



Discussion Paper

REVOLUTIONIZING TRAINING IN GOVERNMENT: THE NEXT WAVE

Tom Myette, TMGov Innovative Learning Models Community of Practice Manager

June 2013

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Revolutionizing Training in Government: The Next Wave

The advent of blended learning environments to accommodate varied learning styles, coupled with the expanded use of technology in delivering training programs, has created abundant opportunities for innovating training programs. The key to innovating learning exists in the delivery of the training, not necessarily the idea or concept. Leveraging technology to expand collaboration and inclusivity, and tailoring learning experiences that align with distinct learning styles, are fundamental training delivery innovations that result in more effective and cost efficient training programs. This white paper will highlight several traditional training paradigms and discuss how to innovate their implementation and execution in the public sector work context to increase engagement and productivity levels and the organization’s return on investment.

The notion that learning occurs both formally and informally, and can take place in a variety of settings, employing many different tools, demonstrates both the importance and advantage of innovative learning methods. If participants are able to learn through creative means and activities tailored to their learning preference, both engagement and knowledge retention will be greater as compared to more traditional learning methods.¹ The biggest difference in training approaches today is the growth in unstructured, learner-centric, collaborative learning engagements that require active participation.² As demonstrated in *Figure 1*, innovative training activities that require a significant degree of learner participation are advantageous and recommended for producing more favorable learning outcomes.

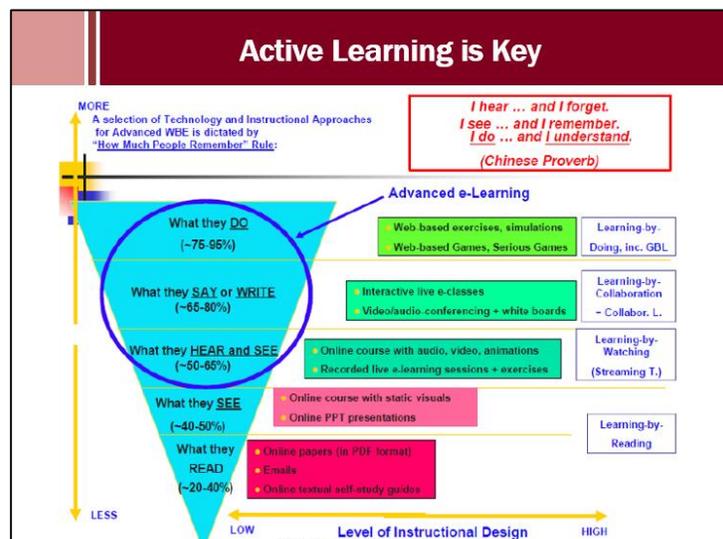


Figure 1

¹ Radosevich et al. (2008). “Using Student Response Systems to Increase Motivation, Learning, and Knowledge Retention.”

² Uskov, V. (2005). *International Journal on Advanced Technology for Learning*

Simulations and Gaming

The first training concept is simulation, an advanced eLearning platform that requires active participation. Target areas for innovations include the structure and design of the simulation, as well as its mode of delivery. First, the simulation should be delivered in an unscheduled or unannounced manner to truly replicate a work environment. Learning within unpredictable circumstances adds a realistic dimension to the training activity, which requires employees to think quickly and rationally while applying the information acquired in previous training programs. Incorporating "real" elements within the simulation is suggested for maximum effectiveness.³ For instance, use real customers and clients, actual computers, and scenarios that are derived from real events. To achieve this, shift from creating content in the developer's office to going out to the field to learn what actually occurs. Furthermore, implement changes to the simulations on a regular basis to authentically reflect what is going on in the real working environment. In addition, use content and scenarios that may have more than one outcome, which allows for enhanced collaboration and engenders creative problem solving and decision-making.⁴

When innovating simulation delivery options, first consider the overall training delivery strategy. If the program in question is a classroom-based course, the first component to consider is securing a "live workspace." For desk workers, develop a workspace that simulates the desk, complexity of the work, number of interruptions, and expected behavior of the person sitting behind it. Virtual training applications allow us to create complex learning environments that should be leveraged to simulate the workplace. For example, consider sending a "surprise" link to a simulation while students are in the virtual classroom, or transporting them to the real world using streaming video. This concept introduces the unscheduled element to the simulation while also giving participants the opportunity to experience the situation as it unfolds.⁵

Games are powerful platforms for learning. They provide a highly motivating environment with lots of opportunity for repetition and feedback. In addition, they give learners opportunities to make choices and embrace failure as an opportunity to improve. Some interesting facts on gaming from the *Learning Federation* demonstrate the widespread interest in gaming.

- An 8th grader plays video games an average of 5 hours per week.
- By high school, 77% of students have played games and nearly all have by college.
- 60% of college students are regular game players.

³ Nielson, Bryant (2010). *Seven Innovative Training Concepts*

⁴ Nielson, Bryant (2010). *Seven Innovative Training Concepts*

⁵ Nielson, Bryant (2010). *Seven Innovative Training Concepts*

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- As of April 2005, the America's Army video game had more than 5 million registered users.

According to the *Pew Internet & American Life Project*:

- 70% of college students play video or online games at least once in a while.
- 65% of college students are regular or occasional game players.
- 50% of college student gamers agreed that gaming keeps them from studying.

Clearly, younger generations of workers and future potential employees have an interest in gaming.

Organizations that innovate with simulations have realized increased retention rates and expanded opportunities to recruit higher quality candidates that prefer this type of learning environment.⁶ This nearly universal interest in games can be leveraged in the learning environment.



America's Army Video Game

Job Rotations, Virtual Rotations

It seems that any contemporary discussion of training and development in the public sector has to consider layoffs, diminished budgets and reducing resources to cut costs. Specifically, the challenge lies in how to enable a depleted workforce to continue producing at current levels of output. One way to innovate training is to counteract poor economic conditions through experientially-based training activities, such as job rotation, virtual rotation, and action learning. Thus, the training organization can become an integral aspect of the organization's recovery. For example, one way to innovate an employee's learning is through cross-functional job assignment on a part-time basis. This arrangement allows for diverse skill development, preserves the talent pool despite

⁶ Koper, R. (2005). "Increasing Learner Retention in a Simulated Learning Network Using Indirect Social Interaction."

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reduced staff, and reduces costs as the employee is learning while working.⁷ Rotations can potentially elevate inspiration levels as the employee acquires an expanded view of how the organization functions. Fresh perspectives in new departments can stimulate innovative ideas, facilitate communication, and engender transparency.

For geographically diverse organizations, rotations can occur at a virtual level, which is an innovation known as "virtual rotation." With advanced technology, such as web conferencing, screen sharing programs, and webcams, employees can be rotated virtually and connected in valuable ways, so why not have someone learn another job virtually? With screen sharing, a person can watch transactions, correspondence, and even in-house programs as the operator is carrying out the task, all without leaving his or her desk.⁸ If your organization has a work at home workforce, these employees can be especially leveraged to virtual rotations in many different areas. The elements to consider when implementing a program like this are the availability of technology in various locations, as well as the time differences that occur both within the country and outside of it.⁹ Again, cost effectiveness is likely as people are not leaving their desks to rotate through other jobs and other departments.

Action Learning Projects

Action-learning programs serve a dual purpose. First, they provide developmental experiences for employees that force them to look beyond functional silos to solve major strategic problems.¹⁰ Second, if properly designed, the action learning project can be linked to strategic objectives. Thus, participants garner real world lessons while simultaneously producing a useful work product for the company. Such programs have increased in importance because many companies, in downsizing and creating economies of scale, have eliminated a number of the roles that used to be prime training grounds for top management.¹¹ One way to provide general management experience in this environment is to launch small joint ventures or internal enterprises. Managers can also make lateral moves across functions and business units.¹²

There are several key principles of successful Action Learning. The core of the project—the problem to be solved—must be relevant and connected to the strategy or current needs of the organization.¹³ Learning must be continuous and occur throughout the process, not just at the end. The solution to any problem probably exists

⁷ Neal, A. et al. (2011). *Transitioning to Workforce 2020*

⁸ Nielson, Bryant (2010). *Seven Innovative Training Concepts*

⁹ Nielson, Bryant (2010). *Seven Innovative Training Concepts*

¹⁰ Conger, J. & Fulmer, R. (2003). "Developing Your Leadership Pipeline"

¹¹ Conger, J. & Fulmer, R. (2004). "Bench Strength: Grooming Your Next CEO"

¹² Conger, J. & Fulmer, R. (2004). "Bench Strength: Grooming Your Next CEO"

¹³ Nielson, Bryant (2010). *Seven Innovative Training Concepts*

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already somewhere in the organization, and action learning uncovers and amplifies those solutions. A challenge posed by Action Learning is the perception that it produces extra work. If the process is linked to a long-standing or critical problem, however, the process will be thought of as productive rather than just extra work or an “exercise.” Therefore, incorporating outcomes from the project into the wider organization is critical for success. A process to capture and distribute learning throughout the organization should be developed.¹⁴

Blended Learning and Modern Media Training

To most, blended learning describes a learning environment that combines an online intervention or computer simulation with the live classroom experience—a combination that is proven to work. However, as technology evolves, a variety of additional media is available to put in the “blend.”¹⁵ The innovation in blended learning can occur in the delivery methods as well as the combination of those methods. For instance, one can use web conferencing, video conferencing, online learning via a Learning Management System, or LMS, along with coaching and mentoring as well as on the job training. There are “on the go” trainings, social networks, and simulations, all delivered via various new technologies. For instance, “homework” delivered in an MP3 format has become common. When participants finish a certain portion of class, have them log into the LMS and find a downloadable homework assignment, complete with instructions and links, to complete before the next class meeting. We have touched on blogs as training tools, so why not use the blog during class time? After a case study, have participants log in and post discussion items.¹⁶

We are living in a new environment where technology is an integral aspect of our everyday lives and is a cost effective method of communication that can be leveraged in training programs. Organizations can and should create innovative combinations of training delivery methods to accommodate various learning styles and sustain engagement levels. More and more, today’s training audiences are looking for stimulation and quick interactions so that they can return to their responsibilities as quickly as possible. A variety of delivery combinations will attract learners to subsequent training activities.¹⁷

How can an organization use this “new social media” for training? They can market the training itself with new social media and track participation. Twitter is a recommended method to gather momentum and attract followers, especially if the audience is spread out over a large geographic spectrum. The idea is to have live, “real time” evaluation of the course to incorporate proper modifications for subsequent participants. Blogs are also an

¹⁴ Nielson, Bryant (2010). *Seven Innovative Training Concepts*

¹⁵ Nielson, Bryant (2010). *Seven Innovative Training Concepts*

¹⁶ Nielson, Bryant (2010). *Seven Innovative Training Concepts*

¹⁷ Nielson, Bryant (2010). *Seven Innovative Training Concepts*

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effective method of training. Online learning already uses discussion forums, so it should be easy to incorporate this type of learning activity into any course, whether it is classroom based or online. With a blog, you can also have a moderator who is an instructor, and this person can ensure that content remains focused on the subject. Blog moderation is also a good way to make corrections to incorrect information. The instructor can post scenarios, discussions, case studies, and other activities and have participants respond as part of their normal class work.¹⁸

Government Examples of Application

The Department of Commerce recently created a self-directed, computer game style course on PII (personally identifiable information). The course was not inexpensive to develop, but it has been successful on multiple fronts. It is engaging, it appeals to youth as well as other demographics, it costs pennies per user, it is available 24/7, and it is scalable to the entire department as well as to agencies and departments across government. Would it make sense to develop a sophisticated, first person style computer game for training relevant to only a few dozen or even a few hundred employees? Probably not; however, where there are thousands of students, who might otherwise have required costly traditional training, this development makes a lot of sense.



The VA Learning University (VALU) is VA's corporate university that supports the agency's mission and business objectives through high quality, cost-effective continuous learning and development that enhances leadership, occupational proficiencies, and personal growth.

In support of the ADVANCE initiative committed to helping veterans advance their career, VALU offers blended training options and resources that boost leadership and professional performance, develop job skills such as communication, problem solving and teamwork, promote personal growth, and support diversity and lifelong learning.

¹⁸ Nielson, Bryant (2010). *Seven Innovative Training Concepts*

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The Defense Acquisition University (DAU) deploys a robust blended learning approach for supporting the training and development needs of its workforce. Their system incorporates access to a virtual library, an online portal of collaborative communities, classroom and virtual instructional training courses, and modules and conferences to facilitate continuous learning.



The opportunities to innovate in learning throughout government are abundant. Training methods can be as innovative as their delivery methods, so consider every possibility when looking at how to design simulations, connect coaches and protégés regularly, and use virtual job rotations. Once you have looked at your available training methods, create innovative combinations as well, such as a spontaneous case study accessed virtually with an integrated blog for participants to interact. Blending learning combinations should be changed on a regular basis. Avoid keeping participants in one blended learning combination for an extended period of time, as the constant change will generate energy and interest in learning.¹⁹ Use many pieces of accessible technology, media, and traditional training programs. Modern training participants are looking for stimulation and brief interactions so that they can return to the office and apply new skills as quickly as possible.

¹⁹ Nielson, Bryant (2010). *Seven Innovative Training Concepts*

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