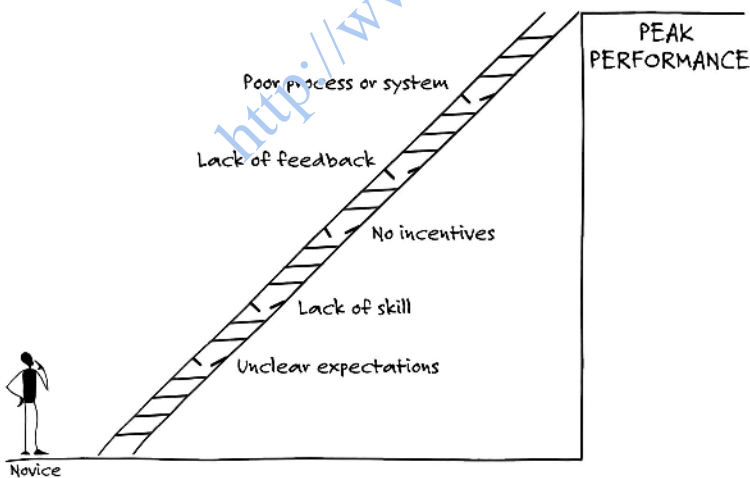
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## Decide Whether Training Is Appropriate

“To a young boy with a new hammer, everything is a nail.” Unfortunately, for many business managers, training is a hammer and every sort of performance challenge is a nail (Pollock, 2013). For training professionals to be more than “order takers,” we must learn how to explain to business leaders when training is, and is not, an appropriate part of the solution (see H2 D1.2: “How to Decide Whether Training Is Necessary”).

You can ask your doctor for any medicine you like, but it’s malpractice for him or her to prescribe it without a diagnosis. Similarly, learning professionals should never deliver training just because some manager asks for it, without first being sure it is the right prescription.

When a lack of skill or knowledge is holding back performance, training is an essential part of the solution. But there are many other causes of suboptimal performance that training cannot resolve—and indeed, that training may make worse (Figure D1.2). Among them:



**Figure D1.2.** Lack of Knowledge or Skills Is Only One of Many Potential Causes of Suboptimal Performance, But It Is the Only One That Training Can Remedy





- Unclear expectations or performance criteria
- Inadequate feedback on performance
- “Bad attitude”
- Lack of motivation
- Insufficient information, tools, or time for the task
- Lack of incentives or consequences

Why raise the issue here? Doesn't every learning professional already do this? Apparently not. The inappropriate use of training appears to be much more widespread than generally appreciated. Participants in our 6Ds Workshops estimate that from 10 percent to as high as 50 percent of all the training they do is directed toward issues that training won't help resolve. That is a terrible waste of time, money, and talent. It frustrates both trainers and learners.

What can we do about it?

- Build the process for approving training so that it requires a clear business case and needs analysis.
- Use the flow chart in Tool D1.2 to ensure that training really is the right solution and that other possible causes and solutions have been explored and eliminated.
- Keep in mind that, even when training is an appropriate *part* of the solution, it is never the *whole solution*. For training to be effective, it has to be directed toward the right problems *and* it has to be supported by active managerial engagement before and afterward (see D2: Design the Complete Experience).

## **Complete the Performance-Gap Analysis**

Once you have a clear view of the business objectives of the training, and you are convinced that training is an essential part of the solution, you need to figure out specifically what people need to learn. The

Planning Wheel asks the stakeholder (usually a senior business leader) “What do people need to do better and differently?” That is a good starting point, but senior leaders rarely have detailed insight into specific knowledge and skill gaps.

Designing an effective learning intervention requires a performance-gap analysis based on observations, interviews, surveys, and task analyses with those who actually do the work or who directly supervise it. We prefer “performance-gap analysis” to “training-needs analysis” because the latter pre-supposes that the solution is training, which, as we just discussed, is not necessarily so.

To truly understand what people need to learn, you have to get close to the action; senior managers and human resource professionals may have important insights, but they are often too far removed from the day-to-day interactions to know key details. Refer to one of the numerous texts on the subject—such as the Robinsons’ *Performance Consulting* (2008), Mager and Pipe’s *Analyzing Performance Problems* (1997), or Barbazette’s *Training Needs Analysis* (2006)—for detailed guidance.

Quick Check D1.3 will help you decide whether you have adequate insight into the issues to move to the design phase and, if not, some actions to take.



## QUICK CHECK D1.3: PERFORMANCE GAP ANALYSIS



1. Are you convinced that knowledge and skill deficiencies contribute to the performance gap?



Yes	No	Not Sure
<p>Great. That means training will be an important part of the solution. Remember, however, that training is never the whole solution and there may be multiple contributing causes. Be sure to design a complete experience, which includes managing the transfer climate.</p>	<p><b>Stop!</b> If you are not convinced that knowledge or skill deficiencies are significant contributors to the problem, then training is unlikely to help. As Bob Mager put it: "If a genuine lack of skill is not the problem, then you can forget training as a potential solution" (Mager &amp; Pipe, 1997, p. 93).</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Use Tool D1.2 to try to get to the root causes and help devise remedies for the real issues.</p>	<p><b>Stop!</b> If you are not sure whether a lack of knowledge or skill is a significant contributor, don't agree to provide training until you are convinced it is.</p> <p>Ask "If their lives depended on it, could they still not perform?" If the answer is that they could not, then training is probably part of the solution. If they know how to perform, but aren't, then something other than training is needed.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Use Tool D1.2 to try to elucidate and fix the real cause of suboptimal performance.</p>



2. If you are convinced that lack of knowledge or skill is a significant contributor, can you identify where the specific gaps are?

Yes	No
<p>Terrific. Convert your knowledge into learning objectives and design—or work with an instructional designer or vendor—to create learning experiences to address them.</p>	<p>Spend the time to identify where, specifically, the gaps are. If you don't, then you run the risk of creating a lot of content that people don't really need while missing key things that they do.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="696 553 1099 684"><input type="checkbox"/> Consult a text or expert on needs analysis and do enough to be sure you pinpoint the critical skill deficiencies.</li></ul>



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## Differentiate the Business Objectives of Training from Learning Objectives

In the practice of D1, it is important to differentiate between the business objectives of training and the learning objectives.

Learning objectives explain *what* the participants will learn—the capabilities that they will have acquired by the end of the instruction (“At the completion of this module, the participant will be able to . . .”). Business objectives for training, in contrast, describe the *on-the-job* results that application of the training will produce. The business objectives explain *how* the training will help the organization and the participants perform better. The differences are highlighted in Table D1.1. Examples are shown in Table D1.2.

Training initiatives, of course, are only one of many initiatives that a business undertakes to meet its targets and ambitions. There are business objectives for each unit or function which, taken together, add up to the overall success of the organization (Figure D1.3).

The business objectives for training explain how it fits into the overall picture and contributes to the organization’s success. They are, therefore, of interest to both senior management and to the leaders of departments. Learning objectives are a lower level of detail. They exist only to support achievement of the business objectives. Numerous learning objectives (as well as other kinds of support) are usually needed to support one business goal. As explained below, learning

**Table D1.1.** Comparison of Learning Objectives to Business Objectives of Training

	<b>Learning Objectives of Training</b>	<b>Business Objectives of Training</b>
<b>Time Frame</b>	End of instruction	On the job
<b>Focus</b>	Knowledge or capability	Actions and results



**Table D1.2.** Examples of Business and Learning Objectives for Training

Business Objective of Training	Learning Objective of Training
Improve employee engagement by 10 percent within one year	At the completion of this workshop the participant will be able to demonstrate the proper use of the SBR method for giving feedback in a simulated conversation with a direct report.
Keep number of customers who switch to competitor's product to less than 5 percent by year's end	At the completion of this e-learning module, the learner will be able to identify all three key advantages of our product versus the competitor's product.
Increase the "net promoter score" on customer surveys by 10 percent within six months	At the completion of this self-paced learning, the customer service representative will be able to correctly score at least eight of ten recorded calls as "acceptable" or "unacceptable" according to the principles taught in this course.



**Figure D1.3.** The Learning Objectives of Training Exist to Support Business Unit Objectives, Which Together Create Business Success



objectives, by themselves, don't adequately explain training's value; their use should be restricted to internal communications among training professionals (see H2 D1.3: "How to Use (and Not Use) Learning Objectives").



## Use Business Objectives to Explain Benefits to Participants and Managers

One of the first things a new salesperson must learn is to differentiate between a product's features and its benefits. *Features* are characteristics of the product itself, like the amount of RAM memory, a car's horsepower, or an armchair's fabric. *Benefits* explain the value of those features to the customer; they answer the WIIFM ("What's in it for me?") question for the potential buyer or user.

In our view, learning objectives are like features: "Here is what you will learn." They leave it up to the participant or the participant's manager to figure out the benefits. Any time anyone is asked to attend a corporate training program (or when a manager is asked to send his or her staff), the key questions that spring to mind are

- Will this be worth my time?
- Will it help me?

Learning objectives don't answer that question directly; they are too particularistic and too formulaic. In her short and readable *Design for How People Learn* (2012), Julie Dirksen advises, "... just say no to learning-objective slides at the beginning of the course" (p. 73). Why? Because it means that "learners are subjected to horrible instructional design jargon" (p. 72). Moreover, while learning objectives list *what* trainees will learn, they don't really answer the question on every adult learner's mind: "Why should I learn this?"

Don't misunderstand our point. Learning objectives are essential to define what needs to be taught and the criteria for demonstrating mastery. Our concern is that they do not adequately communicate the benefits of the training to either the participants who must attend or the business managers who pay the bills. Use learning objectives to communicate internally within the training department, but use the business objectives (rationale) to communicate with attendees and their managers. You will enjoy greater buy-in and participation when you make the business benefits explicit.

Use Quick Check D1.4 to evaluate your current practices and the actions you could take to strengthen this aspect of D1.

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## QUICK CHECK D1.4: BUSINESS OBJECTIVES

1. Can you concisely and convincingly state the business objective of the training and how it relates to the overall business goals?



Yes	No
<p>Congratulations, you have passed an important milestone on the path to creating training that delivers business results.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Be certain to stress the business objectives and business benefits of the training in any communications to the rest of the organization.</li></ul>	<p>You will greatly improve the probability of success of your training if you stop to clarify the business rationale.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> If you are unsure of the business objectives, you need to talk to the business sponsors. They own the business objectives, although they may need your help in clarifying them (Planning Wheel, etc.).</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> If you think you understand the business objectives, but are struggling to express them, give it your best shot and then ask a business leader to react to it.</li></ul>

2. Are you using learning objectives in your course descriptions and course introductions?

Yes	No
<p>Don't do it! Learning objectives inadequately convey the program's benefits and are usually boring.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Take Julie Dirksen's advice: "There are a multitude of ways that <i>aren't</i> bullet points on a slide to accomplish the goals of focusing the learners' attention, and letting them know where they are headed" (2012, p. 73).</p>	<p>Good, so long as you are using business objectives and benefits statements. One of the principles of adult learning is that adults want to know why they should learn something before they will willingly do so.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Explain the business rationale for the training to learners and their managers—what this will help them do and how it fits into the overall strategy.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> If you aren't sure, ask.</p>



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## SUMMING UP

The most effective learning organizations build D1 into their standard operating procedures. Before they embark on the design and implementation of a training program, they make sure that:

- A clear and agreed-on business need has been defined by the business leadership.
- Training is an appropriate part of the solution.
- Other essential elements of the solution also have been identified.
- It is clear what participants are supposed to do better and differently as a result of the training.
- How success will be measured and judged has been discussed with the business sponsor.
- The benefits to the business and individuals are succinctly stated.
- The business outcomes, rather than the learning objectives, are used in communications with managers and participants.

A checklist of the most important elements of D1 is provided as Tool D1.3. The checklist should be completed before a training initiative moves into the design and implementation phases.