

Digital Training @Work

Engaging and Educating Employees Online

Renee Robinson, PhD



RENEE ROBINSON

DIGITAL TRAINING @WORK

ENGAGING AND EDUCATING
EMPLOYEES ONLINE

Digital Training @Work: Engaging and Educating Employees Online

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CONTENTS

	Preface	6
1	Training and Development: Employee Engagement and Interaction in a Digital Age	9
1.1	Information and Communication Technologies	10
1.2	Organizational Communication and Training and Development Programs	11
1.3	Organizational Learning and Organizational Knowledge	15
1.4	Organizational Factors Impacting Digital Learning Success	16
1.5	Summary	17
2	Getting Started: The Fundamentals of Planning a Training & Development Program	19
2.1	Organizational Goals, Need Considerations, and the Role of Assessment	19
2.2	Audience Identification	21
2.3	Training Types	21

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2.4	Technological Considerations	22
2.5	Organizational Communication and Digital Training	23
2.6	Summary	24
3	Designing and Assessing Digital Training & Development Programs	26
3.1	Andragogy	27
3.2	Learning Styles	28
3.3	The ADDIE Model	31
3.4	Summary	33
4	Content Application: Designing a Digital Training & Development Module	35
4.1	Communication Model and Element Application	36
4.2	ADDIE Applied	37
4.3	Adragogy Applied	43
4.4	Kolb's ELM/Learning Styles Applied	44
4.5	Instructional Communication Tips	45
4.6	Summary	47
5	References	49
	Appendix A Andragogical Characteristics Questionnaire	51
	Appendix B ADDIE Model Questionnaire	52
	Appendix C Activity Analysis Table	53

PREFACE

Organizations, whether profit or nonprofit, brick spaces or digital ones, are complex entities with numerous challenges. In their most basic form, organizations consist of a group of people working together to meet a common goal or mission. These individuals form a system that is managed by a hierarchical structure consisting of people with varying duties and responsibilities adhering to and enforcing policies, procedures, and rules created by the entity through organizational communication.

Regardless of organizational type, all organizations are confronted by a variety of factors that influence their productivity and success. Modaff, Butler, and DeWine (2011) note some of these challenges consisting of diversity among employees and globalization, which has resulted in increased competition among businesses around the world due to technological innovation and communication capabilities. Consequently, one of the most significant challenges for organizations involves communication in general but especially technology and the digital communication and information tools that it permits and supports as it relates to human interaction.

The degree of success that an organization obtains is contingent upon how effectively it manages the challenges it encounters. How effectively the organization addresses challenges is contingent upon its ability to recognize problems and to effectively communicate those issues to the appropriate department or person that can respond. All workplace communication, effective and ineffective, produce organizational consequences. Effective communication can lead to employee satisfaction, positive organizational cultures that embrace workplace learning and capitalize on employee strengths, and productivity improvements. Typically, organizational success, is dependent upon the effectiveness (and quality of) communication that exists among and between employees at all institutional levels and the extent to which organizational members are connected to the organization's mission/purpose and one another.

The likelihood of organizational success as it relates to employee connectedness, also thought of as engagement, is further reliant upon effective communication. Interpersonal communication, group/team communication, and workplace interactions each play a significant role in shaping the employee's organizational reality and degree of satisfaction with their position. For instance, effective communication is required to provide message clarity concerning the employee's role and responsibilities, performance, and organization goals. Effective managerial and leadership communication is required to convey care, concern and value of employees as well as to discuss areas of employee improvement, or the organization's future. Effective organizational communication is also required to create shared meaning among organization members so that they may fulfill the organization's mission and their respective role. Each of these areas present opportunities to enhance

organizational communication and success through employee training and development programs. And because the workplace is diverse and organizational needs great, the necessity for training and development programs is both numerous and great. According to the BusinessDictionary (see <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/training.html>) *training* is an “organized activity aimed at imparting information and/or instructions to improve the recipient’s performance or to help him or her attain a required level of knowledge or skill.” A fundamental aspect of training is skill development. *Skills* are “an ability and capacity acquired through deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to smoothly and adaptively carryout complex activities or job functions involving ideas (cognitive skills), things (technical skills), and/or people (interpersonal skills) (www.BusinessDictionary.com). Training, whether it is well-developed, assessed, and linked to specific objectives (or not) impact employee job satisfaction, communication satisfaction, and employee morale; each of these outcomes can influence organizational growth or stagnation while also increasing the likelihood of employee retention or turnover.

Additionally, effective training, which requires specific communication behaviors and knowledge of learning theory and design principles, is a fundamental component for organizational growth and evolution especially as it links to organizational objectives. Effective training and communication demands that an organization manages information, uses that information to create organizational experiences and knowledge for employees, and finds ways to translate that knowledge to organizational learning depicted by employees that ultimately manifests in organizational evolution. The issue of information management has become especially important over the last 25 years due to the information age. Since organizations consist of employees, it is important to underscore the role that employees play in how an organization learns and uses information to advance organizational success. For employees to obtain professional goals and contribute to organizational success, they must be trained and developed to understand the:

- importance of communication (interpersonal and organizational);
- organization’s mission and goals;
- role they fulfill within the organization (e.g., their position and duties); and
- need for their ongoing learning, both formally and informally, concerning their position, but of equal importance, the industry to which they belong and the skills they personally require for success in- and out-of-the office.

Therefore, a fundamental purpose of this book is to help improve organizational interactions and employee learning and connectedness through communication strategies and educational theories associated with effective digital training and development experiences aligning with various organization goals. This text is intended for human resources personnel and training managers and leaders in varying organizations and industries who seek to design meaningful

digital learning opportunities for employees, whether they be developed internally or purchased externally. More specifically the book focuses on digital training and development programs and the variables that impact employee engagement and learning. Although this book emphasizes digital training, the topics discussed here are just as applicable to more traditional modes of training that occur in face-to-face environments.

The objectives of this text are to:

- present information about the importance of employee training and development as it relates to communication, employee engagement, organizational learning, and company success;
- familiarize you with various training considerations to assist you in creating original digital training and development programs;
- equip you with various training variables to consider in identifying and selecting training and development programs prepared by external vendors;
- acquaint you with different types of digital sources and activities to implement in online training modules;
- introduce you to some important aspects of instructional design, learning theories, knowledge construction models, and trainee interaction types; and
- provide a working example of how to apply the text's concepts to the creation of an online training module.

Each of these objectives is explored in the following chapters and accompanied by various activities to enforce the information presented. For example, Chapter 1 introduces you to the communication process, elements, and aspects of computer-mediated communication in relation to training and development initiatives. Chapter 2 addresses the logistics of planning a successful training program. A discussion of how to design and assess an effective and engaging training and development program is presented in Chapter 3 while Chapter 4 provides a working model and examples of how to implement what is presented in the opening chapters of this text.

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1 TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT: EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND INTERACTION IN A DIGITAL AGE

In this chapter, you will learn about:

- The digital age and its characteristics
- Information Communication Technology
- Organizational Communication Components and Process
- Computer-mediated Communication
- Organizational Learning and Knowledge

According to IGI (see <https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/digital-age/7562>), the digital age, also referred to as the information or computer age, is conceptualized as a time in human history, beginning around 1980, in which people began to interact with technology frequently. The digital age is characterized by the pervasiveness of technology in our society. With the increased use of technology, expectations of that technology and the way it is societally adopted and used to communicate modifies peoples' expectations about information and communication. Marshall McLuhan, in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964), conveyed this best in his famous quote, "The medium is the message." With the digital age, computers became the medium with which we communicated and their capacity to allow human interaction to span time and space coupled with their multi-modal capabilities that support messages in text, audio, and video influenced societal expectations about when we communicate, how we communicate, and where we communicate. It also increased our expectations about our access to information, the rate of speed in which we should respond to others, the locations in which we communicate about matters of interest, and where we work.

Organizations are a subset of society. Consequently, the digital age also impacted the way businesses operate and communicate. Some examples of digital age implications and operational differences involve how information is valued, collected, used, and stored. Other digital age implications on operational practices involve communication and how organizations interact with customers, employees, and stakeholders, as well as develop and maintain their organizational reputations in digital spaces. Work place locations and times for work have been significantly affected by the digital age and the mediums used to conduct our work. Organization success and survival has been largely influenced by information and communication technologies and how organizations incorporate, implement, learn and train employees to use technology in the digital age in a way that serves the organization and its stakeholders well.

1.1 INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES

According to TechTerms (see <https://techterms.com/definition/ict>), “Information and communication technologies, ICT, refers to technologies that provide access to information through telecommunications. It is like Information Technology (IT), but focuses primarily on communication technologies. This includes the Internet, wireless networks, cell phones, and other communication mediums”. As a component of the digital age, ICT requires some discussion as it relates to organizations.

Upon further investigating ICT, it involves three intricately related words that significantly impact online training and development programs: information, communication, and technology. *Information* refers to specific data or messages that need to be conveyed to or between intended audiences. *Communication* refers to the shared meaning that emerges among participants in the interactions about the messages they exchange between them. *Technology*, in this instance, refers to the tools and channels participants use to communicate about information and message exchanges. More specifically, ICT is concerned with telecommunication. According to Bouwman, van den Hooff, van de Wijngaert, and Dijk (2005) “*telecommunication* is technologies used to establish communication over distance” (p. 22). Telecommunication permits information exchange through human interaction with computer-based technologies. *Information technology*, as defined by Bouwman et al (2005), is ‘technologies that are used to store, process, and provide data’ (p. 22). Information technologies are varied and the rate of innovation regarding these tools is increasing. New software and hardware designed to manage information is produced regularly and the advances to previously produced technology versions are rampant. Technological advancement brings about several positive outcomes. For example, Fulk and Desanctis (1995) posit that, communication technologies increase the speed of communication, reduce the cost of communication and information storage, increase the amount of information that can be shared between participants, improves connectivity between people, and integrates communication into the organization in a way that enhances the likelihood of community building and information sharing. Each of these positive outcomes can be met in digital training and development programs if they are created depicting the best practices concerning communication strategies and educational theories related to online learning.

To better understand how ICT impacts organizations, let’s examine the concept of organizational communication and the role ICT plays in facilitating organizational interactions and productivity inside and outside the organization.

1.2 ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION AND TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Organizational communication has been defined in various ways. Essentially it is the communication that occurs in an organizational context between coworkers, supervisors and subordinates, and external stakeholders as appropriate. Paynton and Hahn (nd, see https://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Survey_of_Communication_Study/Preface), offer a more concrete definition of organizational communication “as the sending and receiving of messages among interrelated individuals within a particular environment or setting to achieve individual and common goals.” This definition is built upon an important tenet of communication – shared meaning. For organizational employees to achieve personal or group goals, they must understand what those goals are and mean to various individuals. Other definitions of organizational communication involve aspects of challenges experienced in the workplace and the way those challenges influence communication or require different communication behaviors or strategies. For example, Modaff et al (2011) define organizational communication as “...the process of creating, exchanging, interpreting (correctly or incorrectly), and storing messages within a system of human interrelationships” (p. 7). While each of these definitions are distinctly different, they share one distinct commonality: they both focus on messages in the communication process and how those messages influence organizational outcomes when humans interact in workplace contexts.

In the digital age, organizations use a host of different communication tools. For instance, it is not uncommon for workplace interactions to involve audio exchanges via phone, emails, text messages, or videoconferences. The digital communication tools available today increase the likelihood of miscommunication between communicators. Part of this miscommunication occurs due to a decreased amount of face-to-face communication in the workplace. These same challenges emerge in digital learning and training spaces. As previously noted, organizations are complicated places. Communication is also complex. Therefore, some discussion about the communication process and its elements is required so we may better comprehend the communication challenges presented by ICT tools and ultimately the challenges of digital training and development programs.

1.2.1 THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS AND ELEMENTS

Communication is a process involving participants and the exchange of messages between them. Each human interaction involves the elements of the communication process and training and development programs is no exception. It is important to begin our analysis of communication with the understanding that communication is complicated because it involves human interaction and every interaction occurs in a specific context that is bound

by culture, time, physical or digital space, and in relation to some event or historical context that prompted the communication act in the first place. Furthermore, the communication process is dynamic. It is a process that is fluid and one in which each participant is multi-communicating, or communicating with themselves as well as each other(s) simultaneously using multiple communication tools (e.g., apps, emails, texts). Multi-communicating in the digital age is promoted given the multi-modal characteristics of computers and smartphones. Unfortunately, this communication phenomenon is not necessarily helpful nor does it promote shared meaning between communicators as it often leads to a lack of complete attention to the messages shared between communicators. It is easy to imagine the implications for organizations regarding the loss of profit, resources, and time. This is especially true of digital training and development programs if they are not appropriately designed and delivered.

The *communication process* consists of seven elements. These elements are listed and defined below with accompanying workplace examples in Figure 1.

Element	Definition	Workplace Example
Sender	Message generator	Supervisor
Message	Information conveyed between a sender and receiver consisting of symbols and signs sent verbally or nonverbally and intentionally (Stohl & Redding, 1987)	Jocelyn (Supervisor): Greg (subordinate) <i>do you have a few minutes for us to discuss tomorrow's presentation?</i>
Receiver	Recipient of a message	Greg (employee/subordinate)
Channel	Mechanism or tool used to convey the message	Jocelyn could make this request face-to-face, email, phone, or text message.
Feedback	Messages sent between a sender and receiver in response to an initial message	Greg (Subordinate): <i>Sure, Jocelyn. What time would you like to meet?</i>
Context	Circumstances defining a communication act that involve the time of communication, the space in which it occurred (digital or physical), the socio-psychological relationship between the sender and the receiver (supervisor-subordinate), and the cultural aspects of the sender, receiver, or organization	Depending upon the communication channel, this message could be conveyed during or after office hours, physically or digitally, the socio-psychological relationship is one of employee to his supervisor and the cultural aspects of the conversation would depend upon Jocelyn and Greg's cultural characteristics as well as the organization's culture.

Element	Definition	Workplace Example
Noise	Environmental, physical, or psychological impediments to the communication interaction	Noise varies depending upon the channel used to communicate. Email noise may occur if the company email experienced technological issues. However, physical noise might occur if the meeting encountered a construction or repair to office equipment issue. Noise might also be present if Jocelyn or Greg is experiencing a physical ailment such as a headache or cold.

Figure 1: Communication Elements Defined

Each communication interaction involves the communication elements noted in Figure 1. However, they are not necessarily isolated aspects of the communication process. The communication elements interact simultaneously resulting in the need for communicators to attend to different types of messages (e.g., verbal, nonverbal, physical) and elements while also sending and receiving those messages at the same time. For instance, we communicate using verbal and nonverbal messages. However, while we are receiving a message, we are also formulating a response to that message and trying to interpret what an individual is sharing with us. Consequently, we may use language, hand gestures, or facial expressions (among others) as channels to convey aspects of a message to a recipient. To make matters more complicated, meanings of words and nonverbal cues reside in the recipients of our messages. As a sender of a message we may think we have conveyed what we mean by our messages to others; however, messages consist of signs and symbols that may be interpreted very differently by others dependent upon the meanings that those signs and symbols have for the recipients of messages.

Like technology, in the digital age, communication is ubiquitous. It occurs everywhere around us in our interpersonal relationships, families, workplaces, and on our computers, mobile devices, and televisions. Consequently, there are a variety of forms of human communication. Some of these communication forms are listed below in Figure 2.



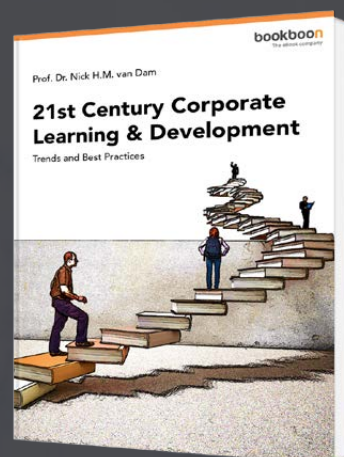
Figure 2: Communication Forms

Upon careful reflection, you will note that each of the communication forms presented in Figure 2 occur in organizational communication settings and most of these forms can also occur in digital contexts or computer-mediated environments. Consequently, training and development programs are impacted by each of these communication forms resulting in the need for clarity and understanding of communication strategies that promote learning

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in digital environments along with educational theories that guide us in how to present messages and the channels available to convey that content. Now that you have a basic understanding of organizational communication, the communication process and elements along with the different forms of communication contexts, we will turn our attention to two specific types of communication related to digital training and development programs: computer-mediated communication and instructional communication.

1.2.2 TECHNOLOGY AT WORK: COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION

As noted earlier, the digital age has impacted societal expectations about communication and information; consequently, it has impacted the ways in which organizations conduct their day-to-day business as it corresponds to communication practices and information management, both of which impact the potential for organizational success. To remain competitive and relevant to stakeholders and customers, organizations use a variety of technologies to meet organizational objectives and daily tasks. Technology in the workplace ranges from computers to mobile devices to smartphones to software that supports communication or manages information. Specific examples of organizational activities using computer-mediated communication involving information and communication consist of documenting organizational inventory and behaviors, communicating with employees and stakeholders, and storing information like employee records and performance evaluations. Other examples of computer-mediated communication include email, voicemail, videoconferences, and text messages. As you can see, ICT and computer-mediated communication has significantly impacted organizations via the way they interact with their environments and communicate with their constituencies. Another way that ICT has impacted organizations concerns organization learning and knowledge accrual as it relates to information access and how to contextualize and organize that information.

1.3 ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING AND ORGANIZATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Organizational success is contingent upon the individuals who comprise it and their understanding of the role they play and the tasks they are responsible for institutionally. These individuals have the capability to shape the organization positively or negatively and their ability to do so depends upon the training and development programs that were in place as they transitioned from a new hire to an insider. Peter Senge in his book, *The Fifth Discipline* (1990), defined *organizational learning* as a place, “where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking

are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together” (p. 1). From an access to information perspective and ability to interact with individuals around the world, which is a fundamental benefit of ICT, increasing the likelihood of organizational learning has become more achievable than it was in 1990. An environment like this demands “*knowledge workers*” (Nonaka, 1991, p. 97); a reference to individuals who learn and generate knowledge about various topics as a way of being. ICT has significantly shaped and co-created a knowledge economy that expects citizens to access information, use that information to the benefit of themselves and their positions/ employers, and to constantly learn about technology tools as it helps them to communicate or to manipulate information more effectively in personal and professional ways.

Organizational learning and knowledge workers are created through effective organizational communication between leadership, management, and employees that is thoughtful, inclusive, and well-planned with the intent of developing a workforce that wants to learn, builds upon their individual skills sets, and begins to translate that knowledge into a collective learning organization like that described by Senge (1990). According to Garvin (1993), “A learning organization is an organization skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights” (see <https://hbr.org/1993/07/building-a-learning-organization>). In a digital age, for organizational learning to occur and a learning organization to evolve built upon knowledge workers, employee training and development is required. Learning how to use ICT in purposeful ways aimed at developing effective digital training and development experiences for employees is the purpose of this text. Instructional communication provides the framework for this goal to be met.

1.4 ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS IMPACTING DIGITAL LEARNING SUCCESS

There are many organizational factors that affect digital learning environments in the workplace and whether an organization can achieve success by empowering employees and capitalizing on worker talents. Some variables that influence success consist of organizational leadership, culture, and resources. Leadership plays a fundamental role in establishing organizational expectations, goals, and vision. Leadership is largely responsible for shaping the organization’s future through careful contemplation about competition, employee motivation, institutional finances, organization brand, and stakeholder expectations. *Organizational culture*, typically thought of as the rules and norms that guide an organization’s behavior, also influences its success and is linked to leadership. Organizations with cultures that welcome employee experiences, encourage employee learning, contributions, and innovation, and implement effective communication behaviors with employees (e.g., soliciting employee feedback

about organizational or personal goals, encouraging employees to try new things) and their broader environments are often more successful than organizations that fail to embrace these practices. Developing a workplace culture that celebrates innovation, encourages worker input, and values employee contributions requires resources. Organizational resources are needed to reward employees for a job well done. Resources are needed in the form of time; time to train workers, time to modify work schedules for training, and time to create meaningful learning experiences that engage workers is necessary. An additional resource involves technology support given the demands of a digital age and what is required to maintain an organization of knowledge workers while also creating an organization that utilizes technology to manage information and workflow effectively internally with digital training and development programs while also creating a digital presence concerning brand and reputation management externally.

1.5 SUMMARY

This chapter has introduced you to a variety of concepts involving the complexities of communication in a digital age and the implications these variables have on organizational operations and success. The fundamental goal of this chapter is to set the stage for how to create a learning organization and knowledge workers built upon effective communication practices involving the instructional training and development of workers in digital platforms. The remainder of this text will examine the characteristics of effective training and development programs, the logistics of planning instructional interactions, how to design digital learning experiences that maximize employee engagement, and some concrete examples of how to produce effective digital training and development programs internally or to identify effective programs provided by external vendors.

Key Terms

Digital Age
Information Communication Technology
Communication
Sender/Receiver
Channel
Message
Feedback
Noise
Context

Information

Computer-mediated Communication

Organizational Communication

Organizational Learning

Learning Organization

Knowledge Workers

Reflection to Action

1. Revisit the definition of computer-mediated communication. Reflect on the ways in which you communicated with colleagues today and list the communication technology tools you used to interact with them.
2. Select one of the definitions of organizational communication presented in this chapter. Apply that definition to a specific situation you've encountered in your workplace.
3. Would you describe your organization as a learning organization? Why or why not? What characteristics do you think an organization must possess to become a learning organization?
4. What kinds of support or resources do you believe employees need to become knowledge workers?
5. What role does training and development play in addressing any of the questions above?

2 GETTING STARTED: THE FUNDAMENTALS OF PLANNING A TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

In this chapter, you will learn about:

- Linking Organizational Goals to Training Programs
- Different Training Types
- Audience Identification
- Technological Considerations and Infrastructure
- Communicating about Training and Development

Regardless of the organization, there are several considerations to evaluate when developing a successful instructional program. This is especially true of digital training and development programs when compared to that of face-to-face settings given the advanced role of communication in computer-mediated spaces. The following sections outline some key factors related to instructional planning that human resource personnel or managers should contemplate in relation to broader organizational needs and goals no matter what the training format, digital, face-to-face, or hybrid.

2.1 ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS, NEED CONSIDERATIONS, AND THE ROLE OF ASSESSMENT

Prior to developing any training and development program, an organization should assess its mission, organizational goals, the strategies it would like to take to achieve those goals (strategic plan), and the needs required of various employees at different levels of the institution to meet the goals identified. This type of assessment can be done in a variety of ways. In some instances, organizations hire external consultants to assist them in identifying their goals more specifically. These types of assessments are done by examining organizational artifacts, investigating the industry to which the organization belongs, interviewing employees, and meeting with different organization managers and leaders. At other times, organizations engage in self-studies conducted by the human resource staff or cross-functional committees and teams, leadership retreats, and organizational practices that allow for conversation and discussion between employees at various levels of the organization. In many instances,

organizations must first experience a crisis that leads to such action and planning. Examples of crises consist of brand issues, financial distress, increased competition, mergers, or technological challenges that impacted organizational productivity. Once an organization discovers its need for training, action is required concerning three key factors: strategic planning, employee appraisals, and pre-training assessment to meet the goals necessary to right the course of the organization.

- Strategic planning is normally manifested in an organizational document that outlines the goals, mission, and activities an organization will engage in to meet those goals. Effective training and development programs should align with key aspects of the strategic plan.
- Employee appraisals should also be carefully considered when contemplating the role of training and development. Ideally, performance appraisals outline a series of competencies and skills the employee possesses in relation to their position. Additionally, the appraisal should be intricately linked to the job description and duties while also reflecting the desired goals and mission of the organization. Furthermore, performance appraisals should contain an opportunity for the employee to obtain training and development in how to better perform or develop additional skills associated with the position they were hired to perform. When creating training and development programs, trainers should identify ways to document the training positioned in the employee evaluation. Including this practice into the training process allows employees to understand why they are training as well as the relevancy of any ongoing educational initiative. As discussed in the following chapter, adult learners (employees) are especially motivated by activities they believe will help them better perform and that they see as relevant to their daily lives.
- Pre-training assessment involves obtaining organizational data from employees, managers, and leaders involving their understanding of an issue or situation that needs correcting or more information regarding how to address a problem. Pre-training assessment may include questionnaires and surveys or interviews and focus groups with employees to obtain baseline data for what employees understand about the topic. Pre-training assessments provide valuable information to trainers as it advises them where training should begin, the content to be included, and how a training session should be delivered. This activity also helps enhance employee engagement given they are participating in the planning process of the training program.

Once an organization has determined its mission, goals, and activities to meet those goals along with assessment and employee appraisal fit, attention must be given to identifying which of the strategic planning objectives is the focus of training and development and which employees will participate in the training. It is likely that a strategic plan has several initiatives. Some of those goals may involve leadership, other managers, and other general

employees. Consequently, there may be a variety of different training sessions needed for the same type of employee. For example, leadership teams may need training on effective presentation, communicating more clearly with external stakeholders, or how to secure employee buy-in. Managers may need training on how to build effective teams or how to improve the communication between them and their subordinates. And yet other employees may need training that involves doing their job. These skills can range from listening to conflict resolution to learning how to operate a new communication technology device. As you can see, the training options are diverse and abundant. Therefore, it is essential to develop mechanisms, like strategic plans, that allow an organization to articulate goals and strategies so that training and development can be integrated into the organization's culture and existence. This will assist in creating an organizational learning environment that underscores the importance of employee learning and growth. It also continues to chart a clear path for the organization to meet its goals.

2.2 AUDIENCE IDENTIFICATION

A key component of effective training and development is delivering the right information to the right employees. Selecting the right set of trainees is influenced by the organization's goals, the employee's position, and the information an employee needs to know to be a part of the organization's internal community. Therefore, when identifying training needs, consider carefully who is impacted by the training topic and why an employee would need to know this information. This becomes significantly more important when it comes to workplace learning in our next chapter.

2.3 TRAINING TYPES

There are a variety of different types of workplace training. Some training is *sequential* which requires a series of trainings that occur over a specified amount of time and that are intricately connected. This kind of training is usually seen in new employee orientations that progress over the course of a newcomer's lifespan in the organization. Other types of training are *random* and require *just-in-time instruction* to meet some emergent issue in the organization. A good example of this training involves the adoption of new communication tools or devices that require specific training for how to operate or interact using the tool. Additionally, training can be formal or informal. *Formal training* is usually facilitated and delivered by the organization's human resource or training management personnel and consists of topics deemed important by the organization. Formal training involves employee orientations, job shadowing, mentoring, and skill or task development related to the employee's

position. However, a significant amount of informal training occurs in the workplace as well. For example, *informal training* involves an employee's observations of coworkers performing a task without direction or facilitation by management or leadership, conversation about how the workplace runs during employee breaks or lunches, employee socialization, or after work gatherings. Consequently, it's important to consider how employees learn to do their jobs, fit within the organization, and the individuals the employee is positioned by physically or interact with regularly. Each of these variables affect the employee's transitioning into the organization as well as their overall performance related to how they perceive the organization's culture. These factors influence employees' dispositions toward learning or how they act in the workplace.

2.4 TECHNOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Because this book focuses on the development of effective digital training spaces or the assessment of vendor adopted digital programs, communication, interaction, and technological infrastructure for developing online training is especially important. When designing or adopting an online training program, there are a variety of factors to consider because of the dependence on computer-mediated communication and the differences associated with e- or digital learning.

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is "communication between different parties separated in space and/or time mediated by interconnected computers" (Romiszowski & Mason, 1996, as cited in Bannan-Ritland, 2002, p. 162). CMC transcends space and time and permits users to interact with content or others from anywhere and at any time. The computer as a communication tool is multimodal and multi-channeled. This means people may communicate with one another using audio, text, or video among other graphics and symbols. Hirumi (2002) further explained computer-mediated communication in e-learning contexts by articulating distinctive communication acts. According to Hirumi, e-learning is "learning that is facilitated predominately through the use of telecommunication technologies such as electronic mail, electronic bulletin board systems, interrelay chat, desktop videoconferencing and the World-Wide-Web" (p. 145). Today e-learning can involve environments that offer apps, gaming tools, and simulations among many others. Regardless of the activity, it is important to recognize that each of these communication interactions utilizes a different communication channel. Understanding this point allows trainers to better understand their technological needs and the infrastructure required to support those needs. It also allows trainers to better determine the skills employees need to engage in digital training. For example, training online requires employees to be technologically competent while also being communicatively appropriate in digital spaces. Because CMC does not allow for the rich human interaction needed by individuals to communicate effectively and interpret

messages accurately (like those in a face-to-face environment), there is a need to orient employees to the skills they will need to communicate online. Additionally there is a need to educate employees about what it means to learn digitally as it relates to self-direction, content engagement, and online interaction with materials and peers.

When developing a digital learning environment or adopting a vendor produced one, consider the following questions among many others:

- What technology is needed?
- Where can it be obtained?
- Who will create the digital infrastructure?
- Who will maintain it?
- What is the cost to develop the training in-house or purchase it externally?
- Who will own its contents?
- Who will facilitate digital learning and interactions in the online learning environment?
- How often will the course/site be updated?
- Can I deliver this same training using a different delivery system such as face-to-face training?
- What are the benefits of digital learning?
- How does online training fit within the strategic goals of the organization?
- How does the online training fit within the employee's job and ultimately performance appraisal?
- Do employees need training on how to digitally train?

2.5 ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION AND DIGITAL TRAINING

Organizational success is grounded in effective communication. Consequently, it is important for human resource personnel and training managers to utilize communication skills and tools to create an organizational environment and culture that embraces and understands the role of training in employee engagement, productivity, and success. To meet this goal, human resource and training management should regularly solicit employee feedback about training needs and their perceptions about organizational challenges that may require or create training needs. This type of feedback can occur through employee focus groups, online surveys, or suggestion boxes *if* this feedback is acted upon. Once employee feedback is obtained, it should be used to make organizational change. Employees who observe their suggestions being utilized are more likely to have more positive attitudes about training and development. They are also more likely to contribute to organizational learning and be more engaged in their workplace. These factors further shape an organization's culture and disposition toward change and the role that communication plays in that process.

2.6 SUMMARY

In this chapter, you have learned about the connection between organizational goals, strategic planning, and digital training and development in relation to employee performance appraisals. You have also been exposed to some factors to consider when planning digital training ranging from sequential to random training segments to formal and informal programs to delivery systems pertaining to those programs. We have also discussed some technological considerations and questions to pose when developing or assessing a digital training program as well as the role that communication plays in developing an organization's disposition toward learning and training. In our next chapter, we will focus on the design aspects of creating a digital learning environment or assessing an external vendor produced one.



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Key Terms

Needs Assessment (pre-training, post-training)

Performance Appraisal

Strategic Plan

CMC

E-Learning

Formal Training

Informal Training

Reflection to Action

1. Reflect upon your organization. Identify one area of training and development that you believe should occur. Why is that an area to develop? Who should participate in the training? What data do you have to support the training should occur?
2. Examine your organization's strategic plan. What emphasis, if any, has the organization placed on training and development?
3. Consider your employee performance appraisal. What relationship, if any, exists between it and the training and development available in your workplace?

3 DESIGNING AND ASSESSING DIGITAL TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

In this chapter, you will learn about:

- Adult Learner Characteristics
- Learning Styles
- Experiential Learning
- Design Models
- Learning Outcomes
- Training Materials and Resources

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce you to educational models and frameworks for how to create original digital training spaces or how to assess digital training spaces created by external vendors that your organization may wish to adopt or purchase. More specifically, this chapter introduces you to key considerations and questions about training and development design and content planning. For example, some questions include:

- How are adult learners different than other learners?
- How do trainees learn best?
- What should a digital training module look like?
- What content should be in a training module?
- How can trainee learning be assessed?

We will explore these questions and many others in determining how to best create digital learning spaces. We will also examine key definitions and examples frequently seen in digital training environments and planning. Like previously presented information, the contents of this chapter also apply to face-to-face and hybrid environments. However, given the information age and desire of workers to have access to information anytime and anywhere, the content and source support for this training will be entirely digital.

Training, as a form of learning, requires managers and personnel responsible for educating employees to have a knowledge-base for how to create learning spaces. Paulsen (2001) referenced the concept of *pedagogical content knowledge*, or the instructor's understanding of content plus pedagogical theories associated with learning environments. While the initial definition related to professors, it is also applicable to trainers. For instance, human resource

managers and training personnel must understand the needs of employees, the content to be presented to those employees, and a variety of different educational theories that allow for the learning opportunity to be maximized. This chapter is dedicated to familiarizing you with the training considerations most relevant in designing online training programs. Let's begin our discussion with analyzing adult learners and their learning characteristics followed by exploring other pertinent educational theories.

3.1 ANDRAGOGY

Andragogy (Knowles, 1984) is a term used to describe how adults prefer to learn in relation to their lived experiences and how they come to understand new information in relation to those lived experiences. According to Knowles, an adult's readiness to learn is intricately linked to the relevancy of the content. Because adults have lived experiences, these experiences become a tool of engaging new information and using that information. Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2011) identified six key characteristics believed to impact adult learners located in Figure 1 below:

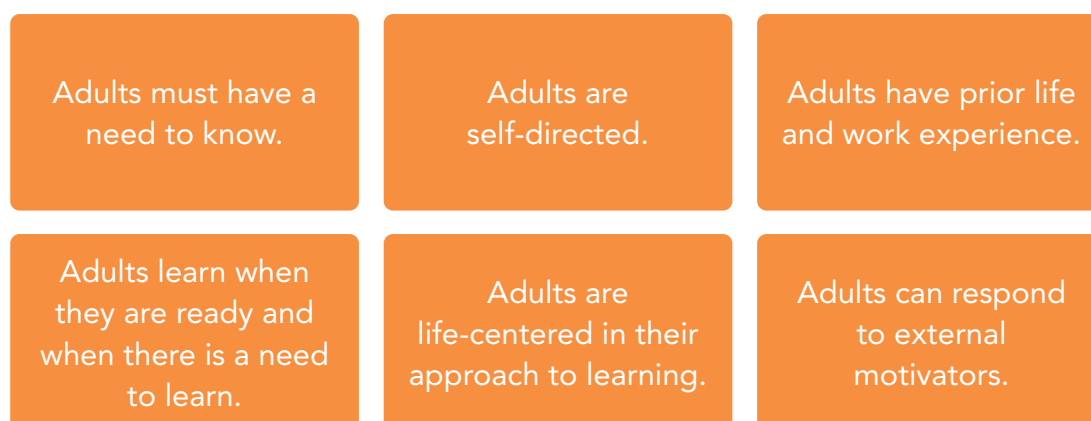


Figure 1: Characteristics that Impact Adult Learners

When developing or assessing any training program, trainers should consider carefully these six characteristics. Consequently, they should design or identify programs that clearly relate to the employee's position, build upon the employee's experiences, and permit trainees to be self-directed. When possible, training programs should also utilize external motivators. Some ways to incorporate external motivators involve connecting training programs to the employee's performance appraisal and the opportunity to advance in the organization by way of performance acknowledgement, pay, or promotion. Another external motivator is certificate or badge earning for knowledge mastered from advanced educational or training opportunities.

Beyond the characteristics that impact adult learning, Knowles (1984) also suggested the following principles to guide good andragogical practice, which is also applicable to training environments:

- Adult learners (trainees) should be involved in the planning and assessment process.
- Adult learning should be problem-oriented not content-focused.
- Learning should be relevant and tied directly to the trainee’s job or personal life.
- Trainee’s experiences form the basis of learning.

These four principles are significant in developing and designing training programs that engage employees. An application of this information will be presented in chapter 4. However, for now, it is important to note that training programs should present limited amounts of content followed by greater opportunities for the trainee to draw upon their experience, problem-solve the situation, and articulate how that information relates to their current position. Prior to engaging in these activities, human resource personnel and trainers should obtain employee feedback about training needs to involve them in the training process and to ensure that training is applicable to the employee’s needs, relevant to their position, and presented in an engaging way that builds upon the principles noted above. When thinking about training and relating it to employees, it is also important to consider the various learning styles present in trainees as they interact with content and peers.

3.2 LEARNING STYLES

Learning styles “refers to the consistent way in which a learner responds to or interacts with stimuli in the learning context” (Loo, 2001, p. 252). It essentially refers to the ways people prefer to learn or take in new information. For example, some people learn best by listening, others by seeing, and still others by doing. The ways in which people learn and the context of that learning has been described and studied in many ways (e.g. Honey & Mumford, 1986; Gardner, 1983). Regarding adult learners and their need to apply their life experiences to solve a current problem, we will examine a specific learning theory that helps human resource personnel and trainers to develop these types of digital learning experiences and environments.

3.2.1 KOLB’S EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING MODEL

Experiential learning is, “active participation of learners in events or activities which lead to the accumulation of knowledge or skill” (Yount, 2001, p. 276); it is also defined as

“learning by doing” (Lewis & Williams, 1994, p. 5). Kolb’s (1984) Experiential Learning Model (ELM) is one specific theory that explains experiential learning in digital or face-to-face learning environments.

Kolb’s ELM consists of learning styles that are defined by how people prefer to perceive new information followed by how they process this new information. The learning styles are grounded in specific learning activities that promote the learner’s preferences for perceiving and processing that information. Kolb’s model suggests that people perceive information through feeling or thinking and that people process new information by either doing or observing. People perceive new information through a concrete experience or an abstract concept. They process information by either actively experimenting with the new material or by observing it in action. Kolb identified four learning styles that explain how people perceive and process new information: accommodator, diverger, assimilator, and converger. The chart below in Figure 2 defines each learning style and explains the kinds of activities preferred by style. The differences between these styles revolve around the degree to which each learner *likes* to ‘think or do’ when engaging new content.

Learning Style	Activity Preferences for Learning
Accommodator	Concrete experiences (think/do) with active experimentation (do); need to work with others to understand
Diverger	Concrete experiences (think/do) with reflective observation (think); prefer working alone but can work with others
Assimilator	Reflective observation (think) with abstract conceptualization (think); prefer working alone
Converger	Abstract conceptualization (think) with active experimentation (do); prefer working alone on tasks more than with people

Figure 2: Kolb’s Learning Styles and Preferences by Style

3.2.1.1 Examples of Kolb’s Learning Style Preferences

As depicted in the figure above, the accommodator, diverger, assimilator, and converger each prefer different degrees of thinking and doing when it comes to perceiving and processing new information; they also have variances in their preferences to work with things or people as well as alone or in groups. There are a variety of different activities that a trainer can utilize to create experiences involving thinking and doing. Some examples of these activities are noted below in Figures 3 and 4.

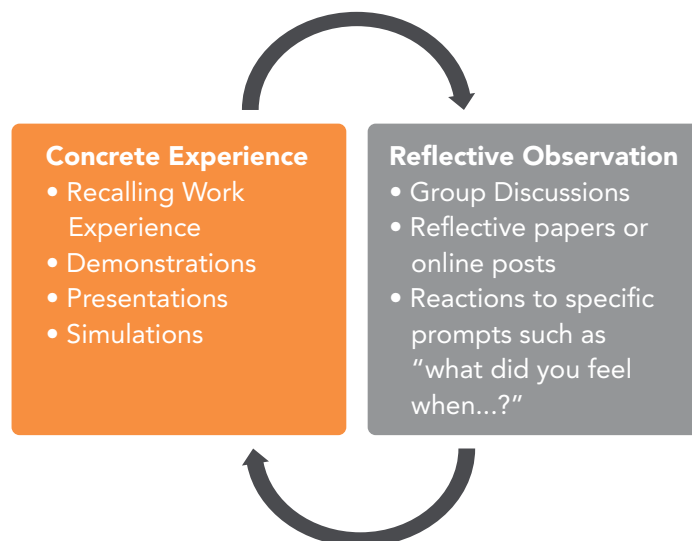


Figure 3: Concrete Experience and Reflective Observation Sample Learning Activities

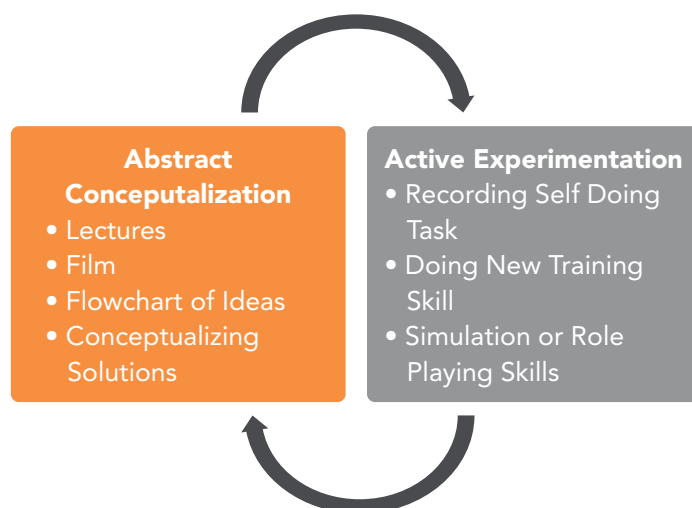


Figure 4: Abstract Conceptualization and Active Experimentation Sample Learning Activities

The four different learning activities should be considered when developing training content. Consequently, incorporating activities from each of the learning style categories ensures that all learners/trainees are perceiving and processing information in ways that appeal to their preferences. No one learning style is better than another; however, trainers should work to create content and experiences that expose trainees to new information in ways that is easily digestible to them while also giving trainees the opportunity to learn new ways to perceive and process new information. Each of these activities can be implemented in a digital learning space. An application of this information will be demonstrated in chapter 4. To help us conceptualize how to use the information presented about adult learners and learning styles with activities, let's turn our attention to a model for designing content online, ADDIE.

3.3 THE ADDIE MODEL

Although there are a variety of different models used to design educational content, we will focus on one model that has been widely used by instructional designers to develop learning content and experiences for various audiences: the ADDIE Model. This model outlines five phases to assist instructors and trainers in planning for an effective course or training module. These phases include analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation. We will apply these phases to the workplace and employee training as we discuss each stage in creating workplace learning environments. The information presented here will also be applied in a concrete example on performance appraisals in the following chapter.

Analysis phase. The analysis phase is the initial step in creating a training program or module. It involves assessing and determining what the training program will consist of based on employee feedback, identifying training needs, assessing trainee knowledge or skills, and defining the training outcomes. For digital training environments, it also includes identifying what kind of technology will be needed, the learning management tools and platforms required, online support, and the information trainees will need to engage in digital training. This phase of planning requires an attention to detail and an examination of each aspect of the training. Below are some questions to ponder when initially planning a training session/module; there are many others to probe based on your organization and employee needs.

- What training is needed?
- How do we know it is needed?
- What have employees said about needing such training? How have we collected that feedback?
- How will we assess what employees know or need to know? How does this relate to the employee's job? How does it relate to the employee's performance appraisal?
- What are the learning outcomes or goals of the training?
- What technology is required to deliver such training?
- How do the answers to these questions relate to our organization's strategic plans and goals?

Design Phase. The design stage requires trainers to outline what trainees are to learn, how they will be assessed, content, and specific planning. In this phase trainers must exercise focus and determine a logical and systematic way of meeting the goals identified. This stage of ADDIE also requires trainers to know about Bloom's Taxonomy, different digital sources available for content development and assessment, and the various kinds of interaction that occur in digital training environments.

- *Bloom's Taxonomy* (1954). Bloom provided a framework for how to think about learning outcomes and the different types of higher order thinking skills people

need to master a specific task or skill. Learning outcomes are important because they clearly articulate what a person is to learn in a specific learning experience. Outcomes should be measurable (meaning they can be assessed) and express what a trainer wants the trainee to obtain from the training interaction. For a more comprehensive explanation of Bloom's framework and list of learning outcome verbs, visit <https://www.utica.edu/academic/Assessment/new/Blooms%20Taxonomy%20-%20Best.pdf>. This list can also be used to identify different kinds of activities related to various learning styles.

- *Digital Sources.* There are a variety of different digital sources available online for free and for cost. Training sources can be defined as information and tools that permit a trainer/instructor to engage a trainee in a meaningful way resulting in the trainee mastering the content of the training session in an observable way. The figure below reflects some of the different sources available online. Each of these digital sources can be produced by the trainer as well. However, it is important to follow the best practices in producing such content to ensure learner engagement versus learning or message distraction. For information about how to assess the sources below and incorporate them into a digital learning environment see Robinson and Reinhart's (2014) e-book located on www.bookboon.com. Also, note that each source relates to different learning styles. For example, video sources can relate to assimilators as well as accommodators.



Figure 5: Types of Digital Sources

- *Interaction Types.* In Bannan-Ritland's (2002) extensive review of the literature on computer-mediated communication and e-learning environments, four types of interaction were identified in instructional digital spaces: learner-content, learner-instructor, learner-learner and learner-self. Digital learning environments must contain each of these interaction forms to be effective specifically as it relates to androgogy and adult learning preferences. Notice that these interaction types also align with the different learning styles identified by Kolb.

Development Phase. This stage of ADDIE requires trainers to begin the building and assembly process of gathering all the training content required of the digital session. Content is built, reviewed, piloted, and revised until it is accurate. This phase of the digital training process can be quite time intensive so care should be taken in project management and planning.

Implementation Phase. ADDIE also places an emphasis on facilitator and trainer training as well as testing the actual workings of the training. In this stage, the trainers and facilitators test content, digital tools, and confirm support materials are both operable and functional. They also determine how much time is dedicated to each training task and check for logical sequencing of content and activities.

Evaluation Phase. This stage of the ADDIE model demands that evaluation occur at every level of the framework. It is designed to emphasize assessment and data collection on whether the tools work as planned, support learning as needed, and perform as they should. Feedback is collected at every level from the trainer to the trainee to the support staff and tools required to implement the digital learning environment and what it entails to promote trainee interaction. The feedback is used to modify and improve various aspects of the training components at each level and time it is implemented.

3.4 SUMMARY

This chapter has introduced you to some of the different learning theories and practices required of designing an effective digital training environment or the factors to assess when contemplating externally developed digital training materials. Additionally, topics such as andragogy, learning styles, experiential learning, and the ADDIE model have been explored. Within these concepts, we have presented different types of digital sources, learning outcomes, and trainee interaction needs in online environments. While this chapter has presented a significant amount of theoretical information, the next chapter illustrates these concepts at work in a specific training module on performance appraisals that serves as a concrete example for your review.

Key Terms

Andragogy

Learning Styles

Experiential Learning Model

Bloom's Taxonomy

Learning Outcomes

Types of Interaction

Digital Sources

ADDIE

Reflection to Action

1. In reflecting on your organization, identify some ways that you could determine employee training needs. Who are these employees? How would you obtain their feedback?
2. Select a training session that your organization currently offers. What are the learning outcomes associated with it? What kinds of sources are used to deliver the training? How was trainee learning assessed?
3. Select a theory presented in this chapter. How would you use it to develop an aspect of a training module?
4. Explore the different digital learning sources presented in this chapter. Locate some examples online and note how you might use them in a digital training environment.
5. Apply the ADDIE framework to create a digital training session.

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4 CONTENT APPLICATION: DESIGNING A DIGITAL TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT MODULE

In this chapter, through examining a concrete example, you will learn how to:

- Build a digital training module that pertains to adult trainees with varying learning styles
- Organize digital content in a logical way to maximize trainee learning
- Recognize and apply effective digital design practices
- Identify measurable learning outcomes and some ways to assess trainee learning
- Create some forms of trainee interactions to maximize their learning and engagement
- Communicate clearly when designing, developing, and facilitating online training sessions

This chapter presents a digital training and development module, on a topic that relates to most organizational employees, regardless of position or level within their workplace: the performance appraisal. Since many organizations utilize job descriptions and link those position descriptions to a performance appraisal, this training module should be presented or required when an employee joins the organization and during the first six months of employment. Ideally the employee should have an opportunity to engage in their position, carry out responsibilities associated with the position, and have some time to meet and interact with workplace peers in similar positions, supervisors, or subordinates. Consequently, this training program is a formal one as opposed to informal as it is structured, organized, and intended for a specific group of employees who will complete the program in a specific amount of time.

To assist you in identifying the effective practices associated with designing digital training and development environments, this module is deconstructed through the application of information previously presented in earlier chapters. As a result, screen shots of the digital platform used to train employees is included for examples and the information presented earlier is demonstrated through those images. You may find it useful to review Figures 3-10 prior to reading the content presented before them. You will also find it especially useful to revisit these figures as you examine information previously presented.

4.1 COMMUNICATION MODEL AND ELEMENT APPLICATION

In chapter 2, the communication process and elements were introduced in an organizational communication setting. In keeping with this discussion, this information is examined and applied to the training/instructional communication example shared here. Figure 1 below outlines the key elements of the communication process; the third column applies them to our training and development context on performance appraisals. It might be helpful for you to view Figures 3–9 prior to examining Figure 1 for better understanding.

Element	Definition	Workplace Example
Sender	Message generator of instructional materials and facilitator of training module	Trainer
Message	Information conveyed between the trainer and the trainee consisting of symbols and signs sent verbally or nonverbally and intentionally (Stohl & Redding, 1987)	The content shared between the trainer and the trainee ranging from training directions and instructions, to explanations, and discussions with employees.
Receiver	Recipient of a message	Trainees
Channel	Mechanism or tool used to convey the message	Face-to-face, email, phone, or text messages; for this chapter, see Figures 3–9 as they specify the learning management system and discussion threads.
Feedback	Messages sent between a sender and receiver in response to an initial message	Messages sent to the trainer seeking clarification, direction or information about their training tasks as well as messages sent from the trainer answering those questions or providing more information.
Context	Circumstances defining a communication act that involve the time of communication, the space in which it occurred (digital or physical), the socio-psychological relationship between the sender and the receiver (supervisor-subordinate), and the cultural aspects of the sender, receiver, or organization	Depending upon the communication channel, this message could be conveyed digitally at various times contingent upon the training requirements, the socio-psychological relationship is one of employee to his trainer or HR representative, and the cultural aspects of the conversation would depend upon the participants' cultural characteristics as well as the organization's culture.

Element	Definition	Workplace Example
Noise	Environmental, physical, or psychological impediments to the communication interaction	Noise varies depending upon the channel used to communicate. For our training example, noise could occur due to technological issues, access to information challenges or if the trainee is challenged by the assignments or a personal circumstance.

Figure 1: Communication Elements and Process Applied to Instructional Communication/Training and Development Context

4.2 ADDIE APPLIED

As noted in chapter 3, the ADDIE model stages are outlined in Figure 2 below.



Figure 2: ADDIE Stages

Prior to creating any digital training and development program for this section of the text, ADDIE was carefully considered. Regarding analysis, the first stage of ADDIE, a variety of different factors were analyzed in selecting the topic of performance appraisals and the digital delivery system utilized.

Additionally, some of the questions presented on page 23 (found below) were used to guide these considerations. Answers to the questions as they relate to the example in this chapter are noted below:

- What training is needed?
 - Performance appraisal training.

- How do we know it is needed?
 - the topic is relevant to nearly all employees and relates to their personal experiences (both good and bad);
 - the topic is frequently seen in profit and non-profit organizational practices;
 - the topic is related to organizational learning and the encouragement of creating knowledge workers as a component of organizational success and employee motivation and retention;
 - performance appraisals, if used correctly and effectively, can contribute to the organizational culture that leadership and management typically seek to develop in their workplaces – one of learning and knowledge sharing;
 - and this topic is highly relatable to most HR personnel (the target audience for this book) who are genuinely interested in better serving employees.

- What have employees said about needing such training? How have we collected that feedback?
 - If this question were to be explored in the workplace, employee feedback could be obtained through using online anonymous surveys/questionnaires or employee focus groups centering on needs related to their positions and the assessment of them. It could also be obtained in new employee orientation interviews.

- How will we assess what employees know or need to know? How does this relate to the employee's job?
 - Assessment of employee knowledge and mastery of skills will occur through written peer discussions and the development of a digital performance appraisal file that is viewed by an expert trainer or HR representative.
 - The topic relates to the employee's job by outlining the duties and responsibilities of the employee's position while also helping them understand the performance appraisal, its purpose, and ways to use the appraisal instrument and process as an opportunity to manage their careers for professional advancement and growth.

- What technology is required to deliver such training?
 - A digital learning management system (LMS) that permits trainees to interact with peers, training content, and the facilitator is needed for this training; it should also house online content ranging from readings to videos.
 - This LMS could be one purchased for in-house use or one that is offered by a third party. Depending on the organization, it may be necessary to purchase a LMS for privacy and protection of employees and the business.
 - The LMS selected to create the module included in this chapter was Canvas. For more information on this software, visit <https://www.instructure.com>.

- Regardless of the technology selected, it is important that the organization can manage the system, respond to trainee needs with the system, and provide training to the trainees on how to use the system. Overall, the system should be user friendly and have a support person in place to answer employee questions.
- How do the answers to these questions relate to our organization's strategic plans and goals?
 - Most organizations have a mission statement, organizational goals, or strategic plans that note the goal of investing in human capital and employee development to maintain a competitive edge as well as to enhance employee lives.
 - For this chapter, the content is directly related to the first three chapters of this book.

As we move forward applying the information obtained in previous chapters, we will rely heavily on Figures 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, & 9. As you review the information presented in this chapter, pay especially close attention to the communication behaviors of the trainer, the organization of the content, the information included, and the kinds of activities required of the training module in Figures 3–9.

This is the opening page/folder to the digital training module created on *Performance Appraisals*. For organization purposes, it should be the first page a trainee sees.

NOTE: The training title and sequence number of training should be included for clarity and purposeful direction.



Figure 3: Opening Course Page

Once a trainee clicks on the course Opening Page/Folder, they will enter a page with a clearly articulated title and overview of materials. See Figure 4 below for the digital representation of this information in the LMS.

Clear communication is critical in labeling modules, titles, and content names. Notice that when a trainee enters this page, the information is apparent and easy to locate.

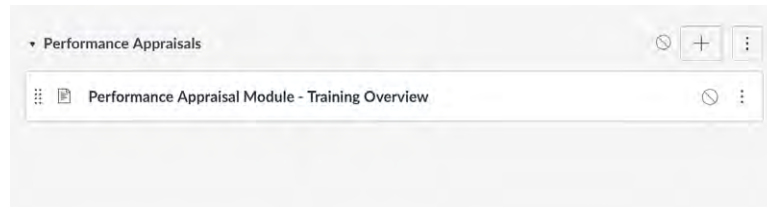


Figure 4: Performance Appraisal Module – Training Overview

Upon entering the Performance Module – Training Overview, Figure 5 captures what the trainee views.

Performance Appraisal Module - Training Overview

Performance appraisals are an important part of organizational life and your workplace success. Consequently, this training module is dedicated to performance appraisals and how to successfully implement, reflect on, and manage the process of an employment review.

To participate in this training session, you will engage in reading about performance appraisals, reflect on your position and the organization's performance evaluation tool, interact with your coworkers about the evaluation process, and respond to a series of questions and prompts about performance appraisals in relation to your career goals.

To get started, let's begin with a shared reading on performance appraisals. This text will guide our training and activities as we work independently and with one another to learn about ways to utilize our performance appraisals effectively. Please do the following:

- 1) Access Bookboon.com
- 2) Create a free account
- 3) Search the text, "Your Job Performance Appraisal: Making it a Career Boosting Experience" by Patrick Forsyth
- 4) Focus on Chapter 8 specifically as this module is dedicated to "The Benefits of Job Appraisals"

e

The purpose of this training module is to assist you in:

- Relating the importance of the employee performance appraisal to your position.
- Identifying reasons for the employee performance appraisal.
- Reflecting on your position description.
- Analyzing ways in which to use the performance appraisal to advance your career.
- Constructing an appraisal file for documenting your work as it relates to your position and discussing your performance with your supervisor.

Figure 5: Contents of the Training Overview

Figure 5 contains some very important aspects of the ADDIE model. For example, this page provides:

1. a brief summary of what the module involves;
2. trainee directions for how to participate in the session;
3. training content in the module along with how and where to locate it (see online source types in chapter 3); for this training, an e-book published by bookboon.com is the primary source of information: <http://bookboon.com/en/your-job-performance-appraisal-ebook>; and
4. learning outcomes for the training module (see Bloom's Taxonomy at <http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/bloom.html> and also discussed in chapter 3 of this text).

Items 3 and 4 above are indicative of the ADDIE stages, Design (e.g., Bloom, Digital Sources) Development, and Implementation.

Regarding learning outcomes for this training session specifically, they are measurable and observable, due to the activities the trainee will engage in and the artifacts they will produce. The learning outcomes are linked to three basic activities: two discussion threads and one creative assignment leading to a reflective document associated with the performance appraisal file. Each of these activities is designed to engage the trainee and promote interaction with instructional materials (content), coworkers (trainees-trainees/learners-learners), trainers (instructors), and themselves (independent work). Consequently, these learning outcomes are also connected to the interaction types discussed by Bannan-Ritland (2002) and reflect best practices associated with online or digital learning.

The screen shots containing the two discussion threads are noted in Figure 6.



Figure 6: Discussion Threads Overview – Trainee Participation

Figure 7 and Figure 8 contain the discussion thread prompt, directions, and information on how to participate in each discussion activity. Figure 9 reflects the information related to the individual activity involving the appraisal file.

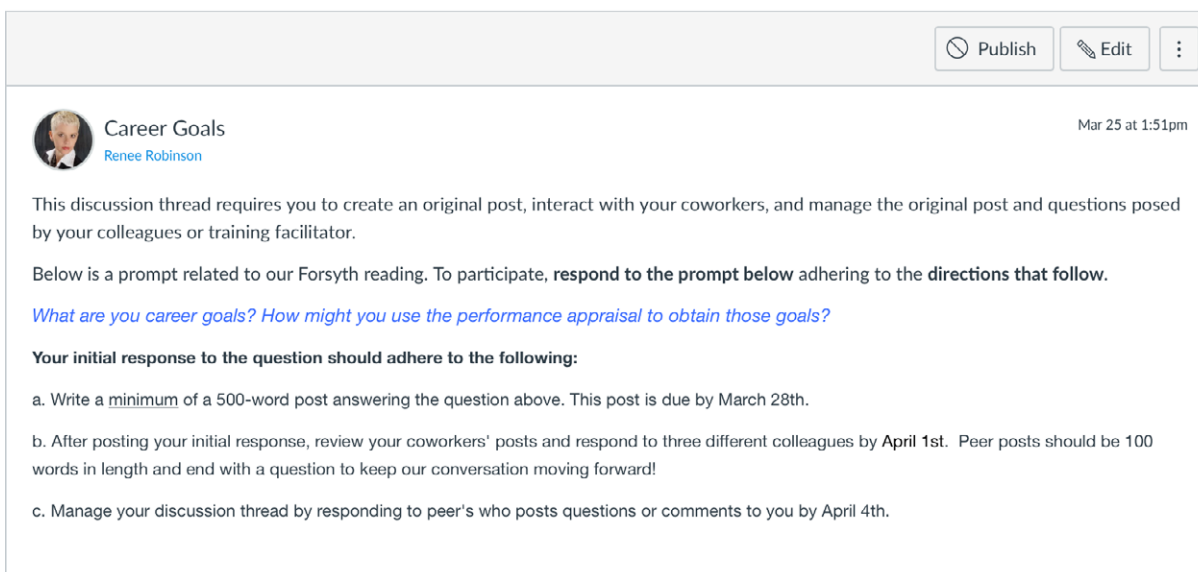



Figure 7: Discussion Thread on Career Goals



Reasons for Performance Appraisals

Rence Robinson

Mar 25 at 1:59pm

This discussion thread requires you to create an original post, interact with your coworkers, and manage the original post and questions posed by your colleagues or training facilitator.

Below is a prompt related to our reading. To participate, **respond to the prompt below** adhering to the **directions that follow**.

Consider your last performance appraisal. Which of the reasons, identified by Forsyth on page 46, relate most to your performance appraisal experience? Which of the reasons would you like for your performance appraisal to focus on?

Your initial response to the question should adhere to the following:

- a. Write a minimum of a 500-word post answering the question above. This post is due by April 1st.
- b. After posting your initial response, review your coworkers' posts and respond to four different colleagues by April 3rd. Peer posts should be 100 words in length and end with a question to keep our conversation moving forward!
- c. Manage your discussion thread by responding to peer's who posts questions or comments to you by April 5th.

Figure 8: Discussion Thread on Reasons for Performance Appraisal

Appraisal File

This activity is an independent task. To participate, please do the following:

- 1) locate a copy of your position description
- 2) locate a copy of the performance appraisal tool used by our organization and review it carefully
- 3) reflect on three specific tasks you have completed and associated with your position in the last month
- 4) identify three documents that illustrate some of the tasks noted in your position description
- 5) create a digital appraisal file that contains these documents (see Forsyth, page 47 for additional explanation)

Now that you have located the position description, performance appraisal, and examples of your work, construct an explanation of how these documents relate to the performance appraisal and its scale (e.g., meets expectation, surpasses expectation...). How do you rate these documents? How might your supervisor rate them? Please provide a rationale as to why you assigned this rating to the examples provided.

Upon completion of this activity, please make an appointment to discuss the appraisal file and examples you noted with your training facilitator. The two of you will discuss this experience and identify ways to assist you in meeting your overall career goals.

Figure 9: Appraisal File Reflection and Artifact Activity

The development and implementation stages of ADDIE vary in the trainer skills required and the organizational goals to be met. In general, the development and implementation aspects of ADDIE can be time consuming as they require the trainer to seriously consider what information should be involved in the training session. Instructional content can range from e-books to audio files to videos. Additionally, PDFs related to training topics of importance can be included along with videoconference or webinar activities. The materials selected should be carefully weighed for their purpose and how they will benefit the trainees learning and overall digital experience. As for implementation, building digital content is contingent upon the design of the training and the software to be used to facilitate such training. Therefore, time is needed to research different digital platforms, test those platforms, and determine how those platforms best support trainee learning and organizational needs. These same approaches need to be applied to evaluating content and piloting its usability. This aspect of ADDIE can be managed differently depending on if the training modules are created internally or purchased externally. The experience of the trainers coupled with the number of individuals involved in designing, developing, and implementing the training environment greatly influence the time needed to meet various goals.

4.3 ANDRAGOGY APPLIED

When reflecting on andragogy and the characteristics of adult learners seen in Figure 10 below, the design aspects of the performance appraisal module are easily identified. For example, five of the six andragogical characteristics apply directly to the trainees and the instruction they will engage in regarding performance appraisals. Review these characteristics carefully and we will relate them to the training example afterwards.

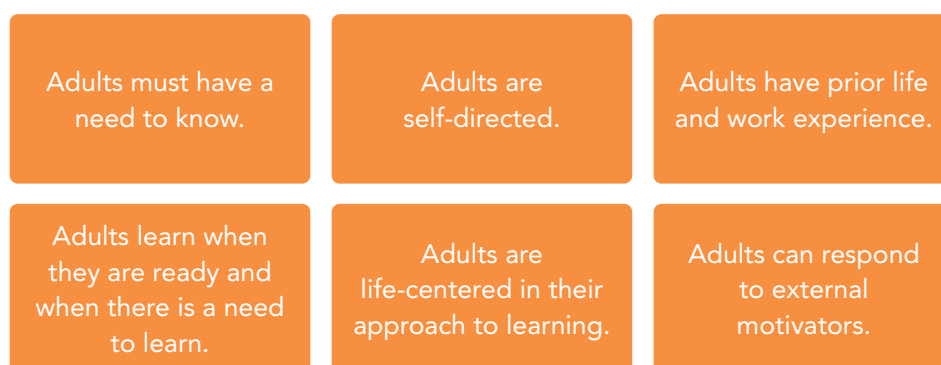


Figure 10: Characteristics that Impact Adult Learners

- 1) **Adults must have a need to know & Adults learn when they are ready and when there is a need to learn:** Regarding the performance appraisal training, adult workers have a need to know how to do their jobs, how they will be assessed, and how they will be trained to do those jobs. Consequently, trainees perceive a need exists that is related to their personal and professional success. This sample module exemplifies these needs.
- 2) **Adults are self-directed:** The design of the performance appraisal module capitalizes on trainees engaging in the content at their will within a specific timeframe and allows them to relate the instructional content directly to their work world. Trainees also desire time to reflect on and immediately apply what is learned to their everyday existence. Activities in this module are trainee self-directed and allow for employees to learn from one another as it relates to the content. The trainer simply guides the discussions through prompt and activity creation.
- 3) **Adults have prior life and work experience & Adults are life-centered in their approach to learning:** The performance appraisal module builds upon the trainees' experiences in the workplace and requires that they use their experiences to train and learn content directly related to their position and performance. This module builds upon this characteristic by tying content directly to the center of trainee work life.

4.4 KOLB’S ELM/LEARNING STYLES APPLIED

As referenced in chapter 3, Kolb’s Experiential Learning Model (ELM, 1984) and learning styles explain how people prefer to perceive and process new information. Learning style simply describes those preferences for learning. Figure 11 below revisits information presented in the first two columns related to Kolb while the new information in column (3) applies these concepts to the training module on performance appraisals.

Learning Style	Activity Preferences for Learning	Performance Appraisal Application
Accommodator	Concrete experiences (think/do) with active experimentation (do); need to work with others to understand	<p>Concrete Experience: e-book reading and reflection on trainee position (think/do)</p> <p>Active Experimentation: (do) discussion threads appeal to trainees who need to work with other trainees to learn/interact on new information</p>

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Learning Style	Activity Preferences for Learning	Performance Appraisal Application
Diverger	Concrete experiences (think/do) with reflective observation (think); prefer working alone but can work with others	<p>Concrete Experience: e-book reading and reflection on trainee position (think/do)</p> <p>Reflective Observation: (think) creation of appraisal file concept; appeals to preference to work alone; discussion thread interaction (do) illustrates ability to work with others when needed</p>
Assimilator	Reflective observation (think) with abstract conceptualization (think); prefer working alone	<p>Reflective Observation: e-book reading and reflection on trainee position (think)</p> <p>Abstract Conceptualization: (think) reflection on documents and tasks associated with appraisal file and how they relate to position; appeals to preference to work alone</p>
Converger	Abstract conceptualization (think) with active experimentation (do); prefer working alone on tasks more than with people	<p>Abstract Conceptualization: e-book reading and reflection on trainee position (think)</p> <p>Active Experimentation: (do) creation of appraisal file and related documents; also relates to their need to work on tasks</p>

Figure 11: Kolb's ELM Applied to Performance Appraisal Module

4.5 INSTRUCTIONAL COMMUNICATION TIPS

As discussed in the opening pages of this text, communication is complex and requires a great deal of energy, focus, and attention given to message construction as it relates to the sender's skills and the target audience/recipients of those messages. The communication process is further complicated when we remove the face-to-face interaction of a communication act and replace it with computer-mediated communication or digital platforms afforded by communication technologies. Digital tools rely on signs and symbols only to convey a message. There is little nonverbal communication (e.g., facial expressions, eye contact, tone of voice or gestures) utilized to help a receiver accurately interpret a message. Consequently, online communicators must be especially attentive to the limitations of communication technologies as they relate to

human interaction leading to shared meaning and plan for those limitations. This is especially true of learning environments such as training sessions. Therefore, it is important for trainers to apply the following communication concepts to their digital training sessions:

- Create a logical sequencing of information and content that is easy to follow (see Figures 3–9 for how to organize a module)
- Use clear and concise language when explaining concepts or presenting new information (see Figure 5 of the training overview for guidance)
- Include directions that entail what is to be done, when, and how the result should be shared (see Figure 7, 8, & 9 for further explanation)
- Be mindful of tone and use of font, emotional language, or words that could easily be misconstrued by the trainee
- Provide definitions, explanations, and examples when possible to ensure understanding and message clarity for the trainee

Another important aspect of communication involves the communication behaviors of the trainer. Since computer-mediated communication channels can be impersonal and because trainees are usually working alone online (e.g. from their desk, home or other isolated area) as opposed to in a community (like a face-to-face training session at work), trainers must employ communication behaviors that create a warm and inviting place in which to learn. Below are some communication tips for how to do so:

- When possible include your photo in your digital profile so trainees have a face to associate with their facilitator.
- Include information in your profile about your experience or expertise as well as when you are available to interact digitally.
- Create information that overviews the processes and procedures associated with the training session so the trainee understands how the class will operate.
- Encourage trainees to contact you immediately so you may become familiar with them when possible.
- Refer to all trainees by name when interacting with them directly to establish rapport.
- Set up a digital space for you to answer questions that trainees may have – consider a discussion thread to do so.
- Use punctuation and other symbols to convey emotion such as ☺, or ;) to provide more context as to how the trainee should interpret a message.
- Use questions to ensure that you understand the trainees' perspective or need for more information.
- Be accessible and respond to trainees in a timely manner.

4.6 SUMMARY

The purpose of this book was to increase your awareness and understanding of how to design and develop digital training spaces to advance employee skills and knowledge while also enhancing the likelihood of organizational success through investing in employees in their evolution to become knowledge workers. Each chapter articulated aspects of the training and development context and information that trainers or HR personnel should be advised of when organizing and creating training environments.

The final chapter of this text presented a sample training module on performance appraisals and deconstructed its contents using the communication principles, educational models and theories, and information shared on digital training throughout the text. Although the information shared and applied in this book involved the internal generating or creating of training materials, the principles presented here can also be applied to external vendor content produced for training and development purposes as well. For instance, regardless of who is creating a training module or program, the factors of andragogical practices, clear communication, effective design principles (e.g., assessments, learning outcomes, evaluation), good content, opportunities to interact with co-workers, trainers, and content during training, and the organization of materials, among many other topics presented here apply to any training program.

Reflection to Action

1. After identifying a training topic of interest to your organization, apply the ADDIE model to begin developing the training module. Answer the following questions as you go:
 - a. What are the learning outcomes of the training session? What do you want trainees to be able to do or to know?
 - b. What types of activities will trainees engage in that demonstrate they have learned? For example, will they participate in online discussions, quizzes, document creations?
 - c. What kind of digital sources will you include in the training module to assist trainees in meeting the training outcomes?
2. Select one of the training activities you identified previously. Develop the instructions and directions for how the trainee will perform this activity. Evaluate them for clarity by asking a colleague to review and discuss with you.
3. Once you have chosen a digital platform to facilitate training, create your trainer profile to reflect your personality and to create a warm and inviting training

atmosphere for your trainees. Use the information presented in this chapter on trainer communication behaviors to assist you.

4. Select an outside vendor who provides training content. Review their site and sample training materials. Does the content of interest reflect the best practices presented in this book?

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APPENDIX A ANDRAGOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS QUESTIONNAIRE

Adults must have a need to know.

Adults are self-directed.

Adults have prior life and work experience.

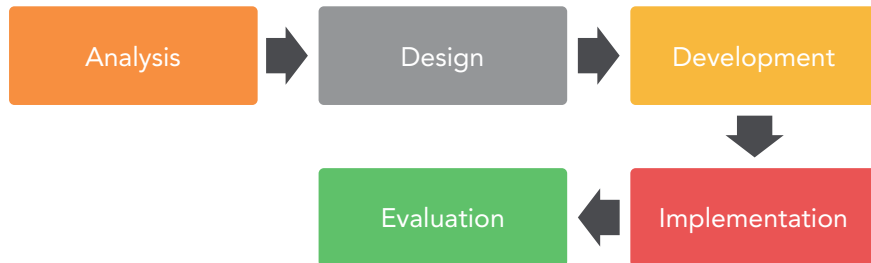
Adults learn when they are ready and when there is a need to learn.

Adults are life-centered in their approach to learning.

Adults can respond to external motivators.

1. What is the training topic selected?
2. How was the topic selected? Were the employees involved in the selection process of the topic? Why or why not?
3. Does the training topic selected reflect the andragogical characteristics noted above?
4. Which of the characteristics best apply to the topic selected? Why? Explain?
5. Select one of the training activities of this module. Design or redesign the activity so that it draws upon the trainees 'need to know' and 'life-centered aspects of their learning'.

APPENDIX B ADDIE MODEL QUESTIONNAIRE



1. What training is needed?
2. How do you know it is needed?
3. What have employees said about needing such training? How have we collected that feedback?
4. How will we assess what employees know or need to know? How does this relate to the employee's job? How does it relate to the employee's performance appraisal?
5. What are the learning outcomes or goals of the training?
6. What technology is required to deliver such training? How will we assess such technology?
7. How do these questions relate to our organization's strategic plans or goals?
8. Is the training created internally or externally? If externally, does it meet the best practices criteria presented in this text?

APPENDIX C ACTIVITY ANALYSIS TABLE

Select a set of training activities in a specific training module that is of interest to you. Analyze those training activities using the Kolb's ELM (1984) noted in the table below. Consider:

- a. how each activity relates to a specific learning style
- b. if the activities are diverse
- c. if the activities relate to the different trainees participating in the session
- d. how these activities connect to andragogical practices
- e. the relationship between the activities and the module learning outcomes and
- f. does the training content and activities permit the three types of interaction required of online engagement?

Learning Style	Activity Preferences for Learning	Training Module Application
Accommodator	Concrete experiences (think/do) with active experimentation (do); need to work with others to understand	Concrete Experience: Active Experimentation/Do:
Diverger	Concrete experiences (think/do) with reflective observation (think); prefer working alone but can work with others	Concrete Experience: Reflective Observation:
Assimilator	Reflective observation (think) with abstract conceptualization (think); prefer working alone	Concrete Experience: Abstract Conceptualization/Do:
Converger	Abstract conceptualization (think) with active experimentation (do); prefer working alone on tasks more than with people	Active Experimentation: Abstract Conceptualization/Think: