

What Type of Learning do we Need?

You've identified something that people need to do better or differently. You already analyzed the performance gap and its causes. You've determined that it really is a knowledge or skill deficiency.

(You have done that, right? You're not just throwing training at a non-training issue... right? Training can only address knowledge and skill deficiencies. Problems with attitudes, beliefs, processes, policies, tools, resources, technology, leadership, organizational support, or culture are NOT solvable with training alone.)

It needs a training (or learning, or development) solution. So, what type of training makes sense?

Steve's Only-Partly-Arbitrary Classification of Terms

- **Learning:** Any lasting behavior change that helps people adapt to a situation. Does not have to be intentional. The change can come about through informal, formal, structured, or unstructured activities.
- **Training:** A structured experience given to people intentionally, to help them learn something of interest to the training sponsor.
- **Development:** A set or series of related learning activities directed toward a general purpose that occur over a longer period of time; usually months to years. Usually intentional. May or may not include training. May or may not be officially sponsored.

Consider these types of training, with their associated plusses and minuses. Then, talk to your learning and development experts for more help.

Type of Learning	Description and Advice
On-the-Job Training (OJT)	<p>A set of structured training activities performed by the learner in the real work environment under the guidance of a subject matter expert (SME). Usually semi-formal and with one or two learners paired with one instructor.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use when: There are just one or two learners at a time; the job can be effectively taught by a single SME; job procedures are stable enough for the SME to teach them with consistency; the knowledge and skills to be learned can be acquired safely in the work setting • Avoid when: Available SMEs do not perform the job consistently or effectively themselves; there are many learners to be taught; knowledge can be more efficiently transferred through e-learning or other methods; the job is changing and procedures are not stable

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Face to Face (Classroom) Instructor-led Training (ILT)	<p>A structured training event led by a trainer with both learners and trainer(s) in the same time and place.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use when: Learners need to interact with each other; there is a group with similar learning needs; logistics make this convenient for everyone; there is enough structure to make this effective; there are trainers with the right skills available • Avoid when: The topic could be better served through self-paced learning; there is no need for skill practice; logistics make it difficult to get learners and trainers together in the same time and place; there are multiple topics that cannot be addressed effectively in the amount of class time available
Online/Virtual Instructor-led Training (ILT Webinars)	<p>A structured training event led by a trainer with learners and trainer(s) meeting at the same time through technology.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use when: New information needs to be shared with the opportunity for real-time questions and answers; the technology and readiness of both learners and trainers fully supports it; short bursts of information are an effective solution • Avoid when: Learners need to practice any skills; the topic could be better served through self-paced learning; the content cannot be addressed effectively in the amount of class time available
Self-Paced Online Learning (e-Learning)	<p>A structured training experience presented by a computer and completed by the learner alone. May or may not include communication or interaction with other learners or trainers through technology.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use when: The topic can be organized and structured for computer-based delivery; there are sufficient resources available for up-front design and development, there are many learners to train; the technology to deliver the learning is stable, reliable, and easy to use; learners are comfortable using the technology; • Avoid when: The topic requires real-time human interaction to build knowledge or skill; the topic requires a human trainer to respond to questions and help learners acquire or practice skills; there are not enough resources or time to meet learner expectations regarding quality
Coaching	<p>An intentional relationship between a learner and another person who can help the learner analyze their performance and find ways to improve.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use when: The learner is motivated and is willing to improve; the learner has an opportunity to demonstrate performance; a person skilled in coaching technique can be found; learning can happen over time • Avoid when: The learner is not motivated to change; available coaches are not skilled at coaching (no matter how strong their subject matter expertise); many learners must be taught and logistics make individual coaching difficult or unrealistic

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Informal Learning	<p>A catch-all category of relatively unstructured learning that happens between peers, managers and employees, or subject matter experts and interested learners outside of a class or formally-sponsored experience. May or may not be funded, tracked, or reported.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use when: Learners have access to resources that show effective ways to think about or do the topic; learners are motivated and willing to improve; there is no need for formal sponsorship or reporting; resources are tight, but the need for learning is large • Avoid when: Training must be documented (usually for compliance purposes); results or process must be consistent and predictable; there is not a strong motivation to learn, explore, and grow on the part of learners or SMEs; there is little agreement about what “effective” looks like
Job Aids and Performance Support	<p>Print or online resources that explain effective performance to the learner and are easily accessible where the work has to be performed. Often serve as process guides, checklists, or reminders to people as they do their work.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use when: During and after any other type of learning activity; steps to effective performance can be shown through a simple tool or reference; as a take-home reminder of what was learned in formal training • Avoid when: The topic requires judgment that must be acquired through other learning methods, first, before a job aid can be used effectively

Some types of learning depend on a skilled trainer, while others just get more benefit from it. The two important features of instructor-led training are (1) that the trainer can present and clarify instructions, provide information, and respond to learners’ questions, and (2) that the trainer guides critical reflection to promote learning. Training can be delivered by professional trainers, subject matter experts, or team leaders, depending on the topic, facilitation skill, and degree of preparation possible.

Training often works best when it engages learners in scenarios or situations that feel like real work, with just enough complexity to stretch them from where they are starting to the next step up in knowledge and skill. Adults can easily connect new things to what they already know, but they need plenty of time to practice new skills in order to really be proficient. If you are ever wondering what might be best for your specific situation, contact me. I’m happy to respond to questions!