

GOOD PRACTICE BRIEF

MARCH 2021

DESIGNING EFFECTIVE TRAINING: ANALYZING NEEDS TO SHAPE A CONTINUUM OF LEARNING

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Develop an evaluation plan into the initial design of training to ensure that monitoring, evaluation, and learning are well-integrated processes and not an afterthought.

Conduct a detailed needs assessment and analysis of the target audience and content areas to guarantee alignment with learners' needs and levels of experience.

Determine an effective modality that is compatible with both the training content and the learning needs, limitations, and context of the audience.

Implement a continuum of learning approach in training design to frame training beyond a single event in order to establish and reinforce learning objectives over time.

BACKGROUND

DDI/EDU is tasked with preparing USAID education staff in the field to more effectively build capacity, influence policy design, and support systems in partner countries to achieve their educational goals. To meet these objectives, the EPIC Professional Development (PD) Team has prioritized evidence-based good practices for designing effective training, with an emphasis on needs assessments and adult learning principles, particularly the continuum of learning approach to ensure the success of key learning events such as the Education Overview Course (EOC) and Effective Education Portfolio Management (EPPM) Course.

GOOD PRACTICE

DEVELOP A TRAINING EVALUATION PLAN

The EPIC PD team designed formative and summative evaluation plans to ensure that learning processes are integrated into the initial design of the training and are not an after-thought or an add-on activity.

Formative evaluation of training seeks to evaluate instructional design prior to implementation through expert review of instructional materials or interviews and focus groups with learners. During the EPIC contract, formative evaluations were typically instituted during implementation through daily session debriefs where the design team discussed feedback from participants and lessons learned to better serve learner needs in real-time. Additional methods include one-on-one interviews and focus groups with learners, expert review, or field trials to evaluate instructional design and materials.

The EPIC PD team utilized post-course summative evaluations to answer questions related to course expectations, course content, assessments, timing, pace, sequence, visual design, multimedia, interactivity, and the overall experience. The PD team relied on [Kirkpatrick's four levels of evaluation](#) (or [New World Kirkpatrick model](#)) as a foundation for developing evaluation surveys, but Phillips and Phillips' [ROI \(Return On Investment\) methodology](#) is also a useful model to consider.

CONDUCT A DETAILED NEEDS ASSESSMENT

EPIC instituted detailed needs assessments to inform decisions related to the content and modality of the training. The assessment should outline the training goals of the sponsoring organization (e.g., DDI/EDU), define desired performance improvements, and describe the target audience and their characteristics. Key actions for a detailed needs assessment include identifying:

- The results that the sponsoring organization wants to achieve;
- The key competencies and tasks required to meet the desired organizational results;
- Factors in the work environment that influence an individual's successful job performance on key competencies and tasks;
- The knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for key tasks and competencies;
- Possible training, alternatives to formal training, and ways to minimize training-related costs; and
- The specific target audiences for which training is being proposed, their key characteristics, and any known constraints.

Keep in mind that the process of assessing learner's needs, identifying gaps, and determining the most effective strategy to develop and deliver the training is not linear but rather is an iterative process that may occur at multiple points in the training cycle.

DETERMINE AN EFFECTIVE MODALITY

When given a choice of modality, decisions should be based on the findings of the needs assessment. The EPIC contract has offered training in various modalities: face-to-face, virtual instructor-led, self-paced e-learning, and blended learning.

When deciding which modality will be most effective for a given training context, consider the following key questions:

- What are the learning objectives of the course, and how complex is the course content?
- How do learners need to engage with the content to best learn and apply it? Does the content necessitate an instructor-led component to facilitate learning?
- Which modality will best serve the needs of the target audience? For example, what logistical and/or resource limitations may learners face?
- What is the length of course?
- What are the training budget and/or resource constraints?

IMPLEMENT A CONTINUUM OF LEARNING APPROACH IN TRAINING DESIGN

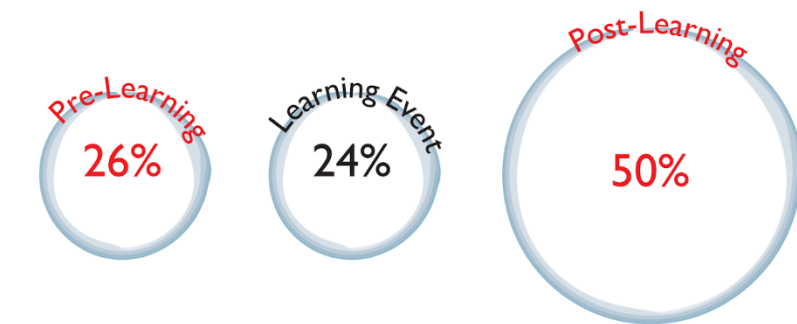
To achieve sustained learning and application of targeted knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs), EPIC ensured that learning opportunities extended beyond a single event and were established and reinforced over time. It is also good practice to incorporate learning science principles, particularly an understanding of how people

absorb and retain information through repetition, a crisp narrative, engaging visuals, and variety. The continuum of learning refers to the before-during-after approach to training, which increases the likelihood of knowledge use, application, and impact in the long-term. Examples of each step in the approach are listed below:

- **Pre-learning:** introductory forum, learning plans, introduction to key concepts and definitions, engagement with asynchronous learning modules or knowledge products.
- **During the training:** assessments, peer-to-peer learning, discussion forums.
- **Post-learning:** continued quizzing and testing, sharing video content/learner generated products, synchronous follow-on sessions (e.g., webinars, coaching, Q&A), or reunions.

Preparing learners through pre-learning (if appropriate) and creating opportunities for post-event learning provide 76 percent of a learning event's effectiveness. This means that just 24 percent of learning occurs during the event itself (Figure 1). Following a cyclical approach to training design and delivery through pre-learning, learning during the event, and learning after the event will ultimately extend the learning process—and its use and impact—over a longer period of time, thus allowing for more context and opportunities to use, apply, act, and reflect on learnings.

FIGURE 1. CONTINUUM OF LEARNING



Pre- and post-learning activities provide 76% of a learning's effectiveness.

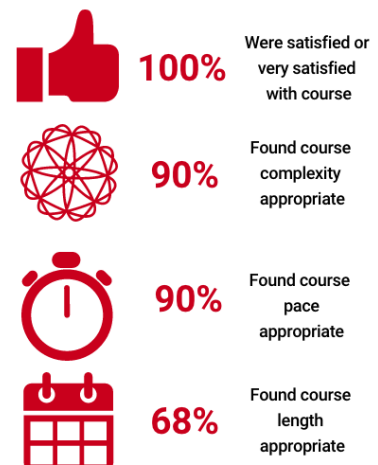
Brent Peterson

OUTCOMES

By implementing the aforementioned best practices into training analysis and design, the EPIC PD team has successfully aligned training with learner needs, contexts, and levels of experience, as well as incorporated the continuum of learning approach and adult learning principles, as illustrated in the examples below.

- The majority of participants in the 2020 Virtual Instructor-Led EEPM considered the length, pace, and content complexity of the course to be appropriate (See Figure 2). Participants also greatly enjoyed the variety and quality of activities and instructional materials, including videos, group exercises, breakout discussions, Q&A sessions, real-life examples and case studies, and role plays.
- Across all modules in the 2019 ED-CVE course, nearly all participants indicated that the knowledge gained was relevant to their context, and they planned to apply the knowledge and skills from the sessions.
- In implementing the continuum of learning approach, the EPIC PD team has integrated follow-up engagements into training designs by sharing learning boosters (learner generated resources, videos, etc.) and establishing communities of practice,

FIGURE 2. EEPM COURSE SATISFACTION



webinars, and discussion groups. Participants in the 2018 EEPM co-created a job aid, shaping specific content they collectively decided that they wanted presented in an easy to read and access format. EPIC then worked with a graphic design platform to transform that content into a job aid and sent it out to participants a few weeks after the training ended.

LESSONS LEARNED

PRIORITIZE ENGAGEMENT AND PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING FOR ONLINE TRAINING

Since adult learners accumulate expertise through their experiences and backgrounds, they are themselves key resources for learning. So, it is critical that there are clear, accessible opportunities for participants to engage and learn from one another during online training without posing a significant time burden for learners. For example, participants from the 2020 asynchronous online EOC praised the content of the training, but focus groups revealed a desire for more active discussions and engagement during and post-course. On the other hand, the 2020 virtual instructor-led EEPM offered opportunities for peer-to-peer learning outside of the synchronous training session, but participants found this approach to be too burdensome and time consuming. Therefore, future training designs should find ways to promote engagement based on the findings of the audience needs assessment to ensure that these opportunities align with learners' needs, context, and constraints.

DO NOT FORGET POST-TRAINING ACTIVITIES DURING THE INITIAL TRAINING DESIGN

Future training should intentionally integrate post-training activities (1 month, 3 months, 6 months after training) into the initial design to ensure that follow-up is an integral component of the training, rather than an afterthought. For example, while EPIC did successfully implement an online reunion for VILT EEPM 2020 participants to share how they have applied what they learned and any challenges they have faced since completing the course, designers should allow time to conceive of and organize such follow-up activities from the onset of the design process. Otherwise it may be difficult to prioritize these follow-up components when the training concludes due to budget, logistical, and/or resource constraints. Additionally, had follow-up been part of the initial training design, EPIC could have planned a follow-up process to utilize the EEPM Google Site for post-training engagement with participants through discussion forums, periodic updates, and continued resource sharing.

ENGAGE THE SUPERVISOR

Research tells us that one of the most effective ways to ensure application of knowledge and skills acquired through a training or course is to engage the participant's supervisor, who can then provide on-the-job support, encouragement, and monitoring (Grossman and Salas, 2011). Future training plans should intentionally reach out to individuals that supervise or mentor the participants and learn from them what they would like to see the participant be able to do as a result of the learning and how application of that learning is going to be monitored and evaluated on the job.

This brief was created by Education Performance Improvement, Communications, and Knowledge (EPIC), a five-year activity (2015-2021) of support services to the Center of Education (DDI/EDU). EPIC consisted of activities in four key areas that were implemented simultaneously: performance improvement through organizational effectiveness; professional development, training, and learning for all staff; knowledge management, generation, brokering, uptake, and use; and internal and external communications, engagement, and partnerships.