

Executive Briefings

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How to Use Virtual Follow-Up Sessions to Reinforce Learning

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How often do learners attend a training session or take an e-learning program and then fail to apply this learning to their jobs?

There are a number of reasons this occurs. The subject matter may have been brand new to learners, so they didn't know what questions to ask in the class. In moving on to applying that learning to work, the learner may have come up with questions on application after it was too late to ask them. Or, learners may have thought they understood the subject matter in class, but in attempting to apply the learning find they actually did not and become stuck. Or, in applying learning, learners may run into problems or obstacles not covered in class and find themselves unable to circumnavigate such issues.

These types of problems are common, and they are even more common when administering an e-learning program, because often there is no one available to answer questions that arise as learners take the program. And when learners get stuck and cannot apply learning to their work, the company loses the benefits of administering the training. Thus, there is no ROI on the company's investment in training.

A cost-effective solution to these types of problems is a virtual follow-up session, which is used to reinforce learning that took place in an instructor-led seminar or e-learning program. A virtual follow-up session is a 60- to 90-minute Web conference or teleconference led by the instructor for a live seminar or a subject-matter expert for an e-learning program.

Here's how a virtual follow-up session works:

1. For an instructor-led seminar or workshop, schedule a virtual follow-up session two to three weeks after the completion of the seminar. This sets the expectation that the participants will apply what they learn to their work.
2. One week before the scheduled virtual session, poll the participants to see if they've been struggling with aspects of the administered learning and have any follow-up questions.
3. Provide the results of the poll to the instructor or subject-matter expert who will lead the virtual follow-up session so that he or she can prepare to answer the participants' questions.
4. On the appointed date, convene the Web conference or teleconference. Assign someone to handle the logistics and keep track of questions that may come in during the session, allowing the leader to focus on answering questions or providing additional instruction. Start by asking the participants what progress they have made in applying their learning to their jobs.

Virtual follow-up sessions are low in cost because they can use existing Web conference or teleconference services supplied by the organization. If the company doesn't have a contract with a provider of these services, its internal information technology or telecommunications group can make the needed arrangements to hold a session. If a learning department wants to try virtual follow-up sessions and doesn't have a contract with a Web conference company, most providers offer a free trial of their services.

The benefits of conducting a virtual follow-up session include:

- Ensuring mastery of the material to be learned.
- Ensuring that what is learned in the classroom or from an e-learning program will be applied correctly to participants' work.
- Ensuring Kirkpatrick Level 3 or 4 return on investment in the learning program.

Whether used for instructor-led classroom training or e-learning programs, holding virtual follow-up sessions can be an effective, low-cost addition to a learning arsenal to help ensure mastery and, more important, application to the participants' work to make a positive difference in individual and organizational business results.



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