

SUSTAINING VIRTUAL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Executive Summary

Introduction

Agile and resilient leaders who can effectively influence the performance and engagement of their teams have never been more in demand. In 2019, organizations spent approximately \$3.53 billion to train employees how to be effective leaders. Leadership training is a vital investment, so how can organizations ensure that their learners retain and apply what they learn back on the job?

To answer that question, CLS partnered with Training Industry, Inc. to conduct a two-year research study on sustaining virtual leadership development. This Executive Summary highlights the research process, insights and key recommendations you can apply to maximize training impact in your organization.

To review the research study details, [download the whitepaper, *Sustaining Virtual Leadership Development*](#).

Research Study Background

The companies that were part of this study varied from government to banking to nonprofit to health care. Participants' job levels ranged from supervisory/management roles to executive directors and vice presidents. A total of 104 leaders from five companies began the training with us, and at the culmination of all the training and reinforcement activities, we had full data from 77 participants.

At the beginning of the process, participants completed a pre-course leadership skills self-assessment. This survey captured data about their experience and their current leadership skills. Next, they participated in a six-hour virtual instructor-led training (VILT) course on leadership skills. The course was *Situational Leadership®: Building Leaders Virtual* and was conducted over two days.

Following the VILT, participants were randomly assigned to receive (or not receive) different forms of sustainment activities to reinforce the knowledge and skills covered in the training. After the eight weeks, outcomes data was collected with a second participant survey, the outcome leadership skills assessment.

Figure 1. Research Process



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What Did We Measure?

Given that the leadership training was designed to build skills in Situational Leadership®, the study measured some of the competencies that are targeted by this framework, including:

- **Team adaptability:** Can I respond to changes in my team and in my role as a member of the team?
- **Organizational adaptability:** Can I respond to changes in my company and in my role as a member of this company?
- **Workplace status:** Do I have respect and prestige in this company?

In addition, we measured practice-related outcomes in three ways:

- **The frequency of intended practice:** How often do I intend to keep practicing the leadership skills from the course?
- **The amount of intended practice:** How many hours do I intend to practice in the future?
- **The amount of recent practice:** How many hours did I practice in the last week?

Check out the article [Practice Doesn't Make Perfect ... Perfect Practice Makes Perfect](#) for additional research study insights.

Research Study Results

The results indicate that the key drivers for sustainment are setting practice goals and providing post-training reinforcement activities.

1. Learners who set goals for deliberate practice are more likely to continue to practice their new leadership skills and implement what they learned on the job.

Deliberate practice involves setting “clear practice goals” and is critical for the effective development of leadership skills, including adaptability.

Adaptability is the degree to which individuals cope with, respond to and/or support changes that affect their roles as members of a team.

2. Reinforcement (coaching or microlearning) had a positive impact on team adaptability as well as the intent of the learner-practitioner to continue practice moving forward.

The critical importance of leader adaptability and resilience was reinforced during the events of COVID-19. A manager’s ability to help his or her team effectively adapt to unforeseen and massively disruptive change is resiliency in action.

Research Study Reinforcement Activities

One-On-One Virtual Coaching Reinforcement

The coaching reinforcement consisted of two virtual one-on-one sessions (15 to 20 minutes in duration) with a certified leadership skills coach. Each session took place at or around Week 4 and Week 8. That equates to about 30 minutes of one-on-one coaching over a two-month period.

In Session 1, the coach provided the learner-practitioner with feedback on an application activity that was completed during the *Situational Leadership®: Building Leaders Virtual* training program. During that discussion, the coach and the learner agreed upon an action plan, including elements of perfect practice.

In Session 2, the coach and the learner-practitioner discussed the outcomes of the action plan and next steps for ongoing application.

Scheduled coaching check-ins (only 15-20 minutes) once every four weeks increased accountability, application and retention.

Discover the five types of reinforcement coaching here: [Five Proven Paths to Training Pull-Through.](#)

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Microlearning

The microlearning reinforcement consisted of four short, content-refresher modules delivered at two-week intervals over eight weeks. Each microlearning targets a specific skill or topic from the *Situational Leadership®: Building Leaders Virtual* program and can be completed in approximately eight minutes or less. All the microlearning modules were accessible on-demand via the learner's preferred device.

Microlearning is just one method to provide reinforcement. Learn more about how to provide post-training reinforcement in your organization here: [Reinforcement in the Workflow](#).



Set Practice Goals

In the research study, the goals set by participants (i.e., their intention to practice at the start of the study) had a positive impact on:

- Workplace status
- Intention to practice in the future (by frequency)
- Intention to practice in the future (by hours)
- Actual practice hours

Without practice, leaders don't retain what they learned.

When someone forms an intention in the present, they have crafted a goal.

Key Takeaways

The two primary recommendations for maximizing leadership training are to:

1. Help learners set practice goals
2. Offer reinforcement activities, such as coaching or microlearning.

Learn more about how to help learners set practice goals in your organization here: [How to Make Learning Stick: Strategies to Drive Behavior Change webinar](#).



Contact our team to learn more about training transfer.

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