

Association Executives of North Carolina

Success *Live*

BY ASSOCIATION

The below educational content of this edition of *Success by Association Live* is sponsored by **Marriott Winston-Salem and Benton Convention Center.**



MEET AT THE BENTON NAMED THE BEST OF THE BEST

The centrally located Benton Convention Center is the ideal facility to host your next event. A five-time winner of the *Convention South Readers' Choice* award, it's no surprise that we were selected to once again host the recent AENC Annual Meeting.

The facility offers 156,000 square feet of flexible, naturally lit space. Most recently, Benton South was the recipient of a \$1.8 million dollar renovation that features the 24,000-square-foot Gallery Ballroom designed in warm, natural tones with bright accent colors and numerous pieces of art from local contributors. Whether it's a gathering of 10 or a full-blown city-wide convention, the Benton Convention Center is the logical choice to enjoy flawless execution and attendee satisfaction.

Contact Ms. Ayshen Montiel at 336.397.3623 or ayshen.montiel@twincityquarter.com to assist with your next event.

[View Virtual Tour](#)



The Impact Imperative in Education

Jeff Cobb and Celisa Steele

Click [here](#) to listen to the article instead!

April 17, 2024

The Impact Imperative in Education

What are the most important factors for your members when deciding whether to invest in a continuing education or professional development experience?

Over more than a decade of conducting surveys for our clients, we've found that – not surprisingly – people care about the reputation of the presenter and, where relevant, they care about whether continuing education credit is offered. Perhaps more surprisingly, a factor that has consistently ranked in the top two or three out of several possible choices is:

The activity has been shown to produce demonstrable improvement in knowledge or performance for those who take part

The desire for “demonstrable improvement” – in other words, *impact* – is growing significantly as the market for adult lifelong learning evolves, but relatively few organizations are prepared to demonstrate that their educational offerings actually move the dial for learners. For those that want to remain competitive in the new learning landscape, that needs to change.

Why Impact Matters More Than Ever

Spurred by advances in technology and changes in the global economy, the market for continuing education, professional development, and lifelong learning has become much larger, more sophisticated, and competitive over the first two decades of the 21st century. Three factors now drive why impact is becoming an imperative.

Lifelong learning has gone mainstream.

As little as a decade ago it was rare to see the term “lifelong learning” in mainstream or business media. It has since become a major focus, along with related terms like “upskilling” and “reskilling,” and widely respected publications like *The Economist* have gone so far as to declare it an “economic imperative.”

Learners have more choices than ever before.

Big commercial companies have gotten into the game – LinkedIn Learning is just one of many. The subject matter experts associations rely on for creating education can now easily bypass them by working with these companies and/or by licensing a low cost online platform of their own. And, of course, aside from formal offerings, learners can and do make extensive use of search engines, YouTube, ChatGPT, and a wide range of other platforms. Competition for their attention is arguably fiercer than competition for their wallets.

Impact is more measurable than ever.

With advances in learning science, we know more than ever about what to measure and how to measure it. And we now have much better, more affordable tools to do it. Recent advances in AI make that even truer – the ability to dynamically analyze large amounts of data and provide much more personalized learning experiences will make it possible to deliver highly targeted, individualized impact.

All of these factors combine to make a measurable return on learning not only possible but expected – by learners and by the organizations that employ them. Bottom line: If your members – or their employers – are going to spend time and money on education, they expect it to actually produce results.

Traditional Evaluations Aren't Enough

Many education and events staff will counter that their organizations consistently collect evaluations at the end of seminars, conference sessions, and other learning events. But while these evaluations may have some value, they typically are designed only to measure the *reaction* of learners to the learning experience.

“Reaction” is Level I of the widely used Kirkpatrick model for evaluating adult training and education. Unfortunately, a range of research has indicated that there is little connection between the way people initially react to training or education and how it ultimately affects their performance. Indeed, it is not uncommon to find situations in which instructors and sessions have received poor Level 1 evaluations and yet proved to have significant positive impact on learners' longer-term performance.

Because associations are in the learning business, it is useful and important to know whether your learners (aka you customers) like what you are offering – what typical evaluations measure. At the same time, as mission-driven organizations, we often need to give learners what they need, which is not always what they want.

How to Better Measure Impact

Measuring impact begins with creating well designed learning experiences that have opportunities for measurement built in.

Greater use of pre- and post-assessment is one clear path to better measuring the impact of learning. Assessments may be longer or shorter and more or less complex depending on the nature of the learning experience, but even brief, simple assessments can effectively capture “before” and “after” states.

The use of assessment and evaluation over time should also be increased. As already noted, the possibilities for gauging impact immediately following a learning experience are very limited. Following up weeks, months, or even years after the experience can give much more insight into how and whether the learning actually “stuck” and had an impact.

Integrating more opportunities for practice and application, both during and – crucially – after a learning experience ensures learning will stick and also gives learners a concrete point of reference – rather than just their “gut” – for assessing their own improvements.

Finally, it's important to note that the level of measurement suggested here may not be necessary for *every* learning experience an organization offers, but it should be a priority for at least a subset of learning experiences to incorporate well defined approaches for measuring impact.

Communicating Impact

Arguably, the main reason for focusing on impact is that it is simply the right thing to do. The promise of results is implicit in association educational offerings and organizations have an obligation to deliver on that promise.

But another key reason is that being able to demonstrate and communicate impact – through data, through stories, through testimonials – creates a powerful marketing edge.

In today's highly competitive market for continuing education and professional development, if your organization is able to deliver “demonstrable improvement in knowledge or performance,” learners will beat a path to your door.

About the Author: Jeff Cobb and Celisa Steele are co-founders and managing directors of [Tagoras](#), a firm focused on helping organizations in the business of continuing education and professional development increase their reach, revenue, and impact. They also co-host the long-

running [Leading Learning Podcast](#), a source of ongoing insights and information for learning business professionals.

If you would like to have one of your articles featured in **Success by Association Live** or have interest in sponsoring please contact Madi today at madi@aencnet.org.



AENC | 514 Daniels Street, Box #352, Raleigh, NC 27605