



# Book Effective Training Strategies

## A Comprehensive Guide to Maximizing Learning in Organizations

James R. Davis and Adelaide B. Davis  
Berrett-Koehler, 1998

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### Recommendation

James R. Davis and Adelaide B. Davis present a comprehensive guide to seven major training strategies, along with underlying learning theories, and examples of how different companies have used these approaches. The book draws on conversations with trainers and the results of research on learning from diverse fields - including psychology, sociology, philosophy, and communications. Its easy organization allows you to quickly extract its major principles, which are highlighted in bold-faced summaries, bullet-pointed lists, numbered rules, and final chapter summaries outlining major conclusions. If you want more depth, you can read the capsule descriptions of companies that have used the approach featured in a chapter. *BooksInShort* recommends this excellent guide to academicians, training professionals, and any managers charged with training new or existing employees.

### Take-Aways

- Everyone in your company should devote themselves to learning.
- Apply different training strategies based on the type of knowledge you wish to convey.
- The seven major training strategies are: behavioral, cognitive, inquiry, mental models, group, virtual, and holistic strategies.
- Use the behavioral training strategy to teach motor or cognitive skills.
- Use the cognitive training strategy to share important information.
- Use the inquiry strategy to promote dialogue and to build critical or creative thinking.
- Use the mental models strategy to teach problem-solving and decision-making skills.
- Use the group dynamics strategy to improve human relations and teamwork.
- The virtual reality strategy involves role playing, dramatic scenarios and simulations.
- The holistic strategy involves mentoring and counseling.

### Summary

# The Importance of Learning

Because of the explosion of knowledge and the globalization of competition today, learning is more important than ever. To continue improving and to compete successfully, your entire organization needs to dedicate itself to learning. All of the individuals in your organization need to be learning all of the time.

“One of the most important tasks in organizations today is knowledge management. Learning in organizations takes on a new importance as workers are forced to learn new ways to apply knowledge to knowledge.”

Whether you are conducting training yourself or hiring trainers, you need to know the best strategies. When you understand these standard methods, which use well-established theories and research, you can increase learning in your organization. Such theories and research come from several fields - notably psychology, sociology, philosophy and communications.

“A true learning organization is made up of individuals throughout the system who are continually learning new things and learning to improve old things.”

Apply different learning-based training strategies, depending on what kind of learning you want to convey. You will encourage learning if you know more about how to learn.

To choose and apply training strategies, you need to understand some basic learning principles. Training is a process in which skills are developed, information is provided, and attitudes are nurtured, to help individuals become more effective and efficient in their work. You must commit your whole organization to learning, because:

1. The learning edge gives companies an advantage.
2. All the people in an organization need to commit themselves to learning, since the organization learns as the individuals within it learn.
3. New technologies usually require major training so the whole system can adapt. The more change occurs and redefines work, the more training you will need to make that learning actually happen. Because change happens so quickly now, every organization must be a learning organization. No organization can survive without perpetual learning.

“It is the learning edge that gives companies the advantage today.”

However, many trainers don't understand learning principles. They have an atheoretical approach to learning, which makes learning less effective. If you understand these principles, you can provide guidance and increase the amount of learning in your organization.

Often, learning goes on informally. People learn things on their own, and in their own way. Thus, prepare yourself to work - or to have trainers work - outside of formal training settings. This will help your employees learn more about learning for themselves.

## Choosing the Best Training Strategies

In choosing a training strategy, consider the characteristics and needs of your organization. Have a philosophy of learning. The first step is to understand your organization. Consider its purpose, type, size, structure and culture in making arrangements for learning.

“Training strategies are based on the solid, well-researched theories about learning that serve as the foundation for effective training.”

For example, the learning needs of business, government and non-profit organizations are all different. Organizations with a rational, human relations-based, technological, or holistic approach have different learning needs. Your firm's learning needs also will depend upon whether your organization is decentralized, distributed, nonhierarchical, fluid, transitory, or information-rich.

“You will be better at facilitating learning if you learn more about learning and then practice what you know.”

Delineate these factors in a characteristics matrix, to help you understand your organization better. This will help you establish your philosophy of learning, which will guide your selection of the training strategies you want to use.

With your learning philosophy as a basic framework, plan for learning. Establish organizational goals. Start by assessing your learners' needs. Define your objectives according to these needs, and identify training that will meet those objectives. Next, organize those learning experiences. Finally, evaluate how well the program has met your objectives. If you do this, you will establish a results-driven planning program based on objective curriculum planning guidelines - such as scope, breadth, depth and sequence.

“The organization learns as the individuals within it learn.”

Why plan? Because if you can identify the learning results you want, then you can select the appropriate training strategy to magnify that kind of learning. Seven training strategies, based on accepted theories of learning, are available to you: 1) behavioral, 2) cognitive, 3) inquiry, 4) mental models, 5) group, 6) virtual, and 7) holistic. Each approach has a repertoire of activities, materials, and media you can use as training tactics. Choose among these, and adapt them to the needs and capabilities of the participants. For full effectiveness, use them with sufficient intensity, frequency, and duration.

## The Behavioral Training Strategy

Use the behavioral training strategy to teach motor or cognitive skills to employees. This strategy requires employees to move to better skill levels - until they reach your stated performance goals.

“A learning organization is one where all of the individuals in it, in their own place and throughout the system, are learning.”

The process came into being through research most associated with the psychologist B.F. Skinner. However, Skinner drew on the work of John B. Watson and E. L. Thorndike, who first looked at the relationship between a response and the consequences of that response. This approach relates to operant conditioning, in which learning occurs through a shaping process. The learner experiences rewards for increasingly moving toward a goal. While much of the early research involved animals, the process works with human learning, too.

“New technologies often involve the revision of whole systems. New technologies usually have high order-of-magnitude implications for learning.”

In using this model, start with task analysis. Break the learning into its component parts, to identify its steps and sequence. Then, establish rewards for achieving the tasks your trainees should master. Learners want to avoid negative reinforcement for not learning the tasks. They also must experience feedback to move toward their goal. Use this approach through personal training, or through a computerized instructional program.

## The Cognitive Training Strategy

Use the cognitive training strategy when you are sharing important information or explaining how things work. The cognitive learning theory describes how we pay attention to, process, or remember information. Verbal learning theorists, linguists, and systems analysts first conducted this research in the 1950s. It gave rise to the field of cognitive psychology.

“The greater the organizational change and the greater the redefinition of the work, the more training is required to make it actually happen.”

The key to making this approach work is having participants who pay attention to, process, and remember information. This way, they absorb the information in short-term memory and then move it effectively into long-term memory. Although our ability to pay attention has its limits, we learn best when we do so.

“Very few people in the business of training, whatever organization they serve, have had much opportunity to learn about learning.”

Start by doing what is necessary to get the learners' attention. Let participants know what needs to be their focus. Don't try to teach them too much. Slow down as necessary to keep their attention. Don't try to compete with distractions. Help participants recognize the overall patterns. Present information in context, since people learn better that way. Build bridges to their prior knowledge and

actively involve them.

## **The Inquiry Training Strategy**

Use the inquiry training strategy to promote critical, creative thinking skills. Its underlying philosophy comes from theories about different thinking processes and about creativity. Some of these philosophies stem from classical ideas about learning, including the work of Aristotle.

Help learners better analyze evidence or build arguments. Critical thinking requires justifying an argument or seeking reasons to support a conclusion. Creative thinking involves seeking original ideas. It promotes exploration, requires flexibility and encourages diversity. This strategy also promotes learning through dialogue, which requires seeking empathy with others - you can better examine others' arguments and views and compare them with your own.

## **The Mental Models Training Strategy**

Apply the mental models training strategy to teach problem solving and decision making. Its underlying philosophy comes from classical and modern problem-solving and decision theory, deriving from Newall and Simon's basic problem-solving model and Pascal's expected utility-decision theory.

If you promote better problem solving, people can generate better solutions for positive change. By using mental models, people learn to go through various steps to reach solutions. Decision-makers can use mental models to predict likely outcomes more effectively.

## **The Group Dynamics Training Strategy**

Use the Group Dynamics Training Strategy when you want to improve human relations and build teamwork. In this case, the underlying philosophy derives from group communications theory and from knowledge about group interaction and team activities.

You can use this approach to re-examine the emotional basis of how people's opinions, attitudes and beliefs help them collaborate. Motivation for this kind of learning comes from the desire for personal growth, for inclusion in groups of people, and for recognition from others.

## **The Virtual Reality Training Strategy**

The virtual reality learning strategy requires role playing and staging dramatic scenarios and simulations. This kind of learning is good for developing participants' confidence through the use of a simulation - rather than in a real-life situation fraught with danger. The roots for this learning spring from simulation and gaming theory. Some of the early work comes from E.L. Moreno, who developed psychodrama and sociodrama. This approach also draws upon the use of war game scenarios.

This approach is especially ideal for situations in which a live experience is too dangerous or expensive, or if you want participants to practice under controlled conditions first. It works best when participants already have some level of proficiency and when they are comfortable acting out their roles. You can use either low-tech or high-tech virtual realities in this training process.

## **The Holistic Training Strategy**

The holistic training strategy involves mentoring and counseling. This approach works best when trainers - as skilled learners and mentors - can apply what they have already used to guide a learner. They then can both challenge and support the learner. The roots for this learning come from counseling theory, drawn from Freud's talking cure and Roger's client-centered therapy. It especially is good in experienced-based learning settings - such as cross-cultural situations, where mentors or counselors can guide the learners by sharing what they already know.

## **About the Authors**

**James R. Davis** is a professor of higher education at the University of Denver. His books include *Better Teaching, More Learning*

and *Interdisciplinary Courses and Team Teaching*. **Adelaide B. Davis** has served as a training analyst for COPASA, a public utilities company, and has taught human resource management.

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