Performance Improvement of a Sales Training Feedback System

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study examines the analysis, design, development, implementation, and continuous improvement of a training feedback system. In this case, the system captured sales training participant feedback and distributed that data to stakeholders to analyze and to resolve problems within the learning experience. The intervention set presented in the case is intended for practitioners who have limited time and resources but are interested in creating a feedback system that meets ever changing business demands in a sales training environment.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

In 2010, directors in a large pharmaceutical sales training department voiced concerns about the lack of usable feedback from learners to improve the overall learning experience. At the time, all company operating expenses were under scrutiny as a result of looming patent expirations and a shrinking US economy, leaving the department with limited resources to address any non-essential projects.

The sales training department provides several therapeutic businesses areas with product, disease state, selling skills, and leadership development training each year.

This department supports approximately 2,970 sales representatives based in the United States. The role of a sales representative is to provide health care providers with exceptional customer experiences and product information. Training experiences consist of computer-based training modules, meetings, experienced-based learning, and live face-to-face training. Trainers ensure business unit curriculums are implemented and sales representative are prepared to enter the field and serve customers. Each trainer reports to a sales training director who is ultimately responsible for executing business unit sales training needs.

The US sales department accounts for approximately $2 billion in revenue for the global corporation, and an effective sales training program is a critical factor in supporting the business's goals. Preparing sales representatives to provide exceptional customer experiences and to adjust to changes in the business with minimal customer disruption is central to the mission of the department. Although a system was in place to capture participant feedback, leaders were dissatisfied with the system and the data were not used. Sales training leadership knew that feedback was an essential part of the business and instructional process, and without it they would not be able to make improvements and keep up with new business demands. Sales training leadership knew something had to be done to fix the broken feedback system. The question was how?

Through observation and inquiry, an internal performance consultant was able to uncover the root causes of the problem associated with the feedback system. This ultimately led to the system being upgraded to meet leadership's demand along with the redesign of internal workflow processes. Working in partnership with sales training leadership, the consultant was able to move the organization towards a greater emphasis on participant feedback instead of second-hand data as a source of feedback for continuous improvement. Collecting reactionary level 1 feedback on participants' engagement in training is important because it influences sales representatives' morale and their perceptions of future interactions with the sales training (Schultz, 2013). The core strategy behind the new feedback system was grounded in the Kluger and Denisi (1996) feedback intervention theory and Hysong, Best, and Pugh (2006) actionable feedback model. The feedback intervention theory explained how to focus the organization's attention on change (Larson, Patel, Evans, & Saiman, 2013). The four components of the actionable feedback model of timeliness, individualization, non-punitive, and customization were used to operationalize the feedback system (Hysong et al., 2006). By using these core principles as a guiding light through the design of the feedback system, the consultant was able to provide a more user-friendly, self-serviceable, actionable, and real-time feedback system.