

# Focus First on Results

Chris Adams and Beth Hughes



# FOCUS FIRST ON RESULTS

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**L**earning professionals know the value of learning—its importance and how powerful it can be. But how do you show the value of your work and demonstrate the value of L&D activities to the organizations you serve?

That question, a common topic of discussion among learning consultants, spurred us to write this issue of *TD at Work*. In an attempt to show the value of our own work, we reviewed projects we've completed during the past five years to identify which ones stakeholders perceived as most valuable during and after the work. This review changed our conversation: Instead of asking ourselves, "How can we demonstrate the value of learning to the organization?" we began to ask a more fundamental question: "How can we be more valuable to the organization?"

Compare these opposite experiences as a learning consultant: developing a one-hour e-learning course describing this year's policy updates and designing a comprehensive set of experiences that increase client retention by 30 percent within three months.

When we create learning content that companies value, we benefit personally. Meaningful work is a fuel that powers the quality of what we produce, the effort we extend, and our ownership of the outcomes. It is disheartening to produce training programs that accomplish no

more than checking a box for learners and their supervisors. Consultants who connect real operational results with their work elevate their performance from acceptance to enthusiasm, a virtuous cycle where organizational value and personal purpose drive each other.

Learning consultants often attempt to prove the value of learning programs after their completion through evaluation, measurement, or analytics. These tools can help demonstrate changes in an organization. But for those changes to be meaningful, before you even consider learning programs, you need to give them context by defining the goals the company needs to accomplish. Rather than prove the value of a completed product, be a valuable partner with every action you take. Grab opportunities to insert value during the process—these are infinitely greater and much more meaningful. Be more valuable by:

- aligning work with organizational goals to produce real results
- curating learning experiences that cultivate change leaders
- creating mutually beneficial partnerships with your clients based upon open communication and collaboration.

A distinguishing factor between projects that checked off a box and projects that noticeably affected learner behavior and organizational outcomes was a focus on results during every phase of the project. This was not just as a post-implementation afterthought but from the first

project discovery meeting on. The key differentiator is that results come first.

In this issue of *TD at Work*, we'll:

- Introduce the Results Come First framework.
- Describe how results should come first when learning consultants engage with clients.
- Caution about forces that may throw off the balance of your development initiative.
- Provide an example of how the framework works in action.

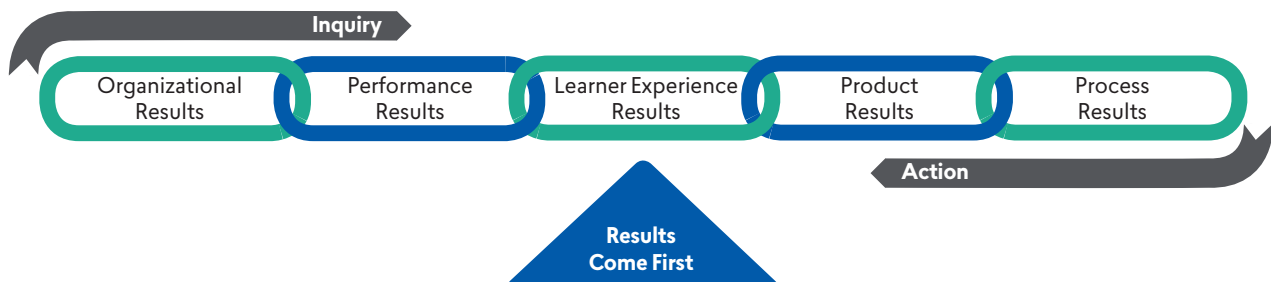
## The Results Come First Framework

The Results Come First framework is comprised of five elements that are depicted along a parallel track. Each element has three associated sub-elements or factors. The flow between elements is unique in that it operates in either direction, depending on where and how the framework is applied. Before we discuss how the elements flow together, let's define each.

### Organizational Results

Organizational results are tangible business results that a company needs to achieve to remain successful over time. Numbers describe those results. For the purposes of the framework, a firm may be for-profit, nonprofit, or governmental. Organizations may also function within a larger entity; for example, a region or department of a company may be an organization.

Figure 1. Results Come First Framework



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The three factors of this element, which represent the most common categories in which these results fall, are:

- cost—reducing or managing costs
- revenue—increasing or generating revenue
- compliance—meeting business operating standards or requirements.

## Performance Results

Moving into the framework, the next element is performance results. Note that each element is linked as the framework proceeds, so these are the performance results learners or organization members must accomplish to produce the organizational results.

Performance results are evidenced on the job via a group of learners' behaviors and are measured in terms of accomplishments. Author, psychologist, and founder of performance technology Thomas Gilbert stresses that behavior is what you can see someone do in the moment, but accomplishment is what stays behind when the individual leaves. For example, you can see a sales rep interacting with a customer, but it is the closed sale receipt that is left after the call.

Factors related to performance results fall into these subcategories:

- behavior change—increasing, decreasing, or modifying behavior
- time to proficiency—decreasing time to proficiency on the job
- advocacy—learners promoting behavior change to others and becoming change leaders.

## Learner Experience Results

*Experience* here is inclusive of both instructional and non-instructional solution components. The internal change that takes place within each learner is important, but equally important may be the changes to learners' environment that remove barriers or provide support in them achieving the required performance results. Those are the desired results for the learners' experience as a whole.

Learning experience factors include:

- capability—learners acquiring knowledge and skills
- engagement—learners grasping relevance and being motivated to continue learning

- experience—learners gaining a certain experience (for example, working within different cultural contexts) that support future performance.

## Product Results

Learning experience design is ultimately about specifying, selecting, building, and implementing learning products. Over time, companies have come to expect more and more from their learning products. Multiple goals for these products have been overlaid. It is no longer sufficient to produce effective instruction. Leaders now often expect learning products to engage, entertain, and inspire—factors that you must take into consideration.

As such, learning product results factors are:

- quality—meeting quality standards
- novelty—introducing innovations
- marketability—generating buzz and demand.

## Process Results

The Results Come First framework is meant to be applicable to many instructional design or development models. Whether it's a more traditional approach similar to ADDIE (analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation), Agile, or the Successive Approximation Model, designers of learning products and learner experiences employ a process in their work.

The process results element considers the stakeholder experience. Often, we find that if clients or project sponsors are not pleased with the design process, they are predisposed to see the products of that design in a negative light.

The categories of factors that relate to the process results elements are:

- time—meeting timeline requirements
- budget—meeting budget requirements
- relationship—establishing or building relationships among the project team.

## How Results Come First

The Results Come First framework is not a new model for creating effective instruction or a new process for designing relevant training materials. Rather, it is an approach

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