



Agilent Technologies

Global Leadership Training with an On-the-Job Focus

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Agilent Technologies' innovative approach to global leadership development redefines the “finish line” of training from the last day of class to on-the-job application. An Internet-based system is used to encourage and track follow-through, with positive impact on the roles and responsibilities of participants, managers, and the learning organization.

INTRODUCTION

Agilent Technologies is the world leader in the test and measurement market. Agilent delivers innovative technologies, solutions, and services to a wide range of customers in communications, electronics, life sciences, and chemical analysis. Agilent is truly global, with more than half of its revenue generated outside the United States.

Agilent was formed in 1999 as part of the strategic realignment of Hewlett-Packard. Following its successful initial public offering in 1999, Agilent became a fully independent company. Becoming a stand-alone company provided Agilent with the rare opportunity to redefine its core values, vision, and strategy.

In doing so, Agilent recognized that “winning innovation” was core to its overall strategy of being the global technology leader. Innovation has been central to Agilent's success, reaching back to Hewlett-Packard's beginnings in the

garage where Bill Hewlett and Dave Packard began. Innovation is truly part of Agilent's "DNA." Agilent's success as a corporation depends on ensuring that innovation permeates every product, every department and function, and every process. This strategy requires a never-ending search for new ways to deliver new products to customers better and faster than anyone else. These concepts of "winning innovation" and the challenge of continuous improvement apply as much to global leadership development as they do to designing and manufacturing new products.

A strategy of "winning innovation" in a global marketplace requires real commitment to employee development. Innovation thrives only in an environment of enlightened leadership in which continuous learning is supported, expected, and rewarded. Agilent's executive leadership regards employee development as a cornerstone of its strategy for winning at innovation.

Strong support from senior management does not mean a blank check, however. Indeed, strong support leads to high expectations. Global Learning and Leadership Development is, as is every department at Agilent, expected to deliver results and to innovate. Simply continuing to do what has been done in the past is not sufficient. This has been especially true in recent years as economic challenges have put unprecedented pressure on training and development budgets.

This chapter describes an innovation in global leadership development: redefining the finish line for leadership training and development. It is still very much a work in progress; Agilent's Global Learning and Leadership and Development group continues to innovate and learn. The best practices and insights that have been identified to date are presented here to help accelerate and improve the impact of development in other global organizations.

FOLLOWING THROUGH BEYOND TRAINING

The core concept is simple: "The course is not the finish line." That is, a leadership development program cannot be considered complete—and therefore "successful"—until its teachings have been taken back to the workplace and applied regularly so that they become part of the culture. This is the problem of learning transfer. While much has been written about the importance of assuring learning transfer, most programs and most learners continue to operate as if the last day of class is the end of the process—the finish line. Contact between the learning organization and the learner ceases as soon as the last class is over, at least until it is time to recruit attendees for the next program. Follow-through, coaching, and manager involvement are left to individual initiative. This can be especially true for global organizations like Agilent, in which both instructors and learners are dispersed across the world.

Agilent realized that the postcourse period was fertile ground for innovation. Improving the rate of knowledge transfer is vital to increasing the return on the investment in training and development.

To help ensure that the application of learning continues after the course itself, Agilent introduced a systematic approach to postcourse follow-through. The impact of thinking about skills development beyond the last day of class has been positive and profound. It has created new partnerships and opportunities, compelled us to reexamine many roles and long-held beliefs, and opened new opportunities.

Redefining the finish line from delivery of courses to delivery of results through transfer and application is a true paradigm shift. It challenges many of the tacit assumptions about the role of training and development. It affects how Agilent approaches development, how it invests time and money in training, and how it measures success.

As Agilent began to focus on transfer and application, rather than just delivery of courses, it became clear that most of the traditional measures of development were not relevant. For example, the number of programs delivered and the number of attendees are measures of activity, not productivity. It does not matter how many people attend a program unless there is evidence that attending is followed by new and more effective behaviors on the job. Likewise, course evaluation measures have little meaning unless they are correlated with enhanced learning transfer and business results.¹ Table 1.1 summarizes the basic difference of perspective.

Redefining the endpoint of a development program creates new opportunities to partner with the business, as well as new responsibilities and accountability. Managers play a key role in supporting or impeding the transfer of knowledge following a development program.² Once Agilent began to focus on results, it became apparent that Global Learning and Development needed to do a much better job of preparing, engaging, and supporting managers in their roles in facilitating knowledge transfer.

Table 1.1. Traditional Versus Innovative Finish Line

<i>Perspective on Training</i>	<i>Perception of Finish Line</i>	<i>Measures of Success</i>
Traditional	When class ends	Ratings on end-of-class evaluations; number of attendees
Innovative	Weeks or months after training when new skills and knowledge are embedded in work of the organization	Positive changes in behavior; business and personal results

Likewise, Agilent realized that facilitators had to stay engaged with the participants after they completed the course. Most programs drop learners like “hot potatoes” as soon as the course ends. Instructors start preparing and thinking about the next program sometimes even before the current one ends.

Agilent realized that this is suboptimal. Facilitators are selected for their superior knowledge and teaching ability. During the program, participants come to value the facilitator’s knowledge, opinion, and advice. Yet, historically, teaching ended when the class ended; communication was cut off. As a result, there was no support for learning transfer from the facilitators—the very people with the greatest insight into the material and whose opinion the learners value most.

To address this issue, Agilent redefined the finish line for its facilitators as well as for the participants. Facilitators are now expected to stay in touch with the class during the weeks immediately following the program and to provide ongoing guidance and encouragement.

To make the process scalable and efficient, Agilent is using a commercial follow-through management system called *Friday5s*[®]. Each time a program for new managers is offered, an account is created for each of the participants in *Friday5s*. The participants’ learning goals are transferred to the system, where they can be viewed by the facilitators as well as participants’ managers and other course members. Participants update their progress every two weeks over a ten-week follow-through period. Facilitators can review participants’ goals and their progress using a special access key. They can respond to queries directly from the site as well as provide online coaching and encouragement.

The results have been impressive in three respects:

1. *An ongoing dialogue is created between learners and facilitators so that facilitators achieve the Robinsons’ vision of moving beyond training and become true performance consultants.*³ In the ten weeks following a recent program in Penang, Malaysia, for example, the facilitator provided sixty-nine separate comments and suggestions to participants to assist them in the application process.
2. *Participants are more actively engaged in applying their learning.* As one commented, “This is probably the first time that I have really taken action after a training course.” Since the new process was implemented in March 2003, more than six hundred managers have attended programs in Asia, Australia, Europe, and North America. They have filed nearly 1,800 updates of their efforts to apply what they learned in the ten-week follow-through period after each program, an average of three per person.
3. *The program is truly global.* Because the program manager can review the ongoing coaching that is occurring anywhere in the world, he is much better able to create a common understanding and

approach among facilitators, even though they are dispersed across four continents.

What Agilent is doing is compelling and unique. It serves as a practical model for moving beyond training to true human performance enhancement on a global basis. Although the process has already yielded positive results, the leadership of Global Learning and Leadership Development at Agilent believes that the company has only begun to tap its full potential.

SYSTEMIC CHANGE IS NEEDED

An important caveat: Introducing follow-through and moving the finish line cannot succeed as an isolated initiative. It needs to be approached strategically and systemically. At Agilent, this depth of approach has been facilitated by a process called “the 6Ds™” and by a Web-based management tool.

A Six-Discipline Model

Figure 1.1 illustrates 6Ds, a model of disciplines that has proved useful in turning corporate learning into business results as Agilent has thought through all the factors that affect learning transfer and business impact.

Looking at the 6Ds, Agilent’s global learning group realized it had done an excellent job on the first three disciplines: defining the needs of the business,

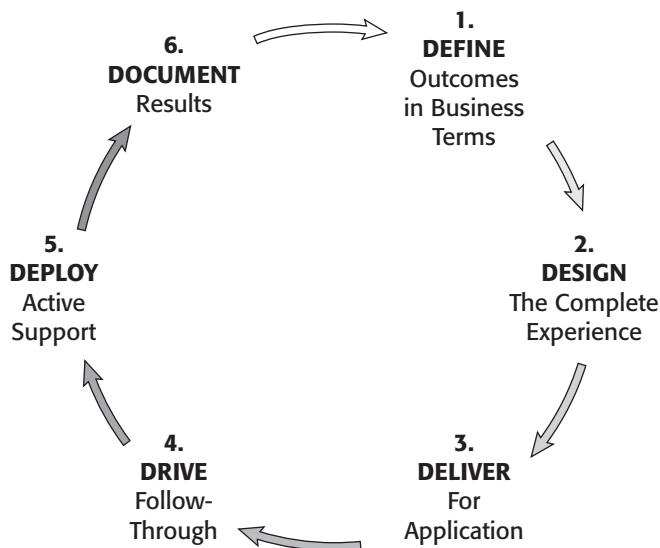


Figure 1.1 The 6Ds

designing the experience, and delivering a high-quality program aimed at application. However, they also saw they had not given enough thought to the last three in the value chain: driving follow-through and application, deploying active support following the program, and documenting results. Accepting the adage that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, Agilent focused on ensuring follow-through, providing support, and tracking results in order to strengthen the overall chain and increase the program's impact.

Follow-Through Management

Another important component of Agilent's approach is an innovative Web-based Follow-Through Management™ system called *Friday5s*, developed by the Fort Hill Company in Montchanin, Delaware. An overview of the process is as follows:

1. On the last day of the program, participants are asked to write two objectives for how they will apply what they have learned in the program to their jobs. Unlike most programs, where these objectives are simply retained by the participants, Agilent collects each person's objectives and has them entered into the follow-through system database.
2. One week after the program, the follow-through system sends a copy of each participant's goals to his or her manager with a request that the manager provide feedback and support for each achievement. The manager is provided with a link to an online form to provide written feedback on the goals as appropriate.
3. One week after the program, and then every other week for a total of five times, participants are asked to complete a brief update online, reporting on the progress that they have made as well as what they intend to do next.
4. Each time a participant completes an update, he or she can forward a copy to his or her manager or coach for feedback. Participants also have access to the updates of other members of their cohort. The facilitators who lead the class have access to the updates of all the group members and are able to monitor progress and provide coaching electronically.

NEW ROLES AND NEW RESPONSIBILITIES

As part of the mission of Global Learning and Leadership Development, encouraging follow-through and providing ongoing support have had a profound and potentially revolutionary impact on Agilent. It has taken the company to a whole new level of thinking about what and how training and development

should contribute to its health. It has changed the way Agilent thinks about partnership with businesses, managers, and participants.

In particular, it became apparent that learning must become “part of the work” of the participants, rather than taking place “apart from their work.” The old paradigm at Agilent was to take people off to an experience where they *talked about* how they would apply what they had learned. Agilent even had them write action plans, but the whole process was mostly lip service. Without a system to encourage follow-through, the actual application was low; once the course was over, people tended to put their notebooks on the shelf and return to business as usual.

Now Agilent is committed to ensuring that development experiences are tied to actual accountabilities, that program participants’ goals for applying what they learned are things that they are *already* accountable for, as opposed to something separate from their work. This commitment forces participants to better align learning with their own personal goals. While this change sounds simple, it is actually a profound change, and a best practice skill.

Agilent’s Global Learning and Leadership Development group finds its approach much more powerful than much of what passes for “action learning,” which can quickly deteriorate into “just another project.” In the group’s experience, the ability to track the program follow-through by documenting its application to work, behavior change, and results provides much greater insight into the impact of Agilent’s programs than what can be seen in other learning organizations.

The vast majority of learning programs conclude with an evaluation of the course as participants walk out the door. The learning “dashboard” in such companies consists of a single instrument labeled “how they liked the course,” an unreliable indicator as to how well the learning will be applied. The follow-through system that Agilent has implemented provides a much richer “instrument panel” with which to guide the program and make course corrections and improvements. The system includes reports and graphs that make it possible to analyze the quality and distribution of learning objectives; the frequency and thoughtfulness of updates; the quality and frequency of coaching; the most important “lessons learned” in the course and on the job; and the examples of achievement that are a direct consequence of the program.

Redefining the finish line from the last day of class to the delivery of results has altered virtually every role in the learning process, from the employees who participate and their managers to program managers, facilitators, and sponsors.

Employees

Employees become more responsible for their own development when application and results are clearly expected and when the learning organization follows through in a meaningful way. They realize they are expected to use what they learn rather than just attend and listen. Because program participants are

reminded and supported to turn what they learn into action after their course, they become active doers rather than passive receptacles. Learning is integrated with what they are accountable for, rather than being a distinct and disconnected exercise, and results are achieved. Exhibit 1.1 provides three examples of how participants view their achievements.

The expectation of results and the purposeful engagement of the manager in goals and feedback changes and deepens participants' relationship with their managers. Comments from managers to participants take place at a whole new level, as Exhibit 1.2 illustrates.

Exhibit 1.1. Examples of Participant Comments

Goal: Giving and Receiving Feedback

"The whole team is committed to success and to add value for the team, organization and company. By referring to the specific behavior and associated implications, they understand the action/behavior that leads to results. The adjustment of behavior quickly returns with desirable outcomes and people are encouraged." (Hong Kong)

Goal: Setting Clear Priorities and Expectations

"The team has clear targets and timelines. The road map has been identified and we are making progress in the project." (India)

Goal: Leading High-Performance Teams

"I feel particularly good about aligning my team's objectives to the division priorities by using some of the Best Practices from the 'Best Practices for Team Performance' manual we received in the class." (United States)

Exhibit 1.2. Examples of Follow-Through System Dialogue

Dear M_____,

I am looking forward to being part of your meeting next week and seeing you put in practice some of these management skills. Please let me encourage you to continue to work on them. Leadership is in short supply these days. Your efforts will pay dividends in the future.

Dear T_____,

You appear to be on the right track at this point. Remember, learning is remembering and applying what's important.

As for finding time, take baby steps and keep moving forward. This is better than taking a few giant steps.

Managers

The partnership between managers and their direct reports is paramount. Managerial support accelerates leadership development; managerial indifference or antagonisms delay it. Yet the manager's role is overlooked by most programs, or it is paid little attention. Active efforts must be made to engage participants' managers, making sure they know the intent of the program and their direct reports' objectives. These efforts will increase the dialogue between managers and their direct reports, extending and amplifying the program and providing, as Exhibit 1.2 illustrates, "a gift that keeps on giving." Agilent continues to explore ways to support and deepen this relationship.

Development Program Manager

Redefining the finish line for development significantly expands and enhances the role of a development program manager. No longer is he or she simply in charge of delivering well-liked courses. Instead, the program manager becomes truly pivotal in ensuring that the development program delivers on its promise of building global leadership capacity.

Expectations for development program managers also change. They must be able to demonstrate that the program is, in fact, changing behavior and building leadership capability. That is very different than the traditional responsibility for generating high scoring "smile sheets," which in turn requires different expectations and management of facilitators. Program managers need the tools and authority to hold facilitators accountable for supporting application and implementation, rather than just for "learning" in the abstract.

At Agilent, the program manager's role is filled by Dominic Ward, the program director for Managing@Agilent. Managing@Agilent is a worldwide program for employees new to people management. As such, it is the vital first rung on the overall leadership development ladder at Agilent. It is designed to increase the overall managerial efficiency, focus, and speed of its participants. This intensive, three-day program is offered in many locations throughout the world, using local facilitators but a common curriculum. It includes presentations by senior business leaders, lectures, discussions, active learning exercises, and work in smaller groups. At the conclusion of the program, participants are expected to set two goals to transfer what they learned in the program to their work as managers in a way that improves their performance and that of their team. These goals are entered into the *Friday5s* system and are updated biweekly.

Using *Friday5s*, Program Director Ward is able to manage worldwide implementation and track participation, follow-through, and coaching in real time. For example, he can access a database of goals participants have committed to as they completed their class. A report generator allows him to analyze activity and progress by region, course instructor, and dates of progress that participants are making on those goals. Exhibit 1.3 provides examples of progress and re-

Exhibit 1.3. Examples of Participants' Progress

Comments like these in relation to goals can be viewed by the program director. They show learners becoming doers when support, follow-through, and integration of learning with priority work are achieved.

Goal: Follow-Through

“I’ve found the goal setting and the follow-up the most valuable, often with courses like this you never actively go back and review what you have learned and how you have applied in the workplace.” (Australia)

“The follow-through by Friday5s is a good tool to help. It forced me to plan my development, and track regularly. Now I have a deep understanding of why it says management is practice instead of saying.” (China)

Goal: Improving Team Performance

“There is more knowledge sharing and trust across the team. The team had varied perspective of where we were as a team, at the beginning of the exercise, but we reached a consensus of being at the trust building stage and working from there on.” (India)

Goal: Setting Clear Priorities and Expectations

“The customer satisfaction has improved. There is improvement in efficiency due to lesser rework.” (India)

“Assignment completed within time and with limited resource bringing confidence on global hub performance and achieving the required cost saving.” (India)

“Team members have clear knowledge of what’s important and can focus on those targets.” (Malaysia)

Goal: Situational Leadership

“I have learnt to use different ‘strokes’ for different ‘folks’ according to their development levels.” (Singapore)

sults that can be viewed. Dominic can also see the coaching and feedback participants are receiving. He then is able to communicate directly with the facilitators and specific groups or individuals as necessary. This facilitates regular reviews of the activity in each of the groups around the globe.

The result is that, as program director, Ward has gained much deeper insight into how effectively the program is being implemented around the globe. He is able to shed light on what, for most programs, is a “black hole”—that happens after the participants walk out the classroom door. Importantly, Ward’s Web-based access levels the playing field; it no longer matters where people are

located. He is able to monitor, congratulate, coach, encourage, or prod individual course leaders as appropriate.

Facilitators

Shifting the finish line to results has a significant effect on the facilitator's role. Facilitators must move from the "sage on a stage" to a "guide by the side," from a facilitator of learning to facilitator of performance. The ability to track goals and actions requires much more accountability and a higher level of skill than just being able to "stand and deliver." It also requires a shift in resources.

Training and development organizations have traditionally been funded and staffed based on the number of courses and classroom hours. No time or resources have been allocated to following up and assisting in implementation. Yet the postprogram implementation phase is an important point of leverage. At Agilent, facilitators are given time and are paid to provide follow-through support, guidance, and coaching. They are also held accountable for doing so. Indeed, part of the certification process is that they agree to play this ongoing role.

Not all facilitators are comfortable with these new responsibilities, which are very different from their traditional role. Learning and development organizations need to help them retool for their new responsibilities and help them appreciate the tremendous opportunities that follow-through creates for them to contribute in an even more meaningful way. Freeing time for facilitators to provide support for learning transfer may mean that fewer people are taught each year. Agilent's position is that it is better to teach and support a smaller number in a way that ensures results than to run a larger number through an ineffective mill.

Sponsor

Moving the finish line beyond the last day of class requires strong support from senior leaders, since it requires setting a different expectation than in the past. At Agilent, the invitation letter to `Managing@Agilent` is signed by Agilent's chief operating officer, the executive sponsor for this program. He sends a voicemail to all participants prior to the program in which he underscores his expectations, emphasizing application and the requirement of putting learning to work. Sponsors who want to see results from learning and development must be willing to become actively engaged in changing the paradigm.

Leader of Global Learning and Leadership Development

The real job of a leader of leadership development, whatever his or her specific title, is to be a "leader in the business." That means, among other things, anticipating what is needed by the business and looking for innovative ways to do things better and more efficiently. Leaders of leadership development need to show courage and a willingness to change. Leadership development needs to focus on "enhancing capability" rather than simply delivering programs, which in turn requires redefining the finish line.

The leader of global leadership development must bring together all the components of a system to successfully move the finish line:

- Revised roles and expectations of the key players
- Follow-through management systems
- Managerial support
- Appropriate measurement of results

No longer will “learning leaders” at Agilent say, “Five hundred and fifty people have gone through this program and they all liked it, so that means it was successful.” Agilent can now see where its leadership development efforts are going, down to the specific types of goals that are laid out as postcourse objectives, as shown in Figure 1.2. One advantage of entering participants’ goals into a database is the ability to analyze their distribution and quality. As expected, the largest numbers of goals at Agilent are related to the use of situational leadership concepts and building high-performance teams.

BENEFITS OF AN INTERNET-BASED SYSTEM

The preceding discussion has already suggested some ways that using an Internet-based follow-through system benefits Agilent’s leadership development program. This section expands on how it improves and provides important insights into the postcourse period.

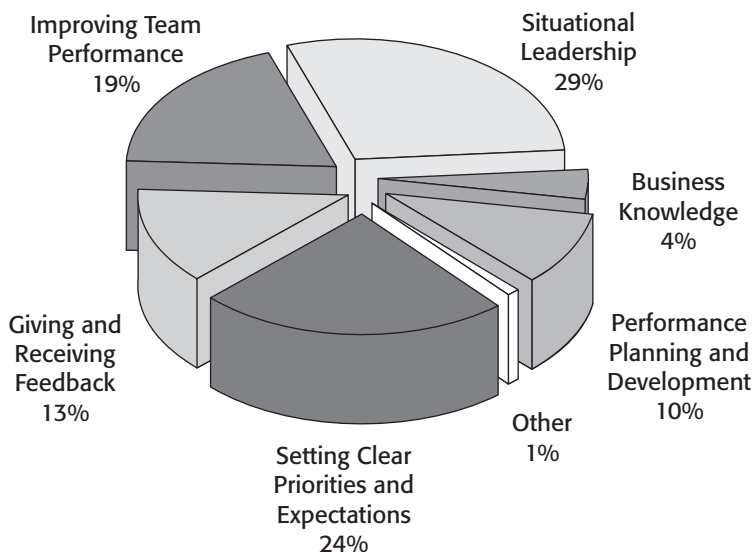


Figure 1.2 Distribution of Postcourse Objectives

As several exhibits have already shown, entering the participant's developmental goals into a database has made it possible to analyze the quality and distribution of postcourse goals, how participants plan to apply what they learned, and what they believe they will accomplish as a result. By comparing the focus of participants when they leave the program to the desired outcomes, the program director is able, if necessary, to make adjustments to the relative emphasis of topics in the program.

For example, the director's ability to rapidly review the text of a large number of objectives has led to identifying a significant weakness in the goal-setting process related to objectives that were poorly stated, vague, or not time bound. A revision to the goal-setting process that includes the use of suggested language resulted in much more specific and well-crafted objectives.

Sending a copy of the goals to each participant's manager assures that the manager is informed of his or her direct report's plans for follow-through on what he or she has learned. It is an important first step in engaging the manager in learning transfer. In some cases, this is the first time managers have been informed of their subordinates' goals for learning application. Many managers take advantage of the link to provide written feedback to their subordinates about the objectives they have selected. For example, here is an excerpt of comments from a Korean manager to one of his direct reports: "I like the objectives and specific goals that you have set up for yourself. You need the rigor of following through and making sure that everything happens. I specifically like the idea of getting the new members of your team developed and operational. It will assist the rest of your team if new members can provide capabilities independently and also would expand your depth and breadth to go after new business. Let me know if I can assist you."

Because this follow-through approach is Internet-based, it is ideal for Agilent's globally dispersed learning organization. From his office in Edinburgh, Scotland, Program Manager Dominic Ward can review the progress of programs conducted anywhere in the world, including the level and quality of coaching being provided by program facilitators. Facilitators can maintain contact with their trainees, even in the most widely dispersed regions. Indeed, they are expected to spend at least two hours a week using the online follow-through system to review progress and provide support and counsel. And the written progress reports provide concrete examples of the positive impact of the program for management review.

NEXT STEPS

In its spirit of "winning innovation," Agilent will continue to look for new and better ways to strengthen its development programs. The company feels that it remains on the steep part of the learning curve with respect to redefining the finish line and is astounded by the richness that continues to evolve.

Certain areas have also been identified for further improvement (for example, ways to get managers even better informed and more engaged). Other opportunities for continuous improvement include:

- Further improving goal setting; linking goals for application to accountabilities the person already has and better integrating development with performance management
- Better preparing learners, facilitators, and managers for their new roles
- Improving the feedback loop to establish an ongoing continuous improvement cycle
- Determining how to take what has been learned so far and apply it to Agilent's whole portfolio of offerings

In the future, Agilent envisions embedding systematic follow-through in all of its programs, making it a standard operating process—the way Agilent approaches all training and development. Agilent also wants to share what it has learned about follow-through with others and to learn from them as well.

SUMMARY

The best practice in global leadership development is to redefine the “finish line” from the last day of class to the delivery of results from the application of learning. At Agilent, this redefinition of development's role has had profound and exciting implications on the various roles as learners, managers, facilitators, and development professionals.

The Agilent Global Learning and Leadership Development group has used a 6Ds model to discipline its thinking about effective leadership training and development. It has used an online follow-through management system to allow it to redefine the finish line. The system has made it possible to produce and document results at the individual, participant, class, and facilitator levels and also on regional and international levels. Now that co-location is a thing of the past, the new approach has been especially important for Agilent's globally competitive, geographically dispersed workforce.

Follow-through technology by itself is not the answer. It must be part of a systemic and systematic approach that optimizes all of the links in the value chain and that redefines roles and responsibilities in a way that maximizes the value that learning and leadership development deliver to the entire company.

The new finish line and follow-through management have the potential to truly revolutionize development and greatly enhance the return on its investment.



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