THE REVISED AND UPDATED ESSENTIAL TRAINER'S RESOURCE!

The Trainer's Handbook is the classic resource trainers—internal or external, full-time or part-time—have come to rely on for designing, developing, and delivering effective and memorable training. It offers a comprehensive and systematic approach to developing training skills and competencies. Thoroughly revised and updated, this fourth edition addresses the increasing demands on learning and development professionals as they grapple with issues of globalization, rapidly changing technology, and a more sophisticated and diverse group of learners that has changed the way knowledge and skills are transferred to the workplace. This new edition includes expanded information on cultural differences, reveals how differences impact training, and suggests tips and techniques for training across cultures. Training in tough economic times receives special consideration and the text also explores storytelling as a leadership and training tool. And because today's trainers are called upon to deliver training in many ways, the text also includes a structured, efficient approach to on-the-job training.

Designed as a practical resource, *The Trainer's Handbook* is filled with helpful checklists, forms, and specific activities that can be put to use right now to design, develop, and deliver your own exceptional training programs. In addition, the book's website makes it a snap to print the tables and exhibits that are included in the text.

Filled with the knowledge and a proven framework *The Trainer's Handbook* gives you the power to deliver useful information in an accessible way and create specialized instructional plans for groups, distance learning, and active training programs.

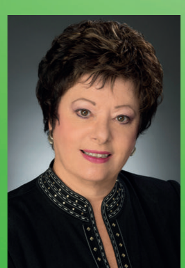

Photo Credit: Amanda Stevenson Photo

KAREN LAWSON, PhD, is an international consultant, speaker, and author. As founder and president of Lawson Consulting Group, Inc., she is the author of *Leadership Development Basics*, *The Art of Influencing*, *Improving Workplace Performance Through Coaching*, *Improving On-the-Job Training and Coaching*, *SkillBuilders: 50 Communication Skills Activities*, *New Employee Orientation Training*, and *Involving Your Audience—Make It Active*. She is coauthor of *101 Ways to Make Training Active* (first edition) and has published dozens of articles in professional journals.

Cover Design: Wiley
Cover Image: © iStock.com/malija

WILEY

Also available as an e-book

BUSINESS & ECONOMICS/
Human Resources & Personnel Management

ISBN 978-1-118-93313-8
90000
9 781118 933138

Lawson

THE TRAINER'S HANDBOOK

Fourth Edition

WILEY

THE TRAINER'S HANDBOOK

Fourth Edition

Karen Lawson

WILEY

The Trainer's Handbook

Fourth Edition

Karen Lawson

Wiley

This book is printed on acid-free paper. ∞

Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey
Published simultaneously in Canada

For general information about our other products and services, please contact our Customer Care Department within the United States at (800) 762-2974, outside the United States at (317) 572-3993 or fax (317) 572-4002.

Wiley publishes in a variety of print and electronic formats and by print-on-demand. Some material included with standard print versions of this book may not be included in e-books or in print-on-demand. If this book refers to media such as a CD or DVD that is not included in the version you purchased, you may download this material at http://booksupport.wiley.com. For more information about Wiley products, visit www.wiley.com.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

Names: Lawson, Karen.
Title: The trainer's handbook / Karen Lawson.
Description: Fourth edition. | Hoboken : Wiley, 2015. | Revised edition of the author's The trainer's handbook, 2009. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2015036769 (print) | LCCN 2015041901 (ebook) | ISBN 9781118933138 (paperback) | ISBN 9781118933152 (pdf) | ISBN 9781118933145 (epub)
Subjects: LCSH: Employees—Training of—Handbooks, manuals, etc. | Training—Handbooks, manuals, etc. | BISAC: BUSINESS & ECONOMICS / Human Resources & Personnel Management.
Classification: LCC HF5549.5.T7 L344 2015 (print) | LCC HF5549.5.T7 (ebook) | DDC 658.3/1243—dc23
LC record available at http://lccn.loc.gov/2015036769

Cover Image: © iStock.com/malija
Cover Design: Wiley

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

List of Tables, Exhibits, and Figures

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the many people who have attended my training sessions throughout the years. In essence, they are the authors of this book. They have taught me what it means to be a learning and development/training professional.

I am grateful to the many training professionals who have shared their tips and techniques from conference platforms and also one-on-one. Many of those colleagues have become my close friends. In particular, I thank Steve Sugar for his willingness to share games, ideas, and materials. I also thank my dear friend, Harriet Rifkin, with whom I have shared the joy and pain of growing as a training professional, for her caring and sharing.

I thank my editor, Matt Davis, for his patience, understanding, and encouragement.

Finally, to my husband, Bob Lawson, I can never adequately express how much I appreciate his love and support throughout the years. I also thank him for his belief in me when I didn't believe in myself. He is my colleague and partner, my champion and much-needed critic, but most of all, he is my best friend.

Preface

The field of workplace learning and development is growing by leaps and bounds. Along with the growth of the industry comes the demand for trainers. For our purposes, "trainer" refers to anyone who is responsible for delivering primarily classroom instruction, but with the growing use of technology in training, the term also applies to someone who may be designing and delivering nonclassroom-based training as well. A trainer might be an internal HRD professional responsible for providing training to the organization's employees. A trainer can also be a subject-matter expert who has been enlisted as a full-time professional trainer. Another category of trainers includes those who deliver training on a part-time basis as part of their overall job responsibilities. The term also applies to the external practitioner who contracts with an organization to design and/or deliver training programs. Often the external trainer is a casualty of corporate downsizing or maybe someone who just wants a career change. In either case, this individual has turned to the training profession as a means of utilizing skills or expertise in a particular discipline or subject area.

Internal or external, full-time or part-time, the demand for trainers often exceeds the supply. To meet this need, organizations often turn to those in line positions as a talent pool for trainers. More and more, people are being asked to deliver training as part of their jobs. These "nontrainers" or subject-matter experts are expected to deliver training, not just present information. Unfortunately, these folks have received little or no formal instruction on how to train. They are thrown into the position to sink or swim. Left to their own devices, they find themselves training the way they were trained or taught. In many situations, that means a didactic approach in which the trainer stands in front of participants and dumps information on often-unhearing ears.

Although the approach just described never really worked as a sole method of training adult learners, it is even less effective today. Trainers are no longer viewed as merely disseminators of information. They are now expected to be facilitators, agents of learning, and performance consultants. These new roles require them to direct their efforts away from specific task-oriented instruction and to concentrate on helping people and organizations improve performance.

Trainers need to design, develop, and deliver training that encourages people at all levels of the organization to take responsibility for their own learning. The trainer becomes a catalyst, a resource person, and often a coach to help people through the discovery process.

The effective trainer will also have to understand business needs and identify how those needs are linked to learning and performance needs. Quite simply, the purpose of training is to help line managers solve business problems. Trainers must develop partnerships with those managers who are ultimately accountable for the success of training. Before this can happen, however, trainers must become proficient at the skills and competencies that define them as professionals. Every profession requires its practitioners to master a certain body of knowledge and a set of skills. The training profession should be no different.

To that end, this book, written primarily for the novice classroom-based trainer, presents a comprehensive, systematic approach to developing training skills and competencies. Those who are thrown into full-time, professional training positions with little or no formal training will be able to use this book to learn the fundamentals of training or supplement what they already know. They can be brought "up to speed" in a relatively short period of time. Although best suited to the new trainer, this book is a good reference for those with more experience. Experienced trainers will learn new tips and techniques to enhance their current skills and help them deliver on-target training that meets individual as well as organizational needs.

The success of any training program or initiative depends on a systematic approach to delivering effective instruction with high impact for both the participants and the organization. To that end, trainers will need to understand various principles and concepts of learning and also follow a process that results in behavioral change. This process (reflected in the arrangement of Part I of this book, "Training Fundamentals") consists of five parts: *analysis*, *design*, *development*, *delivery*, and *evaluation*.

The analysis phase is covered in Chapters 1 through 4. In Chapter 1, you learn how to conduct a needs analysis at both the organizational and individual level. Chapter 2 addresses the principles of adult learning as well as learning styles. You have an opportunity to learn about your own personal training style in Chapter 3. To round out the analysis phase, Chapter 4 provides you with additional insights and understanding of the complexity and diversity of today's training environment.

The second phase in the instructional design process is addressed in the next two chapters. Chapter 5 explains how to write training objectives, and Chapter 6 presents a step-by-step approach to developing a complete instructional plan.

Once the program has been designed, the next step is to fully develop the program, selecting and creating activities and tools to create an exciting and effective learning experience. You will learn about specific active training methods and techniques in Chapter 7.

The next step in the instructional process is delivery. Chapters 8 through 11 give you creative tips and techniques for delivering a dynamic and professional training session. You will also learn how to deal with difficult people and situations.

In Chapter 12 you will learn how to evaluate training and measure its effectiveness. You will learn how to go beyond the "smile sheet" at the end of a session and develop more tools and techniques to show the benefits of training to employees and the organization.

By developing your skills in each of these five areas, you will indeed become a master of your craft.

Since the first edition of *The Trainer's Handbook*, published in 1999, the world and the workplace have changed dramatically. Consequently, the field of workplace learning and development has had to change and adapt in order to meet the needs and demands of an increasingly complex environment. Globalization, rapidly changing technology, and a more sophisticated and diverse group of learners have changed the way in which knowledge and skills are transferred to the workplace and have placed more demands on learning and development professionals. Recognizing that training has moved beyond the fundamentals addressed in Part I, this fourth edition includes Part II, "Special Training Considerations." Use the information in Part II to enhance or supplement the knowledge you gained in Part I.

Globalization has created a multicultural work environment throughout the world. With more and more organizations expanding into international markets, training is seen as a key element to global success. Both domestically and internationally, today's trainers will be interacting with people representing a multitude of cultures. Chapter 13 addresses cultural differences and their impact on training. It also provides tips and techniques for training across cultures.

One of the growing trends in organizations is the use of storytelling as a leadership tool to convey organizational vision, culture, and values. Storytelling is also an effective teaching and learning method to convey information, teach a lesson, enhance the learner's experience, and increase retention. In Chapter 14, you learn how to incorporate storytelling into your training designs.

Technology is more than a trend; it's a way of life, and it's only going to continue its rapid growth and influence on how we live and how we learn. Chapter 15 offers a number of suggestions for using technology in training.

One approach to training that has existed since the beginning of civilization is on-the-job training. So, why is it included in a section on "special considerations"? Rarely is on-the-job training included in books on the design, development, and delivery of training. Most likely, books about on-the-job training are published as separate entities. Because today's trainers wear many hats and are called on to deliver training in many ways, including one-on-one, they need one resource that will help them deliver effective training regardless of format. The information presented in Chapter 16 presents a structured, systematic approach to on-the-job training.

Chapter 17 offers strategies for training during tough economic times. You learn how to maximize your training dollars by adapting to change, using resources more efficiently, and becoming more business savvy.

Chapter 18 is for those who find themselves in either an internal or external consulting role. As a result of the movement or evolution of training to performance consulting, the training and development professional must learn to function as a true consultant. In this chapter, you learn how to develop a client-consultant relationship that positions you as a valuable resource and business partner within the organization.

This book includes checklists, forms, and specific activities you can use immediately in designing, developing, and delivering your own training programs. The book's website makes it easy to print the tables and exhibits included in this book. Not only will you find them useful as you develop your own programs, but you may also choose to use them in your own train-the-trainer programs.

Part I

Training Fundamentals

Chapter 1

Assessing Needs

LEARNING OUTCOMES

In this chapter, you will learn

- To identify key steps in the needs-assessment process
- To select appropriate methods to gather data
- To develop questions for a variety of needs-assessment techniques
- To apply the needs-assessment process to a specific organization and situation

Understanding Needs Assessment

Every year companies spend thousands and thousands of dollars in training programs that fail. Why? Because they fail to provide programs that meet the specific business needs of the organization and the specific professional development needs of the employee.

A needs assessment is the core of any training program. It gives you the basis for program development and establishes the criteria for measuring the success of the program after its completion.

What Is a Needs Assessment?

Needs assessors are much like physicians, who ask a series of questions and order a battery of medical tests to uncover and treat the causes rather than the symptoms of an ailment. Needs assessment is the process of determining the cause, extent, and appropriate cure for organizational ills. The process addresses the organizational context and combines organizational analysis, data gathering, and interviewing techniques to identify and shrink the gap between desired and actual knowledge, skills, and performance. It is a careful study of the organizational context, the job itself, and the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the job incumbents.

Simply put, the process identifies the desired performance and the current performance. The difference or the gap between the actual and the desired level of performance becomes the training need and provides the basis for the training design. The correct problem identification (cause) is the key to developing and implementing appropriate corrective measures (proper cure).

Why Conduct a Needs Assessment?

Before we address how to conduct a needs assessment, we need to take a look at the reasons for doing one. Overall, the purpose of a needs assessment is to prevent a quick-fix, bandage approach to business problems. Instead, a needs assessment, if you do it properly, will ensure that the solution(s) addresses the real issue(s) and effectively focuses the appropriate resources, time, and effort toward a targeted solution. The following are some valid reasons for conducting a needs assessment.

To Determine Whether Training Is Needed. Poor performance is not always a training issue. Often performance problems are the result of poor management practices, organizational barriers, or inadequate systems or equipment. A needs assessment, if conducted properly, will determine whether training is necessary and avoid the mistake of applying a training solution to a nontraining problem. If it is determined that the problem does require training, the needs assessment will help you identify the performance issues that training should address.

To Determine Causes of Poor Performance. As noted, poor performance can be the result of many other factors, including poor incentives, lack of internal motivation, the work environment, poor management, inadequate skills and knowledge, or the employees' lack of confidence. Sometimes, the cause may be poor management. Poor management practices might include poor hiring decisions, poor communication, unclear expectations, or inadequate coaching and feedback. For example, there is a saying that "ducks don't climb trees." Unfortunately, corporations are full of "ducks" in positions that require "squirrels," and no matter how hard they try, they will never succeed in their positions. In other words, if employees are put in positions for which they are unsuited, all the training in the world will not improve their performance. In other cases, managers fail their employees by not stating clearly their expectations or standards of performance.

Often employees do not know what is expected of them. They may have the knowledge, skills, and ability to do the job quite well but are not meeting the manager's expectations. If that is the case, then the training needs to be directed toward the manager rather than the manager's employees.

To Determine Content and Scope of Training. A needs assessment will help determine the type of training necessary to achieve results. Should it be workshop, self-study, or on-the-job? It will help you identify how long the training program should be and who the target audience is. It will also help you identify what should be included in the program and the degree of urgency.

To Determine Desired Training Outcomes. The needs assessment will help you determine what knowledge, skills, and attitudes need to be addressed during the training. It will also help distinguish "need to know" from "nice to know." By focusing on what the trainees actually need to know in order to do their jobs better, a program can be developed that will get results.

To Provide Basis of Measurement. A needs assessment provides a baseline against which to measure results or changes. It is simply a starting point.

To Gain Management Support. By involving line management and other key organizational players, you will find the support you need for the training program to succeed. Because they have had input, they will have a vested interest in the program. Management commitment comes if managers and supervisors see that you are developing training programs in direct response to their specific needs.

Needs-Assessment Process

The needs-assessment process can be as detailed and involved as needed or desired. Many factors must be taken into consideration, including time, money, number of people involved, resources available, and so forth.

A full-blown needs assessment is both time-consuming and costly. Frankly, few organizations are willing to make that kind of investment. A typical alternative is to conduct an abbreviated form of needs assessment, using only two or three methods.

Table 1.1 offers a comparison between an in-depth and an abbreviated needs assessment.

Whom to Assess

The people assessed depends on the goal and the required depth of the assessment. Consider the following categories of people and then decide which groups to target as data sources.

Table 1.1. In-Depth versus Mini Needs Assessment

	In-Depth	**Mini**
Types of Information	**Quantitative**	**Qualitative**
Methods	Multitiered approach Surveys Observation Interviews Focus groups Document reviews	Interviews Focus groups
Scope	Widespread organization involvement Broad-ranging objectives	Fewer people involved Short-term focus
Length	Several months to a year	Few days to a week
Cost	Expensive	Inexpensive
Focus	Linked to defined outputs Long-term	Immediate, quick results
Exposure/Visibility	High profile and risk	Lower risk

Senior Management. To get a clear picture of the problem and its business impact, start with senior management. Ask more strategic questions that address the direction of the organization as well as anticipated industry changes. In other words, start with an organizational context. If you are an internal consultant, you should already have a good idea of the issues driving the need for training. If you are external, you will probably need to do some research first and then ask specific questions to gain better insight into the organizational issues that can be addressed through training.

Here are some questions that will help you gain a better understanding of the organization's business needs:

- What is the vision of the organization?
- What is the mission of the organization?
- What are the primary goals and objectives, both short-term and long-term?
- What organization or industry issues are driving the need for training?
- What is your most critical concern right now?

Target Population. It is also important to identify the target population, those who will receive the training. Often they are overlooked. They should be contacted to find out both their perceived and real training needs. If they are not consulted, it is unlikely they will have a sense of ownership or "buy-in," and they will most likely approach the training experience with resistance and resentment.

Target Population's Managers. Those who manage members of the target population are a critical source of data, because the purpose of the training is to help the line manager solve a business problem or meet a business need. These business needs may include improved productivity, decreased errors, fewer accidents, increased business, decreased turnover or absenteeism, or fewer customer complaints.

Direct Reports. When the target population consists of managers or supervisors, good sources of data are those who report to these people. Direct reports can often provide valuable insight into the skills that managers and supervisors need to improve.

Co-Workers or Peers. More and more organizations are using 360-degree feedback as part of their assessment process, providing employees with performance feedback from multiple sources. Talking with or surveying the target population's co-workers or peers, for example, can provide valuable insight into the skills necessary for a successful team environment. The more organizations that use cross-functional teams, the more critical the need becomes to involve other team members in the assessment process.

Human Resource Personnel. The human resources (HR) department is probably the best source of records and documents. It, of course, will have data on turnover, grievances, safety violations, and so forth, as well as performance appraisals and the like. The HR professionals can also provide interesting insight into the organization's culture.

Vendors. Vendors are a good source of qualitative data. They can share their perceptions of the organization or specific departments with which they interact, plus give some valuable insights into industry standards and practices.

Customers (Internal and External). Customer surveys provide quantitative data that can help pinpoint specific deficiencies, that is, gaps between desired and actual behavior. Survey data will provide information on the level of satisfaction relative to customer-service practices, the quality of the product or service, and delivery systems.

For example, an organization may survey external customers to determine customer satisfaction regarding a call center's activity, such as response time in answering the telephone, friendliness of the service representative, ability to solve the customer's problem, and turnaround time for a request. An internal customer satisfaction survey will include similar items but would be targeted to a specific department. The systems or information technology (IT) department, for example, may choose to send a survey to all the other internal departments it supports to identify how well IT is meeting the needs and expectations of its internal customers.

Competitors. Published competitor data such as sales results, market share, stock prices, and financial reports help to identify the organization's position in relation to its competitors and helps to pinpoint areas for improvement. Gather these data from an organization's annual report or from trade publications.

Industry Experts or Observers. Industry experts have their thumbs on the pulse of the business in which your organization is engaged. They identify trends and industry standards against which your organization can measure itself. Experts may be identified through trade publications, where they may have written about the industry or may have been cited by others as experts in the field. One can also learn about and from experts by attending their sessions at professional conferences and "surfing the Internet" for appropriate websites.

How to Conduct a Needs Assessment

Exhibit 1.1 provides an overview of the needs-assessment process.

Step 1: Identify Problem or Need

A good place to start is to take a look at the organization's statements of vision, mission, values, and goals. Ask to look at the strategic plan. If these organizational data do not exist, suggest that these statements and documents be developed before addressing any training issues. Because the purpose of training is to help solve organizational problems, you must have a clear understanding of what the business problems are.

The first step is to identify the problem or need, stated in dollar terms, if possible. Find out what the problem is costing the organization in errors, turnover, lost business, or additional help. Remember that the desired outcome minus the current outcome identifies the need.

After the need has been determined, define the specific objective the training program should meet. The objective must state the desired performance or behavior and be measurable, observable, realistic, and "fixable." Working with line managers, determine what to measure and how to tie it to organizational goals. Outcomes relate to the specific need. For example, the goal or outcome of safety training is to reduce accidents by a particular percentage. Customer service training should result in fewer customer complaints.

While examining possible causes, it is important to ask, "Is the problem due to a lack of knowledge or skill or is it operational?" For example, improper telephone use may have been identified as the problem.

EXHIBIT 1.1. Needs-Assessment Process

Step 1: Identify Problem or Need

- Determine organizational context.
- Perform gap analysis.
- Set objectives.

Step 2: Determine Needs-Assessment Design

- Establish method-selection criteria.
- Assess advantages and disadvantages of methods.

Step 3: Collect Data

- Conduct interviews.
- Administer questionnaires.
- Administer surveys.
- Review documents.
- Observe people at work.

Step 4: Analyze Data

- Conduct qualitative analysis.
- Conduct quantitative analysis.
- Determine solutions/recommendations.

Step 5: Provide Feedback

- Write report.
- Make an oral presentation.
- Determine next step.

Incoming calls are being disconnected when the person who answers the call tries to transfer his or her calls. At first glance, it might appear that the people handling inbound calls need telephone skills training. However, if the telephone system is not set up to handle multiple functions, then training will not solve the problem.

Step 2: Determine Needs-Assessment Design

To determine the true causes, not just the symptoms, of the problem or need, employ several investigative tools and techniques, including interviews, surveys, questionnaires, observation, and document examination. Choose investigative or data-collection methods on the basis of their appropriateness to the problem. The choice of methods will depend on various criteria such as time, cost, or available resources. These criteria, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of various data-collection methods will be explained later in this chapter.

Step 3: Collect Data

Many methods are available for conducting a needs assessment.

Data-Collection Methods and Tools

- Interviews
- Questionnaires
- Attitude surveys
- Observation
- Tests of proficiency
- Organizational statements and plans
- Turnover records
- Performance appraisals
- Procedures, handbooks, or audits
- Training evaluations
- Exit interviews
- Samples of work
- Job descriptions
- Complaints, error rates, and rejects
- Call reports, incident reports, and grievances
- Trade, government, and business publications

Criteria for Selecting a Method. From the rather extensive list of methods, select those most appropriate for the situation. Many factors will determine which methods to select. Look at the criteria in Exhibit 1.2, On the WEB

EXHIBIT 1.2. Method Selection Criteria

- Time
- Cost
- Number of people involved
- Workplace disruption
- Complexity
- Confidentiality
- Trust level
- Comfort level, knowledge, expertise of assessor
- Validity
- Reliability
- Adaptability
- Participant-friendly

think about your own needs-assessment situation, and determine which criteria you believe should be taken into consideration.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Data-Collection Methods. Data-collection methods fall roughly into six categories: open-ended questionnaires, closed-ended questionnaires, survey instruments, interviews, observation, and document examination.

To help determine which data-collection methods to use, it is a good idea to look at the advantages and disadvantages of each, as shown in Table 1.2. Weigh these considerations against your chosen criteria.

The most common approaches are covered in detail next.

Interviews. Whether for an in-depth or an abbreviated needs assessment, one-on-one and group interviews are valuable data sources. When developing interview questions, be sure to ask open-ended rather than closed-ended questions. Closed-ended questions can be answered with a simple "yes" or "no." For example, a question such as "Do you think there is a need for training?" elicits a one-word response. Probe further by asking an open-ended question. To get to the heart of the matter right

Table 1.2. Advantages and Disadvantages of Data-Collection Methods

	Advantages	**Disadvantages**
Open-Ended Questionnaires	Allow respondent to introduce new topics. Easy to develop. Inexpensive to administer.	Communication is one-way. Respondents may not want to put comments in writing. Prone to ambiguity and opinions.
Close-Ended Questionnaires	Easier to answer. Inexpensive to administer. Feeling of anonymity and confidentiality ensured. Less time-consuming.	Limited information. Require more skill and work to prepare. Items subject to misinterpretation. Difficult and time-consuming to construct.
Instruments	Validated through research. Quick and easily administered in groups. Scored quickly.	Administration and coordination needed. Difficulty in choosing most appropriate. Difficult and time-consuming to construct. Need to research different types.
Individual or Group Interviews	Can read nonverbal messages. Easier to talk. Build commitment for training. Clarifies expectations. Can introduce new topics. More detailed information.	Time-consuming. Some people may feel threatened. Can be affected by interviewer bias. Difficult to organize and analyze data. People may be influenced by peers.
Observation	Better understanding of variables. Provides real-life data and examples that can be used in course material. Real situations, highly relevant. Relatively low cost	Time-consuming. Requires some knowledge of the job. People may be anxious, nervous. Difficult to record data.
Analysis of Existing Information	Factual, highly valid. Easy access to many sources in one place. Inexpensive and not very time-consuming. Unobtrusive. Provides specific examples.	May be outdated. Many not cover all areas needed; too generic. Risks misinterpretation. May be biased.

away, ask a question that begins with "how" or "what" such as, "What would help you do your job better?" Try to avoid asking questions that begin with "why." First, people may not know why. Also, "why" questions tend to put people on the defensive.

Sample Interview Questions

Plan to take considerable time and care in writing questions. Not only should they be designed to elicit as much information as possible, but the questions must produce answers that will provide meaningful information. Although questions will vary according to the specific situation, some sample questions are included below that may help here. After reading sample interview questions, make a list of questions you might ask. Be sure to identify your interviewees. Different sets of questions are required for the employees in the target audience and their managers.

Questions for Target Audience

- What is a typical day for you?
- With whom do you interact on a regular basis?
- What are the typical situations, customers, or projects that you deal with?
- What training have you received to prepare you for this position?
- What additional training do you think you need to help you do your job better?
- What are the most difficult aspects of your job?
- What do you like best about your job?
- How do you know you are doing a good job?
- What type of feedback do you receive about your job performance?
- How often do you receive feedback?

Questions for Managers of Target Audience

- What would you like your employees to do differently?
- How would you describe the current level of performance in your department (or unit or team)?
- What are the important issues, problems, or changes your employees face at the present time?
- What skills, knowledge, or behaviors do you think your employees need to acquire or improve on in order to do their jobs better?

- What are the potential barriers that might get in the way of your training efforts?
- What methods do you use to measure employee performance?
- How often do you give feedback to your employees about their performance?
- What is the biggest challenge you face as a manager?

As mentioned earlier, communication is critical throughout the process. Interviews must be carefully planned and executed. The following guidelines will help you to conduct interviews smoothly and efficiently.

- *Schedule in advance*. Be respectful of people's time. Be sure to contact your interviewees well in advance of the interview and arrange meetings at their convenience. If they view an interview as an imposition and a disruption, they will probably not be as forthcoming or cooperative in responding to questions. It is also helpful to send the questions in advance so they can prepare or think about their answers. This preparation will enable the interview to move along more efficiently, and the interviewees' answers will be more meaningful.
- *Prepare an agenda*. Good meeting management includes an agenda, prepared and sent out well in advance of the meeting. Needs-assessment interviews are no exception. Be sure to indicate the purpose and provide some direction or guidelines on how the interviewees can prepare for the interview. Of course, also include logistical information such as the date, location, and the time (both starting and ending).
- *Ensure privacy*. This point should be a given; however, unless you take special care to arrange for a private meeting spot ahead of time, you might find yourself meeting in a less-than-ideal environment.
- *Eliminate distractions and interruptions*. Once again, planning is key. Take the necessary steps to ensure that you are not interrupted during the interview. In many cases, this means that you will need to communicate the importance of the interview session in

advance and request that the interviewee do whatever it takes to maintain an interruption-free environment. If possible, try to conduct the interview away from the work site.

- *Clarify purpose*. Begin the interview by clarifying the purpose of the meeting. Emphasize the importance of the needs-assessment process and clearly explain the entire process and what you are going to do with the information. Give interviewees an opportunity to ask questions about the process before beginning the formal interview session.
- *Stress confidentiality*. Assure all interviewees that their answers and remarks will be held in the strictest confidence. Be sure to explain how the information will be used. Focus groups, in particular, need to be reminded that, although the speaker's identity will be protected, what the person says will be recorded. It is critical that members of the focus group respect one another and not divulge any information shared within the group.
- *Use good communication techniques*. To be an effective interviewer, hone your active listening skills, particularly your ability to clarify and confirm. Interviewees are prone to rambling and talking in generalities. Make sure that you understand clearly what the other person is saying. The following communication techniques will help you to gather the information you need:

  Tell me more about. . . .

  Give me an example of. . . .

  Let me make sure I understand. What I heard was. . . .

  If I heard you correctly, you believe that. . . .

  Whatever you do, don't say, "What you mean is … " or "What you're saying is. . . ." These statements imply that the speaker is not articulate enough to express himself or herself, and you have to help him or her out.

Observation. Observation involves a person who has received training in observation skills actually observing others on the job. Trained observers look for specific behaviors and are skilled in writing down their observations objectively in concrete behavioral terms. Observations are often used to validate information gathered by other methods such as interviews or questionnaires. Another observation technique makes use of an outside "shopper." Some organizations (banks, retail sales) hire outside professionals to conduct telephone or face-to-face shopping surveys. With this method, representatives from the consulting company go into a store or branch office and pretend to be customers. They note specific behaviors such as how they were greeted, friendliness, and knowledge level of the employees. They may look for evidence of cross-selling efforts or an offer of further assistance.

Questionnaires/Survey Instruments. An important consideration in using instruments is whether to develop them or purchase them. Questionnaires with open-ended questions are easy to construct, whereas questionnaires with closed-ended questions require more time and thought. Although published surveys can be costly, using them can not only save you time but will yield more accurate information because they have been tested for validity and reliability. Be aware, however, that published instruments may or may not be specific enough for a given situation. For both questionnaires and surveys, be sure to send a cover letter to participants explaining the purpose and what will be done with the results of the instrument. Make the instructions crystal clear.

Step 4: Analyze Data

Data analysis can be simple or quite complex, depending on the methods chosen. For qualitative data, such as individual or group interviews, as well as open-ended questionnaires and observation, do a content analysis, sorting information into categories (for example, positive and negative reactions) and identifying common themes. The goal of the content analysis is to categorize and quantify the data as much as possible with minimal interpretation.

For quantitative data (survey instruments and close-ended questionnaires), do a statistical analysis. Keep it as simple as possible. Do not become engulfed in number-crunching activities. Look at the data in terms of mean (the average, calculated by adding all the values and dividing by the number in the group), mode (the number that occurs most frequently), and median (the middle number in a numerical listing).

If your research indicates that training is appropriate, specify the type of training called for. Should it be workshop training, on-the-job, self-study, computer-based, or what? Training must address the problem specifically, and the systems must be in place to support the training outcomes. For example, you may identify a customer-service training program as the solution to customer complaints and lost business. Participants in the training will learn how to handle customer complaints tactfully and respond to customer inquiries politely and efficiently. Yet the program will fail if slow delivery makes it hard for the customer to buy the product.

Clarify and Define the Problem. Although the problem may have been stated at the beginning of the needs-assessment process by the key players in the organization, those are really perceptions of the problem. The data-collection process and subsequent analysis of that data will help to clarify and to define the real problem.

NEEDS-ASSESSMENT EXAMPLE

A client asked me to deliver a stress management program for a group of executive secretaries. In a discussion with my contact, the training director, I probed to uncover what events may have triggered the request. During a recent company-wide employee meeting, several secretaries were quite outspoken in expressing their dissatisfaction with the way they were being treated. As a result, senior management concluded that this group needed stress management. Although actual performance had not been affected, the morale and interpersonal relationships were deteriorating rapidly. I suggested that, before I developed a program specific to their situation, it would be a good idea to talk with a few members of the target audience. The training director agreed, and we arranged a focus group meeting with six of the secretaries. As I listened to the secretaries, it became increasingly clear that most of the stress the secretaries were experiencing stemmed from a single cause: the inability of the secretaries and managers to communicate effectively with one another. After listening to the secretaries' complaints and perceptions of the problem, I concluded that a stress management program was not the answer. In fact, it would be a waste of time and money. I suggested that we attack the cause of the problem, not its symptoms. I recommended that I design and deliver a program that would promote open, two-way communication between each secretary and her immediate supervisor by showing them how to improve their communication skills and to work more effectively as members of a boss/secretary team.

During the analysis phase, you will add to your perceptions of the problem through qualitative data such as interviews and focus groups. Verify your perceptions with survey results and other quantitative data.

After categorizing the data, the next step is to identify priorities, always keeping in mind the business need. The prioritization process is extremely important since your needs assessment will probably result in a long list of training needs. Based on an analysis of the data, make your recommendations for specific training programs or interventions.

Step 5: Provide Feedback

After the data have been collected and analyzed, identify the area(s) of need, design an action plan or strategies, and communicate your conclusions and recommendations to key personnel. This feedback should be delivered in both a written and an oral format. As you prepare to communicate your findings and recommendations, keep in mind that the goal is to get approval for your proposal. Plan a strategy for presenting the information in a positive light. Carefully think through what (and how much) to share, how to share, and with whom to share findings and recommendations.

The Written Report. The final report is a critical piece. It should be constructed in such a way that it presents the data in an easy-to-understand format along with conclusions and recommendations. The length of the final report, of course, depends on how extensive the assessment is. In any case, the written report should contain the following elements:

Executive overview. Provide an overview of your proposal for executives, an abbreviated, concise representation of the larger document, limited to one page and distributed to the key decision makers.

Description of the process. Provide appropriate background information, such as the problem statement or current situation and briefly describe the entire needs-assessment process, including purpose, scope, methods used, and the people involved. Be sure to include your rationale, that is, your reason for conducting a needs assessment.

Summary of findings. In this section, present your data clearly and concisely, highlighting patterns or significant results.

Preliminary conclusions. Address the analysis of the data, focusing on key issues that have surfaced. It may be appropriate to show how the findings relate to or support your (or others') perceptions. Point out how the issues relate to the business need. Do not assume that readers will make the connection by themselves.

Recommendations. At this point, list your ideas and recommended solutions to the problem. When identifying training issues, be clear about what programs should be implemented, who should be involved, and how, when, and where the training will take place. Be careful not to lock yourself in by being too specific.

Potential barriers. Solutions to problems are not without problems themselves. Take a proactive approach by addressing potential barriers up-front and suggesting ways to overcome them. Potential barriers can be almost anything, but the most common will probably be cost, time commitment, and the commitment of the target audience and/or their managers.

Oral Presentation. In addition to the written proposal, plan to present your information and recommendations to a selected audience. The oral presentation is an opportunity to hear reactions from the key players. Be prepared for questions and challenges. Anticipate what they may be and have responses and answers ready. Look at your presentation as a chance to sell your ideas. That means you will need to fine-tune your persuasion and influencing skills. Ask someone who is a skillful presenter and persuader to coach you before your presentation or, if you have the time and the opportunity, participate in a workshop on persuasive presentations.

Selected Audience. Your selected audience depends on a number of factors such as the corporate culture and internal politics. In general, include key decision makers and representative stakeholders such as members of the target audience, their managers, and anyone who may have a vested interest in the program's success. Also, the number of meetings and the levels involved in receiving the feedback should relate to the scope of the assessment. For example, if everyone in the organization completed an employee-opinion survey, then every employee should receive feedback. This is generally done in various group meetings, with the managers sharing the results of the survey along with the appropriate action plan.

Length. In many cases, you may have little control over the length of the presentation. Senior management will probably determine the time available based on their schedules, priorities, and other commitments. If they do not, then request an hour. That will give enough time to present your case and address any questions or concerns the executives might raise.

Format/Approach. The key here is to present findings in summary form. Use slides of bulleted points and simple charts and graphs to illustrate and highlight important information.

Developing an Action Plan

After presenting the information and making recommendations, solicit reactions and feedback from the key players. It is possible that they will immediately approve your proposal. More likely, however, you will be asked to make some modifications. In some cases, you may have to go back to the drawing board several times.

Once your proposal has been approved, map out a plan for the design, development, and delivery of the program(s). Include specific action items with a time line and appropriate task assignments.

The next step in the process of designing a program that meets the specific developmental needs of the participants and the business needs of the organization is to write learning outcomes or objectives, which are addressed in detail in Chapter 5. However, before you begin the design and development process, examine some critical elements that are often overlooked: how adults learn, the different learning styles of your participants, and your own training style. Finally, examine some of the diversity issues in today's workplace that will have an impact on how you design, develop, and deliver effective training programs. These important considerations are addressed in Chapters 2, 3, and 4.

Assessing Participants' Knowledge, Attitudes, Skills

So far, we have looked at the needs-assessment process that serves as the basis of training design, development, and evaluation. It may seem that after you receive the go-ahead to design and develop a program targeted to specific needs, the needs-assessment task is over. Not so! You also must assess the knowledge, attitudes, and skill level of the participants prior to each session. Different audiences may have different needs. For example, let's say the organization has decided to implement a management development program to include all levels of management from first-line supervisor to senior manager level. The needs of a first-line supervisor will be different from those of a mid-level manager, and certainly different from those of a senior manager. Therefore, participants at each level must be further assessed.

Presession Questionnaire

A short, simple, and straightforward questionnaire such as the one shown in Exhibit 1.3 can be an invaluable tool in fine-tuning your program.

The information you receive from such a questionnaire will help you in the following ways:

1. It can help to design the program at the appropriate level, not insulting participants' intelligence (and boring them to death) by dealing with content they already know. By the same token, you do not want to lose them by talking over their heads.
2. A questionnaire allows you to identify those participants who have greater familiarity with the training topic so you can draw on them as resources.

   Conversely, by identifying those with less familiarity with a topic, you will know who may need additional attention or encouragement.
3. The questionnaire will help to weed out those who do not belong in the session because they are underqualified, overqualified, or doing work for which the program is irrelevant. This is particularly important for voluntary, open-enrollment programs advertised to all employees in an organization. Unfortunately, no matter how well the course description identifies the target audience and learning outcomes, invariably those who do not read beyond the title will sign up for programs for which they are not suited. When that happens, take the person aside, explain that the session may not meet his or her expectations, and offer the person the option of leaving. Should the person choose to stay, you have at least been up-front about what the participant can and cannot expect.
4. The questionnaire can be used to gather information to use in creating real-life case studies, skill practices, and examples. The more relevant you can make your material, the more the participants will embrace the training. Of course, assure the participants that their contributions may be used but not identified.
5. The questionnaire can identify potential problems caused by negative attitudes so that you can take steps to overcome these barriers or pockets of resistance.

6. The questionnaire can create a positive learning environment even before the program starts. It can help participants be mentally prepared for the training. Also, your interest in finding out about them even before they come to your session will make them more receptive to you and what you have to offer.

EXHIBIT 1.3. Confidential Presession Questionnaire

Management Skills and Techniques: Part III

The purpose of this questionnaire is to provide the facilitator of this program with insights into your current skills in or knowledge about the subject of managing others. By knowing what new skills and knowledge you would like from the program, the facilitator will be better able to meet your needs.

Name: ______________________ Current Position: ______________

Organization: __________________ City, State: __________________

Previous positions held:

Formal education beyond high school:

What management courses, workshops, or seminars have you attended?

Briefly describe the responsibilities of your current position:

How long have you managed or supervised others?

How many people do you directly supervise or manage?

What do you believe is the most difficult problem or challenge you face when managing people?

What one specific thing do you want to get out of this program?

What concerns do you have about participating in this learning experience?

On-the-Spot Assessment

Regardless of how extensive your needs assessment is, it is also a good idea to conduct an informal, on-the-spot, individual needs assessment at the beginning of the first session. Start by asking the participants what they expect from the session. Their answers will give you an indication of whether or not your design is on target. This on-the-spot assessment will also provide an opportunity to clarify participants' expectations. Reinforce those expectations that are on target with the training design or make last-minute adjustments to the program, to make sure participants' needs are met. Sometimes, participants may have expectations that you cannot possibly meet in the session. Chapter 8 covers some specific interactive on-the-spot needs-assessment activities.

KEY POINTS

- A needs assessment serves as the basis for program development.
- A needs assessment identifies the gap between the actual and desired performance.
- A needs assessment provides criteria for measuring program success.
- Start with an organizational context, that is, the business impact of the training need.
- Use a variety of methods to assess training needs: surveys, interviews, observations, questionnaires, performance data.
- Get input from various sources, including senior management, target population, target population's managers, direct reports, co-workers, customers, vendors, human resources professionals, competitors, and industry experts.
- Follow a prescribed five-step process to identify both the business needs of the organization and the developmental needs of the participants.

Once you have completed the needs assessment and developed your action plan, the next step is to design the training program. Before doing so, however, you need to have a clear understanding of how adults learn so you reflect adult-learning principles throughout your training program.

Chapter 2

Understanding Adult Learners

LEARNING OUTCOMES

In this chapter, you will learn

- To examine the basic principles of adult learning that all trainers should know before undertaking a training assignment
- To identify ways to overcome resistance to learning

Andragogical versus Pedagogical Model

People have been brought up on the pedagogical model of learning that has dominated education and training for centuries. Because that has been the standard, people use that approach when they are asked to teach or train others. In brief, the pedagogical model makes the following assumptions:

- The teacher is responsible for the learning process, including what and how learners learn. The learner's role is passive.
- Because the learner has little experience, the teacher is the expert, the guru, and it is his or her responsibility to impart his or her wealth of knowledge. This amounts to an "information dump" through traditional means such as lecture, textbooks, manuals, and videos in which other "experts" share their knowledge and experience.

- People are motivated to learn because they "have to" in order to pass a test, advance to the next level, or earn certification.
- Learning is information-centered. The teacher "covers" the material so that the learner can acquire the prescribed information in some type of logical order.
- Motivation to learn is largely external. Pressure from authority figures and fear of negative consequences drive the learner. The teacher, in essence, controls the learning through rewards and discipline.

How and Why People Learn

Although adult education theorists differ on just how different adults are from children, most embrace the andragogical theory of adult learning. During the 1960s, European adult educators coined the term "andragogy" to provide a label for a growing body of knowledge and technology in regard to adult learning. The concept was introduced and advanced in the United States by Malcolm Knowles. The following assumptions underlie the andragogical model of learning, which Knowles now calls a model of human learning (Knowles, 1990).

Assumption 1

The first assumption involves a change in self-concept from total dependency to increasing self-directedness. The adult learner is self-directed. Adult learners want to take responsibility for their own lives, including the planning, implementing, and evaluating of their learning activities. This principle is often misinterpreted. Learner self-directedness does not mean the trainer abdicates responsibility for the plan or approach. From the beginning, the trainer establishes the training process as a collaborative effort. Throughout the process, the trainer and participant should be partners engaged in ongoing, two-way communication.

Assumption 2

The second principle addresses the role of experience, a principle unique to the adult learner. According to Knowles, each of us brings to a learning situation a wealth of experiences that provide a base for new learning as well as a resource to share with others. These experiences may be good or bad, but they will impact the way in which an employee approaches a new learning experience. Because people base their learning on past experiences, the new information must be assimilated. The wise trainer will find out what the participants already know and will build on those experiences, rather than treating participants as though they know nothing and must be taught like small children.

Assumption 3

The third assumption is that adults are ready to learn when they perceive a need to know or do something in order to perform more effectively in some aspect of their lives. The days of abstract theories and concepts are over for most adults. They want the learning experience to be practical and realistic, problem-centered rather than subject-centered. The effective trainer helps participants understand how learning a particular skill or task will help them be more successful, that is, how the employee can do the job quicker, easier, more efficiently.

Assumption 4

Fourth, adults want immediate, real-world applications. They want the skills and knowledge to help them solve problems or complete tasks. People are motivated to learn when they see relevance to their real-life situations and are able to apply what they have learned as quickly as possible. Therefore, learning activities need to be clearly relevant to the immediate needs of the adult. To be effective, deliver just-in-time training and emphasize how the training is going to make participants' jobs easier.

Assumption 5

Finally, adults are motivated to learn because of internal factors such as self-esteem, desire for recognition, natural curiosity, innate love of learning, better quality of life, greater self-confidence, or the opportunity to self-actualize.

Principles of Adult Learning

As you begin to design and develop any training program for adults, keep in mind these additional principles regarding how adults learn:

- Adults must recognize the need to learn.
- Adults want to apply new learning back on the job.
- Adults need to integrate past experience with new material.
- Adults prefer the concrete to the abstract.
- Adults need a variety of training methods.
- Adults learn better in an informal, comfortable environment.
- Adults want to solve realistic problems.
- Adults prefer the hands-on method of learning.

Learning Styles

Adults learn through a variety of ways. One person may learn better by listening; another may be visual or may prefer to read instructions. Someone else will need a demonstration.

Learning style refers to the way in which a learner approaches and responds to a learning experience. There are several learning style assessments available on the market including the following instruments, published in the Pfeiffer Annuals:

- *Learning Style Inventory* by Ronne Toker Jacobs and Barbara Schneider Fuhrmann (1984)
- *The Learning Model Instrument* by Kenneth L. Murrell (1987)

David Kolb's *Learning Style Inventory* (1991) is used widely as a basis for other models and instruments. These, among others, are all excellent tools to help you identify learning style. The self-assessment process heightens your awareness that different people learn in different ways and sensitizes people to the importance of designing training that addresses all learning styles.

Determining Your Learning Style

To get a flavor for these style differences and to further your understanding of your preferred learning style, complete the learning style assessment in Exhibit 2.1, then score and study it.

EXHIBIT 2.1. Learning Style Profile

Instructions: For each of the numbered items below, rank alternatives A through D by assigning 4 to the phrase that is most like you, 3 to the one that next describes you, 2 to the next, and finally, 1 to the ending that is least descriptive of you.

1. When solving a problem, I prefer to …
   a. Take a step-by-step approach.
   b. Take immediate action.
   c. Consider the impact on others.
   d. Make sure I have all the facts.
2. As a learner, I prefer to …
   a. Listen to a lecture.
   b. Work in small groups.
   c. Read articles and case studies.
   d. Participate in role plays.
3. When the trainer asks a question to which I know the answer, I …
   a. Let others answer first.
   b. Offer an immediate response.
   c. Consider whether my answer will be received favorably.
   d. Think carefully about my answer before responding.
4. In a group discussion, I …
   a. Encourage others to offer their opinions.
   b. Question others' opinions.
   c. Readily offer my opinion.
   d. Listen to others before offering my opinion.
5. I learn best from activities in which I …
   a. Can interact with others.
   b. Remain uninvolved.
   c. Take a leadership role.
   d. Can take my time.

EXHIBIT 2.1. Learning Style Profile, Cont'd

6. During a lecture, I listen for …
   a. Practical how-to's.
   b. Logical points.
   c. The main idea.
   d. Stories and anecdotes.
7. I am impressed by a trainer's …
   a. Knowledge and expertise.
   b. Personality and style.
   c. Use of methods and activities.
   d. Organization and control.
8. I prefer information to be presented in the following way:
   a. A model such as a flow chart.
   b. Bullet points.
   c. Detailed explanation.
   d. Accompanied by examples.
9. I learn best when I …
   a. See relationships among ideas, events, and situations.
   b. Interact with others.
   c. Receive practical tips.
   d. Observe a demonstration or video.
10. Before attending a training program, I ask myself: "Will I … ?"
    a. Get practical tips to help me in my job.
    b. Receive lots of information.
    c. Have to participate.
    d. Learn something new.

EXHIBIT 2.1. Learning Style Profile, Cont'd

11. After attending a training session, I …
    a. Tend to think about what I learned.
    b. Am anxious to put my learning into action.
    c. Reflect on the experience as a whole.
    d. Tell others about my experience.
12. The training method I dislike the most is …
    a. Participating in small groups.
    b. Listening to a lecture.
    c. Reading and analyzing case studies.
    d. Participating in role plays.

Scoring Sheet

Instructions: Record your responses on the appropriate spaces below, then total the columns.

Feeler	Observer	Thinker	Doer
1c____	1a____	1d____	1b____
2b____	2a____	2c____	2d____
3c____	3a____	3d____	3b____
4a____	4d____	4b____	4c____
5a____	5b____	5d____	5c____
6d____	6c____	6b____	6a____
7b____	7d____	7a____	7c____
8d____	8a____	8c____	8b____
9b____	9d____	9a____	9c____
10d____	10c____	10b____	10a____
11d____	11c____	11a____	11b____
12c____	12a____	12d____	12b____
Total____	Total____	Total____	Total____

Feelers. Feelers are very people-oriented. They are expressive and focus on feelings and emotions. They enjoy affective learning and gravitate toward learning experiences that explore people's attitudes and emotions. Feelers thrive in an open, unstructured learning environment and appreciate the opportunity to work in groups and like activities in which they can share opinions and experiences.

Observers. Observers like to watch and listen. They tend to be reserved and quiet and will take their time before acting or participating in class. When they do decide to offer an opinion or answer a question, they are generally right on target. They enjoy learning experiences that allow them to consider various ideas and opinions, and they seem to thrive on learning through discovery.

Thinkers. Thinkers rely on logic and reason. They like the opportunity to share ideas and concepts. They prefer activities that require them to analyze and evaluate. They will question the rationale behind activities and will challenge statements that they perceive to be too general or without substance. The thinkers prefer to work independently and question the relevance of role plays and simulations.

Doers. Doers like to be actively involved in the learning process. They will take charge in group activities and tend to dominate discussions. They like opportunities to practice what they learned, and they are particularly interested in knowing how they are going to apply what they learn in the real world. They like information presented clearly and concisely and become impatient with drawn-out discussions.

Keep in mind that no one learning style is right or even better than another. The point is that each person learns differently. A variety of learning styles will be represented in any training session. To be effective, trainers must design their programs to accommodate style differences. Predictably, trainers use the styles they prefer. Although it is natural to use the style with which one is most comfortable, the most effective trainers will learn how to adapt their styles to meet the needs of all participants. You will have an opportunity to find out about your preferred training style in Chapter 3.

One note of caution: recent studies find that the scientific research on learning styles is weak and unconvincing. Psychologists and neuroscientists, who focus on the functioning of the brain and memory, question the credibility of learning styles theory. Although the validity of learning styles theory may be in question, there is little doubt that people do have a preference about how they learn. For that reason, learning styles assessments provide value by increasing awareness of these differences, thus providing a basis for choosing various methodologies.

Perceptual Modality

In addition to learning styles, an effective trainer must be able to understand the different perceptual modalities. According to M.B. James and M.W. Galbraith (1985), a learner may prefer one of the following six perceptual modalities, ways in which one takes in and processes information:

Visual	Videos; slides; graphs; photos; demonstrations; methods and media that create opportunities for the participant to experience learning through the eyes.
Print	Texts; paper-and-pencil exercises that enable the participant to absorb the written word.
Aural	Lectures; audio recordings; methods that allow the participant to simply listen and take in information through the ears.
Interactive	Group discussions; question-and-answer sessions; ways that give the participant an opportunity to talk and engage in an exchange of ideas, opinions, reactions with fellow participants.
Tactile	Hands-on activities; model building methods that require the participant to handle objects or put things together.
Kinesthetic	Role plays; physical games and activities that involve the psychomotor skills and movement from one place to another.

Research indicates that more adults are visual learners than any other perceptual style; however, a good training design incorporates all six modalities to ensure that all participants' needs are being addressed. Vary activities to create multisensory learning that will increase the likelihood of appealing to each participant's style. This multisensory approach also helps each participant reinforce the knowledge or skills acquired through the preferred modality.

Learning should be presented in a way that complements each person's preferred modality. For example, let's look at a design for training several people in a group setting to use a personal computer. The trainer includes pictures of the computer screen, illustrating what the person should see when he or she strikes a particular key. The trainer also demonstrates how to perform certain functions on the computer (*visual*). The training design includes print materials such as a manual and short application-oriented quizzes (*print*). For review and reinforcement, the trainer prepares an audio recording (*aural*). During daily instructional sessions, the trainer provides many opportunities for the trainee to answer as well as ask questions (*interactive*). Of course, the design includes multiple opportunities for hands-on practice (*tactile*). Finally, the trainer will create simulation activities in which the trainees will be asked to create "real-life" work-related documents such as spreadsheets, reports, and graphs (*kinesthetic*).

Another important consideration is that people generally learn by doing, not by being told how to do something. For example, a person learns more quickly how to reach a new location by driving the car rather than by observing as a passenger. So the more opportunities a person has to "try out" or apply the skills, the more likely he or she is to learn the skills.

Telling is not teaching or training. How many times have you said to yourself, "I've told him and told him how to do it, but he still gets it wrong"? Just because you tell someone how to do something doesn't mean he or she understands it or has developed the skill to do it.

Still other factors affect the speed at which people learn.

Psychological. Some people prefer the "big picture," while others want a step-by-step process.

Environmental. Sound, light, temperature, and seating can all impact learning. For example, sitting in a hard chair for several hours will put stress on the body, interfering with a person's ability to concentrate.

Emotional. Participants' motivation for attending the session will influence the learning process. Those who attend because they want to are more likely to have a positive learning experience than those who are there because their supervisors required them to attend.

Sociological. People are by nature social beings. Although some people do learn better alone, studies show that most people learn better and experience greater satisfaction with the learning experience when they are in pairs or small groups.

Physical. People's physical condition, including hearing, sight, general health, and energy level, impact their ability to learn. Most people have less energy in the afternoon. Trainers should keep this in mind when designing and developing their programs.

Intellectual and Experiential. People in your sessions will vary greatly in educational background, life experiences, innate intelligence, and abilities. That is why it's important to find out as much as possible about your participants before they attend training sessions.

Age. One of the frequent issues that comes up in train-the-trainer and coaching courses relates to the impact of age on the learning process. Managers, supervisors, and trainers often say that older workers are slower and more difficult to train.

To set the record straight, researchers are somewhat divided on the issue of age and one's ability to learn, depending on one's interpretation of learning. In general, research on adult learning shows that adults continue to learn throughout the years; however, they may take longer to learn new things (Sterns & Doverspike, 1988). Although younger folks seem to be more efficient when it comes to memorizing information, older people are better able to evaluate and apply information. Research findings show that change in adulthood is a procession of critical periods during the 50-plus years following childhood and youth. These periods consist of marked changes and experiences during which some of the most meaningful learning may occur.

Adults have a potential for continuing learning and inquiry that conventional wisdom has sometimes failed to recognize. Researchers, however, do recognize that physical changes play a part in the learning process. As we age, we may experience some hearing loss, lower energy levels, and slower reaction time. These factors should be taken into consideration; however, they should not be regarded as proof that older people are slower or have greater difficulty learning. By observing adult-learning principles as well as basic concepts of individual differences and accommodating them accordingly, a trainer can effectively train any adult.

Cognitive Overload

Our minds are like sponges as we soak up knowledge and information. When sponges are saturated, any additional water will run right through. Just as the sponge is overloaded, a learner can experience cognitive overload of his or her working memory. This working memory—the center of conscious thinking—has an estimated limited capacity of seven "chunks" or pieces of information. The limits on our working memory depend on the knowledge we have stored in long-term memory. A person who is quite comfortable with and knowledgeable about a subject can easily overwhelm those who are less familiar with the information. The challenge to the trainer is to present information in such a way that the participants do not experience overload.

Preventing Cognitive Overload

To prevent cognitive overload, use the following strategies when designing, developing, and delivering your training:

- *Minimize the use of lecture*. Boil down information into key learning points, checklists, charts, graphs, or other visuals.
- *Have the participants do most of the work*. When the participants do the work, they transfer new information into long-term memory, much like storing data in a computer. The working memory is now free to absorb the next chunk of information.
- *Create chunks of content or information, and distribute or communicate it incrementally*. Use a variety of activities to communicate the material.
- *Design workbooks and other participant materials that present information in an easy-to-follow and easy-to-understand format*.
- *Create job aids for use during and after the training*.

Application of Learning Principles

These concepts have certain implications for the trainer. The traditional or pedagogical orientation is concerned with content. Trainers are concerned with "covering" material in the most efficient way possible. In contrast, the andragogical orientation focuses on process, being attentive to the factors that either promote or inhibit learning.

Based on what you know about the adult learner and how learning takes place, take those principles and concepts and translate them into practical applications in your training programs. Consider the following points as you create a learning experience for your participants:

- Create a comfortable, nonthreatening learning climate in which people are treated as responsible adults.
- Involve participants in planning their training through interviews, advisory committees, and other up-front activities.
- Allow participants to engage in self-diagnosis by using questionnaires and assessment instruments both before and during sessions.
- Give participants an opportunity to set their own objectives by soliciting their input through presession questionnaires and assessment activities at the beginning of sessions.
- Give them an opportunity to evaluate their own learning through a variety of activities throughout the training program.
- Help them understand the "big picture" by pointing out how the particular training program relates to the business objectives and/or problems.
- Make the learning relevant to them, that is, show how it will help them, by using "real-world" examples and activities that connect with their frames of reference.
- Use their experience by asking them to share examples from their own situations.
- Actively involve the participants in the learning process by using learner-centered activities and structured experiences and by providing them with many opportunities to master the content.

The more you understand about how and why adults learn, the better equipped you will be to design training programs that meet participants' needs and obtain the results you want.

KEY POINTS

- Training adults is different from teaching children.
- Adults need to be involved in planning, implementing, and evaluating their learning.
- Adults base their learning on past experiences.
- Adults expect training to be directly relevant to them and want real-world application.
- Adults learn in various ways.

Before you begin to develop your training program, you also need to have a clear understanding of how your own style and approach to training may impact the participants' learning experience.