



WestJet: Measuring the ROI of Meeting Management Training

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Overview of WestJet One of Canada's most admired and fastest growing airlines, Calgary-based WestJet Airlines Limited has the goal of becoming one of the five most successful international air carriers in the world by 2016. WestJet's ambitious vision is buttressed by a strategic plan that emphasizes—among other things—investing in the growth and development of its people while simultaneously controlling costs to achieve profit margins that will lead North American airlines.

Training Rationale The One Smart World's Smarter Meeting processes were introduced to WestJet several years ago. Their approach to improving meeting effectiveness was simple and seemed to produce cost saving results. Initially WestJet Organizational & People Development facilitated a one day workshop including several of the One Smart World suites of tools. The response to the Smarter Meetings segment was very encouraging. When the opportunity arose to take part in the *Investing in People™* project and to actually measure the effectiveness and calculate the ROI on this training, WestJet welcomed the chance to participate.

The Training **SMARTER MEETINGS TRAINING**

Target Audience: Participants attended training with their work teams. Teams were drawn from various departments in the organization (planning, marketing, finance, IT, etc.). Team members held a variety of positions (project managers, planners, analysts, coordinators, etc.).

Format: Training was delivered in a half-day, instructor-led, workshop.

Content: Training introduced participants to the dimensions of high performance thinking; it also sought to raise awareness of the costs of meetings to the organization. Participants were provided with strategies for planning efficient meetings, for diagnosing meeting pitfalls, and improving the overall quality of meetings. Specific techniques were taught to help both the chairs and participants in meetings to keep focused, engaged, and on track.

Activities: In preparation for training, participants maintained a "meeting log" to assess the current state of their meeting activity. They also completed a questionnaire to assess their "personal operating style." During training, activities included: diagnosing meeting problems, simulating a meeting, designing a meeting agenda, practicing a meeting, and using an online meeting planning tool, Smart Agenda Maker. At the completion of training, participants created Action Plans describing the steps they would take in the

next month to apply their training to the meetings they planned to chair or attend.

The Case Study Methodology

THE LEARNING VALUE CHAIN

The *Investing in People™* (IIP) case studies adopt the Gillis and Bailey concept of the Learning Value Chain as a general framework for evaluating the learning effectiveness and the business value of training and human resource investments (Figure 1).

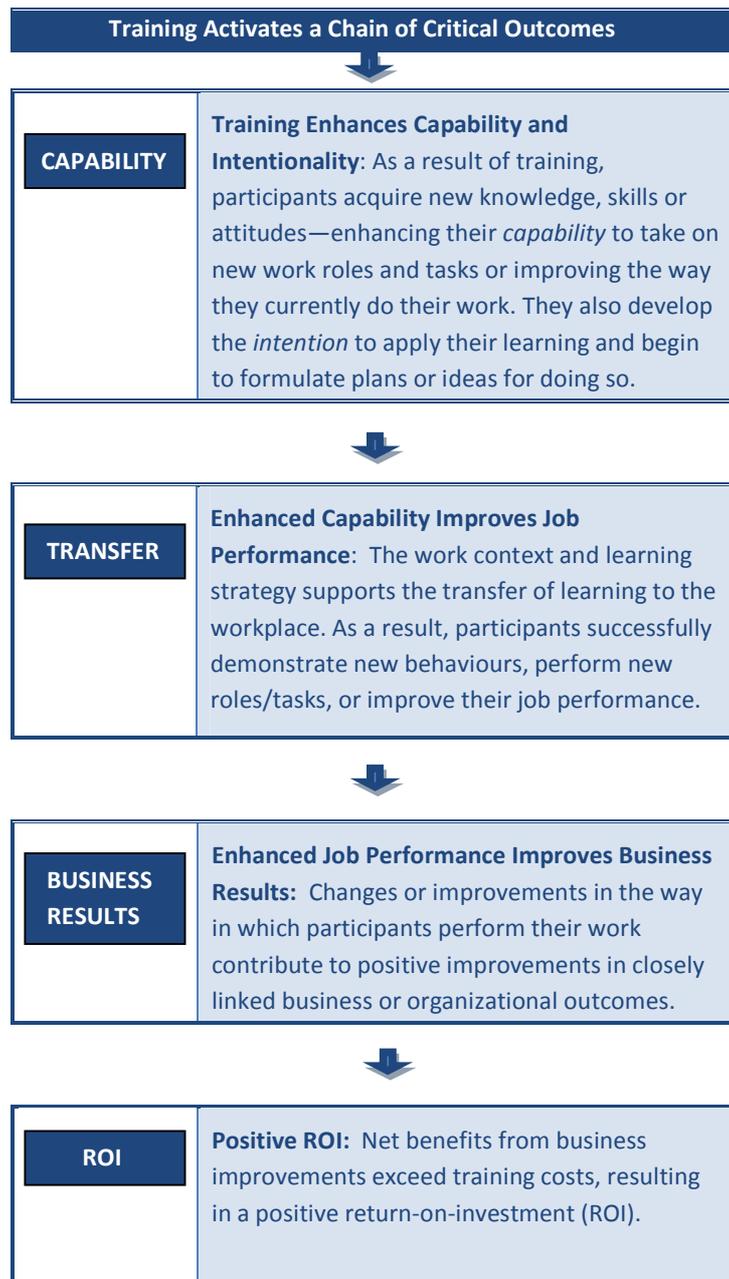
In the Learning Value Chain, the training program triggers a chain of critical outcomes. As desired outcomes are achieved at each link along the chain, greater value is added and the likelihood increases that training will result in positive business outcomes and return on investment. Conversely, if training fails to meet outcomes at any link, value is diminished and the prospect of positive business results and return on investment is at risk.

Using the Learning Value Chain Methodology, the training program is evaluated at each of four links (Capability, Transfer, Business Results and ROI). At each link, data is gathered to assess the extent to which the training has achieved key outcomes, added value and enabled the next critical event in the chain to occur.

The Learning Value Chain model also incorporates a diagnostic strategy to investigate training practices and strategies that may strengthen or weaken outcomes at each link and subsequently influence business impact and return on investment.

Figure 1

The Learning Value Chain



CAPABILITY RESULTS



Evaluation Questions: Did training participants develop new *capability*: acquire new knowledge and skills, adopt new attitudes, improve existing skills, or discover new and more productive ways of doing work? Did participants also develop the *intention* to apply their learning or improve their job performance?

"Smarter meetings" training succeeds in enhancing Capability

To assess Capability—the first link in the Learning Value Chain—all training participants completed the Capability Questionnaire at the end of the workshop.

The results suggest that Smarter Meetings succeeds at the first link in the Learning Value Chain. Participants perceive large gains in knowledge and skill across key learning domains as a result of attending training. Moreover, they give strong indication that they are able and motivated to apply their learning to their jobs.

The questionnaire results are summarized in the Capability Index (at right).

- **Skills & Knowledge:** After training, 72% rated their knowledge and skill level across 5 key areas of learning as “high”.
- **Confidence in Applying Learning:** 76% indicated a high-level of confidence in their ability to effectively apply their learning to their jobs.
- **Perceived Value:** 92% perceived the training as valuable (i.e., credible, practical, relevant, and essential).
- **Motivation to Apply Learning:** 89% rated their motivation to apply their learning as high.
- **Plans for Action:** 64% indicated they had many ideas for where or how they could apply their learning in their jobs. In open-ended comments, participants expressed concern that management support might prove to be an obstacle to applying their new meeting management techniques. They also predicted that it might be difficult to get buy-in from those who had not attended the training.

(Note: In subsequent studies, a sixth measure, Workplace

Capability Index

Impact at a Glance	
Red	Low (1 & 2)
Yellow	MODERATE (3)
Green	HIGH (4 & 5)

(5-POINT SCALE)

SKILL & KNOWLEDGE

After Training



CONFIDENCE



PERCEIVED VALUE



MOTIVATION



PLANS FOR ACTION



RISK ALERTS

	PLANS FOR ACTION
	APPROXIMATELY 1/3 OF PARTICIPANTS (36%) REPORT HAVING ONLY A FEW OR SOME IDEAS FOR WHERE OR HOW THEY WOULD APPLY THEIR LEARNING

Effective Practices Using the Effective Practices Audit, the following strategies and practices were identified by participants as having contributed to the training event's success:

- Face-to-face instruction
- Having team members participate in training together
- Discussing a team plan to make meetings more effective
- Designing an agenda activity
- Smart meeting practice
- Creating an action plan

An additional assessment of instructional quality revealed that 90% of participants rated all aspects of the instruction (e.g., presentation, exercises, feedback etc.) as "effective" or "very effective." 98% assigned similarly high ratings to the quality of facilitation.

Readiness, has been added to the Capability Questionnaire.)

Risk Alert for Transfer Approximately one-third of participants reported that they lacked ideas or plans for where or how they would apply their learning. If participants, at the end of their training, lack clear plans for action, the likelihood of their transforming capability into improved performance is at risk. This would suggest an opportunity for course improvement.

TRANSFER RESULTS



Evaluation Questions: Did the work environment and learning strategy support the transfer of learning to the job? Did training participants apply their learning to their jobs, and did the application of learning impact their work or job performance?

To assess Transfer—the second link in the Learning Value Chain—training participants were asked to complete the Transfer Questionnaire (TQ) one month following their training. 51% percent of training participants completed the questionnaire (an adequate response rate). Questions were also added to the TQ to investigate the extent to which participants completed the "action items" they had planned during training to apply their learning.

Training's impact weakened at the Transfer stage

Most trainees reported low to moderate levels of training application and improvement—only one-third reported a high level of learning transfer. Results suggest that the trainings' impact was considerably weakened at this stage in the Learning Value Chain.

The Transfer Index (at right), summarizes results:

- Learning Application:** Across the four key areas of learning, 32% of respondents reported a high degree of learning application; 24% reported applying their learning to a moderate degree; 44% to a low degree or not at all. Learning application was greatest in the area of "recognizing meeting pitfalls."
- Performance Improvement:** 33% reported a high level of performance improvement one month following training on the four key meeting management skills; 20% reported moderate improvement; and 47% little or no improvement. Improvement was greatest in the area of "staying on track as meeting

Transfer Index

Transfer at a Glance	
Red	Low (1 & 2)
Yellow	MODERATE (3)
Green	HIGH (4 & 5)

(5-POINT SCALE)

LEARNING APPLICATION



PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT



TRANSFER ALERTS

MORE THAN HALF OF RESPONDENTS REPORT A LOW TO MODERATE LEVEL OF LEARNING APPLICATION AND PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT

BARRIERS

58 % CITE A "LACK OF TIME" OR HAVE "OTHER HIGHER PRIORITIES" AS THE GREATEST BARRIER TO LEARNING APPLICATION IMPROVEMENT.

participants."

Action Plan Completion: Approximately half of respondents completed 50% or more of the action items they developed during training.

Other Key Findings: Questions were also added to the TQ to assess other impacts of the training on the quality of meetings. Respondents perceived a moderate impact on:

- Decreasing the non-productive time in meetings
- Increasing achievement of desired meeting outcomes
- Increasing the engagement of participants during meetings
- Increasing the quality of meeting conversations and thinking

The training appeared to have little impact overall on "reducing the overall number of meetings."

Risk Alert for Business Improvement

The low level of learning transfer and performance improvement following training poses a potential risk to business improvement and positive return on investment.

"Lack of time" a barrier to learning application and improvement

Also, as reported in the Risk Alert box, the most frequently cited barrier to learning application and performance improvement was: "lack time" or "have other higher priorities" (cited by 47% of respondents).

Need a critical mass of employees trained in Smarter meetings to see significant impact

Analysis of open-ended comments suggested that many participants were very satisfied with the nature and format of training, but they found it difficult to apply the techniques they had learned in meetings with others who had not been trained:

"Great training. Would be much more effective if this was available company-wide. It has been difficult to try and have other people follow the process without them being involved in the full training."

"Make sure that management and executives are trained in this and then lead by example."

"We need to achieve a critical mass within the organization in order to really have this program embraced and used to its full potential."

"Major barrier is the lack of support, mostly around not having the training. Would be nice to see everyone on the same page of understanding so all our meetings get more efficient."

Effective Practices Audit

The most frequently cited factor helping participants to apply their learning was: "Clear performance expectations" (cited by 58% of participants).

BUSINESS RESULTS



Evaluation Questions: Did the application of learning or improvements to job performance impact business results? What were the intangible benefits from the training?

BUSINESS MEASURES

To evaluate the business impact of the Smarter Meetings training, the third link in the Learning Value Chain, the Business Results survey examined the key performance metrics that best indicate if, and by how much, the training impacted business outcomes. Those who chaired meetings were asked to estimate the impact of training on two key performance metrics that could have changed as a result of the training: the length of meetings, and the number of meeting participants per meeting.

The Smarter Meetings training resulted in positive business performance improvement and return on investment (ROI). Analysis of performance metrics indicates cost savings (in terms of shorter meetings and fewer meeting participants) of \$242,160 annually. The ROI from the training was 558%.

Ideally, effective meeting training might be expected to reduce the length of meetings by reducing the number of unproductive activities. Such training might also result in an overall reduction of the number of meeting participants as meeting chairs acquire the skills to better identify those participants most essential to the success of meetings.

All participants received a Business Results survey approximately six months after training to determine if the new skills and knowledge had improved key business metrics and, if so, by how much. Of the 82 surveys sent out, 46 were returned. Of returned surveys, 36 (78%) were from participants who regularly chaired meetings and 10 were from other participants. The high percentage of returns from chairs is fortuitous since meeting chairs can most accurately assess any change in meeting performance measures.

KEY MEETING METRICS

Meeting chairs recorded the following meeting profiles:

BEFORE TRAINING	
PERFORMANCE MEASURE	ESTIMATE
Average number of meetings per month	8.86

Average number of participants per meeting	6.58
Average length of meetings (min.)	57.10

AFTER TRAINING	
PERFORMANCE MEASURE	LOW ESTIMATE
Average number of meeting per month	8.86
Average number of Participant per meeting	5.66
Average length of meetings (min.)	51.53

Meeting chairs reported that the average number of meetings per month remained unchanged after training when compared to the pre-training meeting frequency. However, *all* respondents reported that the newly acquired meeting management skills helped them reduce the number of unnecessary participants in meetings. The average reduction was from 6.58 participants per meeting before training, to 5.66 participants post-training. (A reduction of 0.92 participants per meeting.) Also, the new skills helped chairs conduct shorter meetings—an average reduction of 5.57¹ minutes per meeting (from 57.10 minutes to 51.53 minutes).

To establish these impact values, the survey asked participants to provide a high estimate and a low estimate of performance change for each business measure (reduction in the number of participants and meeting time). Observing the conservative principles of the Phillips ROI Methodology™, this study chose to select only the lower estimate. In addition, the study also employed an 80% confidence interval to further adjust the participants’ low estimates for error, ensuring even more conservative impact results.

Example: The reduction in length of meetings as a result of new skills
 Participants were asked to estimate if their meetings were shorter as a result of the time saved

Average high estimate: 20.08 minutes reduced per meeting
 Average low estimate: 6.96 minutes reduced per meeting

To be conservative the lowest value is selected (6.96 minutes).
 Additionally, an 80% participant confidence interval is assumed.
 Adjusted value for participants estimate is 6.96 minutes X 80%
 = 5.57 minutes reduced.

(Note: The 80% participant confidence figure is consistent with values reported by Jack and Patti Phillips in a similar ROI meeting study, High Tech, Inc.)

BUSINESS RESULTS

As a result of acquiring new meeting effectiveness skills, meeting Chairs were able to improve productivity, principally through cost savings to the organization by reducing unnecessary employee time in meetings.

Business Benefit: Cost Savings (Time savings)

The total business impact is the annual time saved by all chairs as a result of the training (i.e., the annual benefit from shorter meetings, fewer participants.). To arrive at this value, it is necessary to calculate the difference in the average total monthly meeting time before training and after training.

Total average employee time in meetings per chair:

Average number of meetings per month X Average number of participants X Average length of meetings

Before training: 8.86 meetings X 6.58 participants X 57.10 minutes
 = 3,328.86 participant-minutes

After training: 8.86 meetings X 5.66 participants X 51.53 minutes
 = 2584.11 participant-minutes

Average participant time saved per meeting chair per month: 3,328.86 - 2,584.11
 = 744.75 minutes/chair

Monthly time savings for all 36 Chairs (those who responded to survey):
 = 744.75 minutes/chair X 36 chairs
 = 26,811.00 minutes (446.85 hours saved per month)

Annual Business Impact (Cost savings)

The annual business benefit from the training is the salary saving resulting from reduced staff time in meetings. (This assumes, of course, that employees freed from unproductive time in meetings use the time saved in other productive activities beneficial to the organization.

Business Improvement: Total time saved per month X average hourly salary (loaded)
 = 446.85 hours X \$45.16/hour¹
 = \$20,180 per month

Annual Improvement (annual savings in unproductive meeting time):
 = \$20,180/month X 12 months
 = \$242,160 cost savings annually

Isolation:

The business improvement reported in this analysis results solely from the training since training and not from other factors. Participants (meeting chairs) were expressly asked to indicate *only* the performance improvements that resulted from the training.

¹ The value for 'average hourly salary' was provided by Westjet

ROI

Evaluation Questions: Did the business benefits of training exceed its total costs (Benefit/ Cost Ratio)? What was the return on investment?

**Return on Investment for Smarter Meetings Training:
 558%**

COST

Program development cost (developer salaries, travel):	\$8,539.50
Program delivery costs	
Elearning technology license (\$140/participant)	\$11,480.00
Participant training times (loaded salaries) (82 participants X 4 hours X \$43.16/hour)	\$14,156.48
Facilitator cost	\$1,625.76
Materials	\$365.00
Training Evaluation	\$615.00
Total Training Cost	\$36,781.74

BENEFIT COST RATIO (BCR)

The Benefit-Cost Ratio is a key metric in the IIP Methodology which allows ready comparison of the programs benefits with the program costs.

$$BCR = \frac{\text{Total Business Benefit}}{\text{Cost of Training}} = \frac{\$242,169}{\$36,782} =$$

For every dollar invested in training \$6.58 was returned to the organization

RETURN ON INVESTMENT (ROI)

$$ROI = \frac{\text{Net Benefits}}{\text{Total Cost}} = \frac{\text{Total Benefits} - \text{Total Cost}}{\text{Total Cost}} \times 100\%$$

$$ROI = \frac{\$242,160 - \$36,782}{\$36,782} \times 100\% = \mathbf{558\%}$$

INTANGIBLES In addition to the improved business performance results and positive ROI there were additional, non-quantified benefits from the training—so called, intangible

benefits. Such benefits may be contributing to an overall improvement in the quality, efficiency, effectiveness of meetings. While these meeting outcomes were not specifically measured in this study, responses to the Transfer Questionnaire, respondents suggests at least moderate gain were realized in the following areas:

- Decreasing the non-productive time in meetings
- Increasing achievement of desired meeting outcomes
- Increasing the engagement of participants during meetings
- Increasing the quality of meeting conversations and thinking

**CONSIDERATIONS
& ISSUES**

1. An ROI of 558% means that the original investment in training was returned to the organization along with a 558% profit. That is, every dollar invested in training was returned to the organization plus a profit of \$5.58.

2. A conservative methodology was employed to develop participant estimates of the business improvement resulting from training. Participants were asked to provide a ‘high’ estimate and a ‘low’ estimate of performance change following training. To be conservative, only the lower estimate was used to calculate the benefit. As an additional conservative measure, the average of low participant estimates was further reduced using an industry-standard participant confidence value of 80% to correct for possible error. As a result, the average low estimate of 6.96 minutes was further adjusted for error (6.96 X 80%) to 5.57 minutes reduced per meeting as a result of the training.

(Note: Some analysts might consider this an overly conservative approach, judging it reasonable and sufficiently conservative to select the average of the low estimates without further adjustment—or even perhaps to choose the average of the participants’ ‘high’ and ‘low’ estimates.)

3. It should be noted that the actual ROI from training might have been higher than reported in this analysis. In accordance with the Phillips ROI Methodology™, this study conservatively recognizes only the benefits reported by survey respondents and ignores the any performance improvements that might have been realized by non-respondents. (Of the 82 surveys sent out, only 46 participants responded.) On the other hand, the Phillips methodology recommends accounting for training costs for *all participants*—including both survey respondents and non-respondents.

4. The results of the Capability Questionnaire indicate that “approximately one-third of participants reported that they lacked ideas or plans for where or how they would apply their learning.”

RECOMMENDATION This observation suggests that an opportunity exists to enhance

the business impact of the Smarter Meetings training by the development of more robust follow-through strategies to help participants adapt their new skills and knowledge on their return to the workplace.

5. Comments received on the Transfer Questionnaire strongly suggest that a substantial opportunity exists for even greater returns for this kind of training by ensuring management support and the inclusion of a wider subset of the organization in the training activities:

The training... "would be much more effective if this was available company-wide."

"Would be nice to see everyone on the same page of understanding so all our meetings get more efficient."

"We need to achieve a critical mass within the organization in order to really have this program embraced and used to its full potential."

"Make sure that management and executives are trained in this and then lead by example."

RECOMMENDATION Clearly if the training has potential value (78% of respondents reported that training was "a worthwhile investment for WestJet"), the organization may be able to substantially leverage the generous returns these results suggest by considering a training strategy that would integrate a wider pool of participants and encourage the support and participation of senior management.

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