Implementation Planning:

Avoid Planning Gaps that Can Ruin You and Your Program

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Introduction

Learning program success is what matters for anyone with a professional reputation invested in training. As with any learning development strategy, success begins with choosing the content and delivery system that best fit organizational needs. But when these crucial choices are decided, most organizations overlook the third and most critical component to learning program success: implementation planning.

Hospitality, IT, retail, and manufacturing companies live and die by the competency of their workforces. Too often and too late, many discover their learning programs exceed budgetary resources or are underused. When it comes to program implementation, a small oversight in planning can blossom into a high-profile organizational disaster.

How can you know if your training was implemented correctly?

Approaches to Implementation Planning

When developing a program, most of your energy is focused on systems integration and technical challenges, leaving rollout and long-term planning for later consideration. This leads to critical decisions being made along the way without a clear vision.

Implementation planning sets expectations across the organization up front. It provides a roadmap for engaging learners and stakeholders and a means for success measurement at every step.

Here we will consider examples from real clients to highlight both misdirected and successful programs, helping you get your training on track—even if it's already in flight. We've found certain principles common to successful programs:

Execution and Organizational Alignment	Relevance and Learner Engagement	Learning Program Accessibility	Awareness Building	Continued Program Monitoring
• Roadmap your program • Set expectations in your organization • Agree upon program goals • Defining success and measurement standards	• Build training incentives into your corporate culture • Limit training to job specific competencies to start • Provide a clear professional development path	• Keep training top of mind for your learners • Make your program easy to access • Send timely reminders about training and actively promote your program	• Engage your entire organization in support of learning • Set an executive example to demonstrate the importance of training • Make continued awareness your goal	• Evaluate your training goals and track against them • Gather feedback from students and change your program as needed • Build transparency into your processes
Phase: Planning	**Phase: Planning and ongoing**	**Phase: Pre-Launch and ongoing**	**Phase: Post-Launch and ongoing**	**Phase: Planning and ongoing**

Approaches to Implementation Planning

1. Execution and Organizational Alignment

Any learning program needs an initial roadmap–but this is no easy task given the diversity of groups usually involved and lack of implementation experience. Key players in your organization have never designed a marketing plan for training, nor have they sourced, developed, or managed a learning program. Are they prepared to launch a training program?

At this early stage, expectations must be stated and agreed to by the program sponsor, senior management, and functional managers. In this way, your implementation roadmap can act as a catalyst for keeping successive planning stages on track, and it can ensure alignment at all organizational levels. What are your expectations for measuring program effectiveness? How will you define desired results through each step of the implementation?

Blindsided by Misalignment
An HR manager was asked to run reports for the company's president and management heads on divisional usage and overall data on US versus international training. She hadn't considered different audience expectations when developing the program and couldn't provide data in time for each audience.

An Organization in Line with Training
A client with multiple divisions around the world defined similar job roles (such as reservation specialist or manager of housekeeping) across divisions. They needed to share certain content resources, but each division also had its own unique content. Separate learning organizations were created with reporting needs clearly defined. In addition, messaging for each division and individual plans to educate, communicate, and drive learners were created and agreed to by stakeholders.

2. Relevance and Learner Engagement

Learners relate to training that is relevant to their job function, interactive, and useful. But in the course of a busy week, few will take even the most engaging courses if the benefit is not apparent. How will you engage your learners in the training experience? Will training be dictated by professional development plans, a departmental compliance agreement, voluntary usage, or another method?

While organizational completion requirements may differ, credentials and recognition programs have proven to be the most effective methods for higher usage and completion rates. Unclear development paths and too much choice are among the main deterrents to training, and they inevitably lead to students spending time on unnecessary training.

Too Many Choices
One organization generously allowed all employees access to the full range of training. Though the company's intentions were good, they did not create job-specific groupings of relevant content, nor did they communicate training requirements to learners. This "have at it" approach overwhelmed employees with options, preventing them from finding the content they needed.

A Clear Path to Training
A client defined learner groupings, development path mappings, and reporting needs in the initial planning stage. Paths were based on job roles to ensure that employees accessed only training relevant to their position. A creative means of delivering the paths directly to learners was executed, and many reports were automated and regularly sent to managers as an additional time saver.

3. Accessibility

Training that lacks an incentive plan is already at a disadvantage, but burying it on some obscure corporate intranet page will doom it for sure. Accessibility ensures that training is easy to find and always available. How will you get the word out about the training program? How can you make it simple for learners to remember to access training?

Communication channels already established within an organization are very effective for promoting your program. Town hall meetings, webinars, email, printed materials, intranet banners, and helpful welcome messaging all promote increased usage. Of course, overuse of certain communication methods, such as email, can resemble spam. One way to avoid this is to time training communication with other organization events. For instance, remind supervisors of the mentoring and performance management training just before performance review time.

Red Tape and Roadblocks
A company set up a learning program for all of its employees but provided individual access by request only. Few users bothered to fill out the request form and usage was dismal.

A Personalized Welcome
An organization delivered content based on job role groupings. Its intranet welcome page provided callouts for each group, displaying required courses, references, and job-specific development paths. Management targeted separate communication efforts to groups to reinforce the importance of training and how to access it. Reports later showed that learners focused on the courses they were directed to instead of extraneous content.

4. Awareness Building

Learning programs can fizzle if an organization is not prepared to engage with training. Pre-launch marketing is an essential first step toward modifying attitudes. Awareness helps energize an organization around learning, especially if it ties into development incentives impacting professional advancement. You can effectively demonstrate the importance of learning and send a positive awareness message using a short video of your CEO explaining program objectives.

The Invisible Program
A company sent two pre-launch communications to educate learners about its new training, trusting that learners would grasp the value of training and access it on their own afterwards. Attendance was high at first, but it waned quickly. When the company realized the decline, time was already lost and the program's credibility suffered in the eyes of senior management.

Awareness Leads to 100% Compliance
A company needed to roll out code of conduct training for US and international employees. It created a multi-step communication plan and assigned courses to learners based on their language. They also planned student groupings to ensure the correct content assignment and crafted reports for each of the various languages. Every learner received an introduction email in his or her own language. The company ran completion reports by group and monthly reminders were sent to those who had not yet finished the training— 100% compliance was achieved well before year's end.

5. Continued Monitoring

Once marketing plans and expectations are set, ongoing monitoring becomes critical. Transparency, through detailed reporting and analysis, is the best way for your learning program to retain credibility among top management. What types of data will help you evaluate the effectiveness of your program? How will you capture information? How will you determine the impact of your marketing efforts?

Monitoring tools you define during planning must adapt and change with your program as it grows. User surveys, face-to-face feedback sessions, and usage reports are a few cost-effective tools already at your disposal.

When It's Too Late
A company rolled learning out to all employees but didn't educate supervisors on training management and tracking analysis, assuming HR would facilitate the program. When the CEO requested each department provide an update on its training, managers found that most employees hadn't even logged into the system. The lack of program accountability and monitoring led to an unwanted organizational realignment.

Monitoring that Works
A team was tasked with monitoring managers and employees to ensure alignment with their training objectives. Various programs (such as a hardware certification program for engineers) were put in place with oversight from different managers and business units. The team's objective was to assess activity, evaluate results, and follow a communication plan mapped to key program milestones. The team achieved its goals by working against a set roadmap, tracking progress from different groups, and altering tactics based on defined feedback loops.

Re-energizing Your Program

Does this sound familiar? Your learning program has slumped into new-hire training, with no usage from more seasoned employees. When resources are tight and apathy toward learning reigns, training managers often don't know where to begin. Fortunately, the experienced learning service professionals at Element K are experts at re-energizing existing programs with a proven checklist and diagnostic approach.

Re-igniting organizational interest in learning requires input and commitment from business unit managers throughout the company. With the proper training, your managers can architect meaningful subscription assignments and reposition training as an organizational priority. Element K offers many types of solutions to help you re-energize corporate training—from needs analysis and strategic planning to marketing and professional development. Our experts will eliminate weaknesses in both pre- and post-launch programs and provide the steps needed to get you back on track.

Summary

Maybe you haven't completely thought through how your program will achieve its goals. You can still avoid the failures highlighted above. If you've already launched your program, you may already know the challenges of a struggling learning program. It's not too late to take control of your training.

- Ensure organizational alignment by setting expectations, achievable milestones, and measurement standards as part of a program roadmap.

- Build relevance into your program using credentials and rewards.

- Make training easily accessible and build a supportive learning culture.

- Keep your program invigorated with continued awareness campaigns.

- Commit to ongoing program monitoring and evaluation.

Training budgets dwindle every year, but in our increasingly competitive marketplace, the need for competent employees has never been greater. Element K can cut your costs and save your program. We deliver learning program planning and implementation services to Fortune 500 clients with multi-divisional, multi-functional training needs. Guiding or taking over the rollout and management of client learning initiatives, we actively optimize programs to align with organizational objectives.

For more information about our implementation-planning services, contact Element K at **1-800-434-3466** or visit **www.elementk.com/contact.**

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