

Learning Approaches

Educators have many approaches to help people learn. Some are more effective than others. Effectiveness varies by individuals; people differ in how they learn. As recommended below, learners gain the most knowledge and skills from a combination of the following approaches.

Instructor-led training: Generally, people learn more in classrooms. Instructor-led field exercises are also very effective. Trainers must know their material and how to teach adults. They must prepare clear and organized presentations. They should have handouts so learners can follow the presentation. Handouts are useful for reference in the workplace. Instructors are most effective when they engage learners through discussion and exercises.

Although effective, instructor-led training can be costly in terms of both time and money. Therefore, municipalities should be sure they invest in high quality training. The International Association of Education and Training (IACET) has criteria for effective adult learning. The UNH T² Center, among others, apply the IACET criteria to their training activities.

Book learning: Some people learn effectively from written materials. Books and periodicals provide new ideas and information. They also enable readers to refresh and clarify prior learning.

Book learning is relatively inexpensive and easy to administer. However, reading alone seldom develops new skills or results in changed behavior. For the best return on investment, many individuals should read the book, and then participate in group or departmental discussions.

Video learning: Videos add a visual component that helps many people learn. Otherwise, it has the advantages and disadvantages of books. Studies have shown that video learning is especially effective if groups view and discuss the video.

E-learning: Many new web-based learning programs are becoming available. They vary in purpose as well as effectiveness. Some only provide information, often with pictures and at times with videos. Some programs are essentially courses on

computers. Learners read materials, and then answer questions or take exams.

Effectiveness depends largely on the learning style of the learner. Computer operation skills can also be a factor. In general, learners develop few new job-related skills, and retain the information for only a short time. Advantages include lower travel costs and greater personal convenience.

Action learning: Nearly everyone learns by doing. The process is real-time, work-related problem solving. A group of employees solves work problems or improves processes. For individuals, it can result in self-discovery and increased confidence. For the group, it can build confidence in each other, and shows what they can accomplish together

The advantage is its relevance to the workplace. The disadvantage is that it tends to be reactive; "When there is a problem, we fix it."

On-the-job training: This approach includes mentoring, tutoring, or coaching. It is especially effective for skills training. The mentor, tutor or coach must have personal relations skills as well as be skilled in the subject. The advantage is that learning is personalized, both to the individual and the situation. On the other hand, it is usually time consuming and limited to special situations.

Combining Approaches

Combining the above approaches expands as well as reinforces learning. For example, after **instructor-led** training, managers can set up **action** learning and **on-the-job** training situations. They can similarly combine **book** or **video** learning with **action** and **on-the-job** learning.

Some e-learning programs incorporate **instructor-led** training. Via email, learners discuss material with the instructor and other learners. Taken by a group of employees, they could combine e-learning with **action** or **on-the-job** training.

Source:
Kokkelenberg, Larry. "Nothing Fails Like Success," *Hot Mix Asphalt Technology*.
July/August 2003.