
Nontraditional Training Systems

Realizing the Effectiveness of an Agency's Most Valuable Resource

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Training is the most significant human resource function undertaken by law enforcement agencies. All law enforcement management textbooks cover the importance of implementing effective training programs. Each similarly defines training as the “planned effort by an organization to facilitate employees’ learning of job-related competencies.”¹

Most law enforcement officers receive more training now than they have in the past. Many agencies spend a significant

amount of time training new officers and increasing on-the-job learning through in-service training programs. The majority of this training focuses on cognitive (or factual) outcomes, not affective (or emotional) outcomes. Most law enforcement agencies, however, can make better use of their in-service training programs by shifting their paradigm to take into account the needs of adult learners and by teaching with purpose, not just to cover the material.²

FOCUSING ON TRAINING

Unfortunately, some instructors place little emphasis on teaching adult learners or, further, communicating with the increasing number of “Generation Xers.”³ Both groups are unique in their learning preferences and needs. Historically, law enforcement agencies have used a traditional training system model not particularly conducive to adult learners’ needs, but, instead, seemingly built around the needs of the organization. Often, some



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classes appear to cover repetitive, uninspiring topics simply to meet mandated requirements, rather than satisfying these standards in a self-directed study curriculum. Training with a traditional approach does not always realize the full effectiveness of the organization's most valuable resource—its people; agencies waste this important management tool. “A well-conceived training plan is a necessary ingredient.... It helps police personnel toward a change in attitudes and practices...and in providing more effective police services.”⁴ While training mandates establish uniform minimal standards of performance, the progressive law enforcement agency recognizes that although training provides the opportunity to acquire and improve job-related skills, it also extends further to career planning and development.⁵

Training is a set of activities that provides an opportunity to acquire and improve job-related skills. A majority of officers have mastered much of the mandated training and often work in areas where the training has little job relevancy. Covering this material in a self-directed study program and using the time and resources saved to broaden officers' career development in more challenging and interesting areas would better serve them and their agencies. The cognitive outcomes used to measure the degree to which trainees are familiar with principles, facts, techniques, procedures, and processes easily can be achieved via self-directed study, which allows adult learners to take responsibility for their own learning, and standardized tests. Agencies could tailor the new nontraditional learning objectives to

meet an officer's career development goal.

DEVELOPING CAREERS

The basic framework for formal career planning involves a five-step framework “beginning with personal assessment and then progressing through analysis of opportunities, selection of career objectives, and implementation of strategies.”⁶ Training programs that challenge and move people to higher levels of intellectual thought keep personnel motivated and improve the agency's ability to serve the community. The benefits from this type of training program may not be immediately recognizable, but subtle, long-term results will occur.

By focusing on career development, agencies pay more attention to affective outcomes, such as attitudes and motivation (which may include tolerance for diversity, motivation to learn, safety attitudes, and customer-service orientation), that will positively change an employee's attitude toward the organization and the mission. Focusing on affective outcomes and not cognitive outcomes (the degrees to which officers are familiar with facts and procedures) simply measured on a multiple-choice test compounds the organization's return on investment and the benefits derived from a training program.

Law enforcement officer in-service training can move progressively forward with an emphasis on purpose. Purposeful teaching⁷ moves away from traditional training systems (characterized by presenting topics in specific time frames and composed of lectures and demonstrations with results measured in multiple-choice test formats) to a systems approach, which aligns all elements of the educational process. A successful training program first must take into consideration some established principles of learning and recognize the student's apperceptive base: "The student's

past training and experience and his ability to integrate these with his new learning and experiences will materially affect his learning rate."⁸

IDENTIFYING NEEDS OF ADULT LEARNERS

Law enforcement in-service training programs should reflect Malcolm Knowles' theory of andragogy developed specifically for adult learners. Andragogy emphasizes that adults are self-directed and expect to take responsibility for their decisions; all adult-learning programs must accommodate this. Basically, andragogy means that instruction for adults needs to

focus more on the process and less on the content. Strategies, such as case studies, role-plays, simulations, and self-evaluation, are most useful, with the instructor acting more as a facilitator or resource than a lecturer. Andragogy is based on four assumptions about the design of learning.

- 1) Self-concept: In contrast to the dependency of children, adults have a deep psychological need to be self-directing. They resent and resist situations that do not allow for self-direction or courses in which the trainer and the design shove

Established Principles of Learning

- Principle of readiness: The conditions in the student's environment are such that they establish an attitude favorable to learning.
- Principle of effect: The effect of the student's success in learning is pleasurable and satisfying. The student will strive to continue doing what provides a pleasant effect to continue learning.
- Principle of repetition: Experiences that are pleasing or satisfying lead to an accompanying desire to repeat the experience.
- Principle of primacy: Things learned first create a strong impression in the mind that is difficult to erase. For this reason, negative approaches to teaching should be avoided.
- Principle of recency: Information acquired last generally is remembered best; frequent review and summarization help fix in the mind the material covered.
- Principle of intensity: The more intense the material taught, the more likely it will be retained.

Source: E. Hilgard, G. Bower, *Theories of Learning* (New York, NY: Appleton Century-Crofts, 1966).

trainees into dependent roles of children.

- 2) Experience: Adults have accumulated a reservoir of experience that serves as a resource for learning, as well as a broad base to relate new learning.
- 3) Readiness to learn: Adults become ready to learn things that they need to know or be able to do to fulfill their role in society. For example, instructors should not teach the principles of good composition, but, rather, how to write an effective business letter.
- 4) Orientation to learning: Children have a subject-centered orientation to learning; adults tend to have a problem-centered orientation. For example, children master content to pass a course or to be promoted to the next grade; adults seek the skills or knowledge they need to apply to real-life problems they face.

Other adult-learning theorists support Knowles' andragogy principles. One theorist maintains that "adult-learning programs should capitalize on the experiences of participants while challenging adults to move to increasingly advanced stages of personal development.... Adults should have as much choice as possible in the availability and organization of

learning programs."⁹ Participants who learn from purposeful teaching tend to become lifelong learners who seek further educational and training opportunities, and they also lean toward modeling these behaviors in their own teaching and managerial roles.¹⁰ Four key points facilitate an interactive learning setting: 1) create a low-risk learning environment, which is accomplished by specific seating arrangements in the classroom to the manner that

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questions are answered and the response to answers given; 2) encourage higher levels of engagement, such as critical thinking and problem solving; 3) examine student learning to alter instruction if necessary; and 4) increase the student's level of critical thinking by incorporating specialized questioning. Further, certain principles allow the instructor/facilitator to break away from the incorrect assumptions made with a traditional model of teaching.

- Telling is teaching and listening is learning.
- Covering content will transfer into practice in the field.
- Recall is an appropriate way to test mastery of learning.
- All expertise and control of learning necessarily resides in the instructor.¹¹

Law enforcement training can move its focus on student learning from mere knowledge cognition to higher levels of expressed learning. Benjamin Bloom's cognitive domain taxonomy¹² ranks the levels of thinking and provides instructors with a framework they can use to build curriculum materials that take learners more deeply into an area of study. The cognitive domain involves knowledge and the development of intellectual skills, including the recall or recognition of specific facts, procedural patterns, and concepts that serve in the development of intellectual abilities and skills. The domain includes six major categories, from the simplest behavior to the most complex, and can be thought of as degrees of difficulties—the first one must be mastered before the next one can take place.¹³

- 1) Knowledge: recalling or recognizing information.
- 2) Comprehension: organizing learned material described in own words.

Purposeful Teaching

“Real teaching is more than imparting knowledge. Learning is defined as a demonstrated change of the participants’ behavior sought by the instructor. The behaviors sought must not just be a regurgitation of information provided but, instead, must be a demonstration of the behaviors required for effective application.” This “Purposeful Teaching” approach focuses on learning, not just covering material, and is composed of six essential elements.

- 1) The creation of an environment supportive of and conducive to learning; the major factor is a high-intensity, but relatively safe, learning environment where the instruction builds on successful experiences, not coercive or demeaning activities.
- 2) Clearly stated outcomes expressed in terms of how learners will demonstrate their acquisition of knowledge and skills.
- 3) Activities structured for the needs of the learners, such as the use of their experience, teaching to multiple learning styles, and their inclusion in defining how they will be taught.
- 4) Learners’ active physical and mental engagement in the learning process, rather than reliance on passive listening, watching, and reading activities.
- 5) Interactive teaching techniques that enable a continuous checking for participant learning so instruction can be modified for optimal learning.
- 6) Activities structured to precipitate critical thinking and problem solving; these skills are not subjects to be taught, but processes to be involved in and reflected upon.

Source: K. Spencer, *Center for Excellence in Teaching, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD*, Purposeful Teaching, <http://www.rcmp-learning.org/docs/ecdd1140.htm>.

- 3) Application: using previously learned material to solve a problem.
- 4) Analysis: identifying reasons, causes, and motives and considering available evidence to reach a conclusion, inference, or generalization.
- 5) Synthesis: combining ideas or related information, producing original communica-

tions, and making predictions based on information.

- 6) Evaluation: judging the merit of an idea, solution, or work.

PLANNING TRAINING PROGRAMS

After establishing where training efforts should take law enforcement and the outcomes they should provide, agencies must plot the course to reach

these improved and expanded outcomes. The instructional design process is a systematic approach for developing a training program. The design should emphasize that effective training programs involve more than choosing the easiest or most familiar training approach. Agencies should focus on ensuring education and changing perceptions, not on meeting mandates. To this end, they can

follow a process that will guide them through the design of instruction planning, from recognizing needs, creating the right environment, and selecting the best methods to evaluate the success of the program.¹⁴

Departments can implement this process for any training program; however, mandated training requirements exist for all law enforcement officers. For example, some agencies mandate a certain amount of classroom training for all firearms, covering the 1) purpose of firearms instruction; 2) care, cleaning, and safe handling and storage of service weapons; 3) legal aspects of the use of firearms; and 4) fundamentals of shooting, such as sight alignment, sight picture, stance, grip, and trigger control. Without question, these represent important topics for law enforcement officers to understand and master; however, they typically do not focus on the adult learner. Instead, they stress the cognitive through material lectured to officers each year. This curriculum, built around the constraints of the organization and the needs and abilities of the instructors, often prevents the department from fulfilling the needs of the officers and may create an atmosphere of resentment because abilities go unrecognized. Typically, instructors conduct firearms in-service training by lecture and demon-

stration of the most basic procedures and review of the use-of-force continuum and significant case law with little consideration for the in-service attendees' experience or expertise in the area. Officers, usually grouped in classes with significantly different levels of experience and training, often receive the same training with little modification every year. By applying a sound instructional

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design process, departments can create a more effective course that moves the learning from simple cognition to affective learning, reflecting a change in attitudes and practice.

Recognizing Needs

By conducting a needs assessment, departments rightfully could conclude, for example, that training officers in the care, cleaning, safe handling, and legal aspects of firearms is necessary. The public expectation is high, and officers

certainly should be proficient with their duty weapons to avoid litigation and to provide proper answers to citizens if questioned about firearms safety. Further, many pressure points, such as performance problems, new technology legislation, or an officer's lack of basic skills, may suggest or mandate the need for training. An organizational analysis certainly would confirm the appropriateness of this particular training. A personal analysis would determine whether lack of proficiency was the result of inadequacy of knowledge, skills, or abilities and determine which, and to what extent, individuals need training. A task analysis would identify the important task, knowledge, skills, behaviors, and attitudes to emphasize in the training.

Creating the Right Environment

The next step to successful change is ensuring officers' readiness for the training and the enhancement of their motivation to learn. The most important aspect concerning firearms training is letting the officers know that the purpose of the training is to try to improve performance, rather than to point out incompetence. By creating a learning environment that recognizes the needs of adult learners, a permanent change in behavior can occur.

Officers must know why they are learning the material, which, in turn, instructors should express in objectives that provide the training's purpose and expected outcomes. Training objectives have three components: 1) a statement of what the officer is expected to do, 2) a statement of the quality or level of performance deemed acceptable, and 3) a statement of the conditions under which the officer must perform.¹⁵ Officers also need to use their own experiences as a basis for learning. Here is where the move from the traditional pedagogical instruction method (the one-way transfer of knowledge from the instructor to the student) must take place. The andragogical style, which promotes the mutual involvement of the student and instructor in the learning process to help enhance the learning environment, should replace the pedagogical instruction method. Allowing officers to learn by observing and interacting with others and by giving them opportunities to practice what they have learned further enhances the learning environment, providing immediate positive feedback. These crucial elements should become key components of the curriculum.

Selecting the Best Methods

Training is only effective if the knowledge, skills, and

behaviors are transferred to practice. The transfer of training needs to be supported and encouraged within the culture of the organization. Therefore, management not only must support the training but verify that officers have opportunities to apply the learning. Agencies can employ different methods to determine that they have selected the right training method. While the lecture process has merit in ensuring the presentation of material, it proves the least effective method for teaching adult learners. Also, law enforcement is one of the few professions where the onus for up-to-date training and certification maintenance rests with the organizations, not the

individual. This lack of personal responsibility, coupled with the fact that adult learners are more motivated when their need for active participation in the learning process is recognized, encourages the move to more self-directed learning practices. Providing officers with printed material clearly outlining and explaining information that easily measures knowledge, comprehension, and application prior to formal training allows for more class time to progress instruction into areas that encourage analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of the topic. This moves the training from the coverage and regurgitation of content onto selected response tests to the demonstration of

Our Retention Levels

- 10 percent of what we read
- 20 percent of what we hear
- 30 percent of what we see
- 40 percent of what we see and hear
- 60 percent of what we discuss with others
- 70 percent of what we experience personally
- 80 percent of what we discover and solve individually or in groups
- 95 percent of what we teach to someone else

Source: K. Spencer, *Center for Excellence in Teaching*, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD, Purposeful Teaching, <http://www.rcmp-learning.org/docs/ecdd1140.htm>.

Sample Lesson Plan

One agency's approach to lesson plan design includes facilitating adult learning, incorporating different teaching methods, recognizing varying learning preferences, and meeting the mandated requirement on annual firearms training. First, instructors use the anticipatory set, a short activity that focuses the learners' attention before the actual lesson begins. For example, questions are listed on the board referring to predistributed handouts describing nomenclature of service weapon, cleaning materials used, and general safety practices. Instructors follow this with the purpose or objective of the training. The instructor imparts why the students need to learn the material, how they will be able to transfer the material, and how they will show learning as a result of the instruction. Knowing that students have varying levels of knowledge and expertise and that they have had prior training in this area, instructors should limit the lecture/modeling. A guided practice will ensure continuity of knowledge. After this, the instructor should check for understanding by using a variety of questioning strategies to determine what learning has occurred. An independent practice should follow, and students should break into small work groups to solve problems in either a case study format or situational problem-solving format. The closure segment or a review of the lesson, in which the instructor asks the students to provide feedback or to demonstrate what has been learned, should follow.

new knowledge during a competent field performance. Other best practices to facilitate adult learners and ensure learning include case study methods, work groups, discussion panels, and practice sessions. Employing as many of these methods as possible ensures that personal learning preferences are considered, and by strategically applying all of the different levels of engagement, law enforcement managers can exponentially increase the learner's retention to obtain the most transfer of training to application.

Evaluating the Program

In evaluating training programs, agencies must focus on the training outcomes, which

they can measure in several ways: 1) cognitive; 2) skill-based; 3) results; and, most important, 4) affective, or the changes in officers' motivations and attitudes. With in-service firearms training, agencies more easily can measure the cognitive outcomes, which typically involve an ability to recite information previously presented. In challenging adult learners to affective learning, agencies will call upon them to compare and contrast, design, develop, critique, and justify the materials instructed.

Few law enforcement training programs are evaluated in a rigorous manner. Most training evaluations use routine trainee evaluation forms that ask

participants to describe their attitudes about the adequacy and relevancy of program content and the capabilities of the instructional staff. But, any training program evaluation also should include an assessment of the participants' degree of learning, which indicates if the trainees' knowledge of the subject has increased or if certain skills have improved. In addition, it may include measures of attitudes toward specific concepts or procedures. An assessment of what students have learned in a training program is important because changes in knowledge, skills, and attitudes usually can be linked to changes in behavior and performance.¹⁶

After emphasizing the importance of recognizing the adult learners' needs and ways to accommodate and develop better training programs suited to these needs, departments must consider a lesson plan that incorporates teaching methods focused on the adult learner, as well as one that reflects a progressive, affective outcome-based management philosophy. Without a systematic, comprehensive lesson plan, the instructor, students, and the department lack a significant resource. The lesson plan constitutes the blueprint to meaningful instruction, which departments can duplicate and use as a basis for testing. Further, it can provide the specificity and detail required to determine the purpose of the training, the desired outcomes, the conditions under which the student must perform, and what type of testing took place to ensure learning, items often missing in training outlines.

CONCLUSION

Law enforcement has come a long way in recognizing the importance and significance of training. To keep the training evolution progressing, trainers and managers can incorporate approaches that consider the needs of adult learners and allow them to be accountable for their own learning.

By moving away from the traditional lecture formats and

creating learning environments that facilitate self-directed learning, agencies can increase officers' retention capacities and better ensure that they put their training into practice. Mandated training requirements have a valid purpose, but agencies should ensure that they base teaching methods on the needs of the students, not the constraints and needs of the organization. Simply telling someone how to do something does not mean that learning has occurred; covering mandated content does not mean that officers will transfer the material into practice on the job. Instead, by adopting the principles of andragogy, agencies can instruct with a higher purpose and help their officers achieve full potential. ♦

Endnotes

¹ R. Noe, J. Hollenbeck, B. Gerhart, P. Wright, *Human Resource Management: Gaining a Competitive Advantage* (Boston, MA: McGraw Hill, 2000).

² For additional information on adult learners, see Ralph Kennedy, "Applying Principles of Adult Learning: The Key to More Effective Training Programs," *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, April 2003, 1-5.

³ Some experts place the age range as those born during the years 1961 through 1981, while others say between the years 1966 and 1976. For additional information, see Elizabeth Foley and Adrienne LeFevre, "Understanding Generation X," *Trial*, June 2000, 58-62; retrieved on December 15, 2003, from http://www.zmf.com/articles/art_gen_x.html.

⁴ G.T. Felkenes, *Effective Police Supervision: A Behavioral Approach* (San Jose,

CA: Justice Systems Development, Inc., 1977).

⁵ This opinion was confirmed via an informal research method conducted by the author that included a survey of Johns Hopkins University Police Executive Leadership Program graduate and undergraduate students, representing 12 law enforcement and fire service agencies throughout Maryland and Washington, DC. Nine students indicated that their agencies' in-service training curriculum was constructed around the needs of the agency and mandated topics, which personnel often resented due in large part to the perceived minimization of the officers' intelligence and abilities and curricula not tailored for adult learners and their career objectives.

⁶ J. Schermerhorn, J. Hunt, R. Osborn, *Organizational Behavior* (New York, NY: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2000).

⁷ K. Spencer, Center for Excellence in Teaching, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD, *Purposeful Teaching*, retrieved from <http://www.rcmp-learning.org/docs/ecdd1140.htm>.

⁸ N. F. Iannone and M. P. Iannone, *Supervision of Police Personnel* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001).

⁹ K. P. Cross, *Adults as Learners* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1981).

¹⁰ Supra note 7.

¹¹ Supra note 7.

¹² For additional information on Benjamin Bloom, see *Prospects: The Quarterly Review of Comparative Education* 30, no. 3 (Paris, UNESCO: International Bureau of Education, September 2000); and <http://faculty.washington.edu/krumme/guides/bloom.html>.

¹³ For additional information, see <http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/bloom.html>.

¹⁴ Supra note 1.

¹⁵ Supra note 1.

¹⁶ C. D. Hale, *Police Patrol Operation and Management* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Career and Technology, 1994).