

## **Effective Learning Systems Models – Part III**

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In this series of articles, we address whole learning systems, some of which are rarely used although they have demonstrated effectiveness. We're not certain why some beneficial systems aren't used more frequently, but our experience tells us that many people in the learning and performance world either don't know about them, don't know how to develop and implement them, or simply are fearful of rocking the boat.

We continue to address these learning systems (natural experience, experimental learning, structured on-the-job training [SOJT], learner controlled instruction [LCI] and individual developmental plans) which have stood the test of time and have demonstrated effectiveness in this edition of the *HSA e-Xpress*. For each of these learning systems models, we have created an information chart that can familiarize you with them and help you try them out. In the October 2010 edition of the *HSA e-Xpress*, we presented experiential learning (click [here](#) to read it) and in July 2010, we presented natural experience (click [here](#) to read it). In this edition, we offer structured on-the-job training.

### **Structured On-the-Job Training (SOJT)**

#### **What is it?**

- SOJT is traditional on-the-job training (OJT) (apprenticeship, tutoring, mentoring) with structure built in to increase efficiency and effectiveness.
- It is a means of organizing and assisting personnel who provide OJT to help them train according to a prescribed plan.
- It is a method to ensure consistency in receiving OJT experiences, regardless of where or with whom the trainee is placed. This is a key characteristic of SOJT.
- SOJT provides a system with generic models for OJT for various positions, but it allows for adaptation to individual locations and trainees – structure plus flexibility.
- SOJT gives employee-trainees an overall view of the job as defined by the tasks that compose it. In this respect, SOJT is both organized and comprehensive.
- SOJT includes a means not only for structuring OJT experiences, but also for evaluating trainee progress and trainer effectiveness. A well-planned SOJT system includes trainee self-evaluations, trainer evaluations of trainee performance, and more formal mechanisms for certifying performance capability.

#### **With whom can it be used?**

- It is applicable to any training population.
- It is most frequently used with nonmanagement and lower-level supervisory personnel and specialists (for example, cashiers, counterpeople, salespeople, account representatives, and plant workers).
- SOJT is often used with entry-level positions where volume and/or turnover is high or where only one person or very few people require training at the same time.

### **For what type of content can it be used?**

- It is typically used for well-designed procedural and technical tasks, and not for tasks at higher decision-making, problem-solving levels.
- It is particularly useful with skills/knowledge that can be easily demonstrated by master performer employees (for example, filling out orders, taking inventory, tracking shipments, or handling cash).

### **What are the components?**

- SOJT requires a series of task listings for each position, organized by major area of responsibility, usually in the form of checklists.
- Frequently there is a manager's guide explaining how to organize an SOJT plan (including how to make local adaptations), monitor its implementation, and evaluate progress.
- There is always a trainer's manual containing guidelines on effective SOJT techniques, instruction on how to use the task lists as a training mechanism, and methods for guiding and evaluating the trainee. The model used most often is one based on "teach-prompt-release."
- There is also always a trainee manual that defines the job in terms of responsibilities and tasks and helps monitor personal progress. This guide also explains the role and responsibilities of the trainee as a learner. Usually this trainee's guide contains a progress map or chart.

### **How does it work?**

- The manager, with trainee assistance, creates a training plan based on job needs and trainee background and experience, using the generic task lists for the job. The manager customizes these task lists to meet local needs. A performance professional and/or instructional designer can be very helpful here.
- The manager assigns specific experienced employees to act as structured on-the-job trainers for the various parts of the plan. Generally the selected

experienced employees receive some form of training to prepare them to deliver the structured training.

- The manager distributes manuals and appropriate task lists to trainers.
- The manager orients the trainee to the training system, introduces him or her to the trainers, and explains both the trainee's role in the process and the manager's expectations. The manager also gives the trainee a structured OJT learning guide and progress checklist.
- The trainee follows the training plan, moving from trainer to trainer until she or he demonstrates competency in all SOJT tasks. The trainee self-evaluates. The SOJT trainers also evaluate trainee performance using evaluation checklists, and they provide feedback to the trainee.
- The trainee and manager meet to review training experiences and evaluate readiness for permanent job assignment. This step may include a formal certifying of performance capability.

### **What are the advantages?**

- SOJT is extremely flexible and is easily adapted to local circumstances.
- This training can be implemented at any time with any number of employees.
- This system is similar enough to traditional OJT to be easily accepted by managers, experienced employees, and trainees.
- The structure increases consistency of OJT from trainee to trainee.
- The system makes OJT more efficient.
- The trainee remains on the job during training, thus reducing costs.
- The generic task lists help managers create basic plans that allow for adaptation.
- Training in this system is the job itself.
- Trainees interact and work with a number of employees who serve as role models.
- Trainees obtain an overall sense of the job in a structured manner.
- The system enables the manager to assess trainee strengths and weaknesses in a structured fashion.
- Design and production costs of training materials are relatively low, compared with most other training methods.

### **What are the disadvantages?**

- It requires thorough job analyses for all SOJT positions.

- It requires careful and systematic pilot-testing prior to implementation.
- It requires involving a number of personnel to perform training and management tasks, thus causing a bit of a personnel drain.
- Because it is entirely local in its administration, it is difficult to track and control. (In some instances, however, the WLP group can become involved and build in tracking mechanisms.)
- Its application is limited to situations in which master performers are on location and available to train.

### **What resources are required?**

- *Personnel:*
  - competent SOJT designers
  - managers to help with job analyses and monitor trainee progress
  - master performer employees to act as SOJT trainers.
- *Time:*
  - lengthy job analysis time
  - adequate lead time to validate each SOJT “package”
  - manager and trainer-employee time
  - trainee learning time.
- *Costs:*
  - heavy analysis and validation costs
  - minimal production costs
  - minimal delivery costs
  - manager, trainer, and trainee salaries, plus lost opportunity costs for SOJT trainers whose work may suffer as a result of trainee-guidance responsibilities.

### **What are some examples?**

- Training in a manufacturing setting that receives only a few new hires each year
- Call centers that continuously receive new hires
- Supermarkets that continuously receive part-time employees
- Distribution center workers who are occasionally brought onboard
- Fast-food operations.

Be sure to catch the fourth learning systems model – learner-controlled instruction – in the April 2011 edition of the *HSA e-Xpress*.

**This article is an excerpt from Harold Stolovitch and Erica Keeps' bestseller, *Beyond Training Ain't Performance Fieldbook*. Interested in learning more? Click [here](#) to order a copy of the book.**