

The Future of Systemic and Systematic Training

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The problem and the solution. The overriding challenge facing the training profession and the larger human resource development (HRD) profession is to become systemic. There are many rivals to training and HRD interventions. Gaining and retaining the professional stature must go beyond relationship building and beyond systematic processes and on to systemically connecting human potential to the core of the systems being served and led.

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Almost every productive organization we know of would immediately eliminate training if it were possible. Organizations producing goods and services for the marketplace (except for training companies) are not in the business of training employees or customers. When operating rationally, organizations make investments in training as a means of improving their production and sale of goods and services. Thus, the core propositions behind effective training are as follows:

- The more evidence there is that training contributes to the core business, the more training is valued.
- The more systemic and systematic the training, the more it will contribute to the core business.
- The less evidence of systemic and systematic contribution, the more likely training will be reduced, outsourced, or eliminated.

These rational propositions make common sense and are substantiated through the research (Mattson, 2005; Swanson, 1998). Yet the profession itself spends far too little time advocating and adhering to these propositions. The profession consistently gets distracted from the hard work surrounding these propositions when the authority figures in their organizations call on human resource development (HRD) interventions (training and organization development) as a

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salve or cover-up for managerial incompetence. In these everyday instances, training professionals—helping professionals that they are—love to be needed and being called on to save the day. Given the constancy of human issues resulting from poor leadership, this distracting bandaging role can fill the weeks, months, and years. The balance sheet on this behavior is that the profession and individual training professionals have been regularly undersold.

The Big Picture

As noted in Timothy McClernon's "Rivals to Systematic Training" (this issue), there are rivals to conducting training. One is to simply expect people to learn on their own, and others include hiring expert employees (firing incompetence), hiring external consultants, simplifying the demands of the work and work system, and to confuse knowledge with expertise through ideas such as knowledge management.

Thinking about training that is systemic and systematic is an important way of revealing the big picture. Being *systematic* is "characterized by, based on, or constituting a system; carried on using step-by-step procedures; purposefully regular; methodical" (*American Heritage Collegiate Dictionary*, 1993, p. 1378). Systematic training refers to the internal state of the training process. Being systematic does not ensure that training is systemic.

Systemic is defined as being "of, or relating to systems or a system; relating to or affecting the entire body or an entire organism" (*American Heritage Collegiate Dictionary*, 1998, p. 1378). *Systemic training* refers to the context or external state of the training. *Systemic training* means that training is systemically connected to the organization hosting the training, the processes within that system, the jobs, and the individual contributors experiencing the training.

Some have argued that most training is not systemic and go on to argue that most training is not systemic or systematic. Thinking logically about the present and future state of training alternatives requires a template for analyzing commonalities and differences among various training alternatives. We offer a three-dimensional framework to engage in this analysis.

Training Structure

The first dimension of the framework has to do with training structure. Years ago Swanson and Sawzin (1975) dichotomized training into structured and unstructured training. This was at a time when the major model was where training took place—classroom or on the job. Minimally, structured training is planned, and unstructured training has no plan. In that most of the knowledge and expertise that workers develop is attributable to their own trial-and-error learning (no plan), it would be irresponsible to ignore this when talking about

the workplace learning (Dobbs, 2005). At a later time, Jacobs and Jones (1995) created clarity to on-the-job training by referring to planned training on the job as “structured on-the job training.” This clearly separated planned on-the-job training from trial-and-error learning in the workplace. Thus: unstructured (on-the-job or classroom) or structured (on-the-job or classroom).

Training Content

The second dimension of the framework is training content—general or specific. It is interesting to note that numerous disciplines have taken up this argument. Systems, psychology, and economics scholars are notable contributors. Human capital theory, as conceptualized by Gary Becker (1964), Nobel Prize-winning economist, dichotomized between general education (not company specific) and training (company specific). He argued that a society that invests in general education reaps benefits as do the individuals. Company-specific training reaps benefits for the sponsoring firm and the individual learners. The logical extension has been the reluctance by firms to sponsor education and training that is not company specific—learning that is not connected to specific organizational goals and expertise requirements. Thus: general (basic or life/work) or specific (organization or job).

Training Outcomes

The third dimension is focused on training outcomes—learning and performance. Learning is subdivided into knowledge and expertise, and performance is subdivided into individual contributor and organizational performance. The debate and recognition of learning and performance outcomes had been well documented (Ruona, 2000). Clearly, training programs have targeted outcomes that can be conceptually aligned to one or more of these outcome categories (Dobbs, 2004). Functionally, a program may be structured in a way that limits its actual outcomes from those claimed to a lesser category. For example, the rationale for a sales improvement program may be to improve actual sales while the training program itself only ensures that participants have knowledge about sales and not necessarily even produces expertise required to work the sales process, let alone improve actual sales performance in the workplace (Swanson & Holton, 1999). Pressures on time and program costs eliminated extensive role-playing exercises from the original training design that utilized expert sales personnel back on the job as part of the training process. Thus: learning (knowledge or expertise) and performance (individual or organizational).

Figure 1 positions these three dimensions—training structure, training content, training outcomes—into a 3-axis matrix.

Training Structure, Content, and Outcomes Matrix

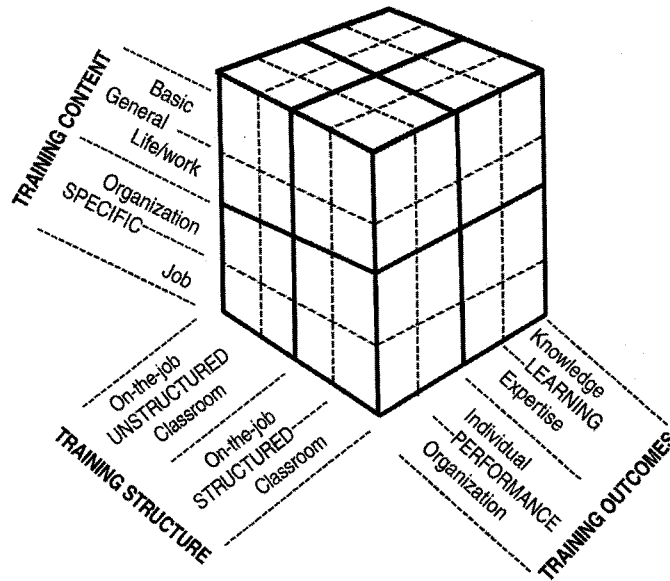


FIGURE 1: Training Structure, Content, and Outcomes Matrix

This matrix can be used to think about training approaches and systems. For example:

Traditional education in schools

Training structure: Structured (classroom)
 Training content: General (basic)
 Training outcomes: Learning (knowledge)

Four-step training method in business and industry

Training structure: Structured (on-the-job)
 Training content: Specific (job)
 Training outcomes: Performance (individual)

Original analysis, design, develop, implement, evaluate (ADDIE) method in the U.S. military

Training structure: Structured (classroom)
 Training content: Specific (job)
 Training outcomes: Learning (expertise)

ADDIE method typically used in business and industry

Training structure:	Structured (classroom)
Training content:	Specific (job)
Training outcomes	Learning (knowledge and/or expertise)

Systemic ADDIE with analysis and evaluation phases "hard wired" to organization

Training structure:	Structured (classroom or on-the-job)
Training content:	Specific (organization and job)
Training outcomes	Learning (expertise) and performance (individual and organization)

Taking the same analysis matrix of training structure, content, and outcomes, contemporary training initiatives might be analyzed as follows:

External off-the-shelf training

Training structure:	Structured (classroom)
Training content:	General (life and/or work)
Training outcomes:	Learning (knowledge)

Action learning

Training structure:	Unstructured
Training content:	(Unknown at the beginning)
Training outcomes:	Learning (knowledge and/or expertise)

E-learning

Training structure:	Structured (often a classroom of one)
Training content:	General or specific
Training outcomes:	Learning (knowledge or expertise)

Informal learning

Training structure:	Unstructured (on-the-job)
Training content:	(Unknown)
Training outcomes:	(Unknown)

Organizational learning

Training structure:	Unstructured
Training content:	Specific (organization)
Training outcomes:	Learning (knowledge and/or expertise)

The Future

The inherent promise of training that is systemic and systematic is that it will address important learning (knowledge and expertise) and performance (individual and organizational) requirements of the host organization and that

these goals will be effectively and efficiently achieved. Having said this, it is critical to note that it takes professional trainer expertise to make this happen. Much of the training activity in organizations is being handled by people without adequate training expertise. At best, these nonprofessionals are experts in the training content to be learned.

Having the training profession stocked with experts on the latest versions of the ADDIE model is essential to establishing and maintaining the strategic goal of improving on individual and organizational performance. Without this strategic connection, the innumerable forms of learning options available to individuals and organizations are there for their consumption with or without a formal training process or function. In addition, the rigor of systemic and systematic training provides a rational anchor for evaluating new learning and performance improvement options that continually appear in organizations that are changing, growing, and being continuously challenged.

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