



TRAINING FOR SOFT SKILLS IS MORE EFFECTIVE WHEN DELIVERED LIVE

LIVE FACE-TO-FACE TRAINING STILL LEADS THE WAY

One question I am often asked these days: “Is there any research available on the most effective modality for training programs – like the one our company is planning to launch?”

The answer is, yes.

There are two studies recently conducted by Training Industry, Inc. that focus on leadership training, which often addresses a range of soft skills considered essential for success. The first study discusses the attributes of effective first-time manager training – more specifically the delivery methods deemed most effective by learning leaders. The second study focuses on training for leaders of technical professionals and how it differs

from traditional leadership development programs.

Looking at both studies, the responses were resoundingly similar, highlighting two dominant modalities for delivering leadership training.

Selecting a program’s modality is probably one of the most challenging aspects when developing a performance improvement initiative. We have to weigh the cost profiles of different options, and then select one that will deliver the results we need, all while keeping the program within budget. Additionally, costs can be incurred at different stages in program development, which varies depending on the modality selected. For example, e-learning costs

are significantly higher up front, while ongoing costs are substantially less than other delivery methods (i.e., because less travel and fewer facilities are needed).

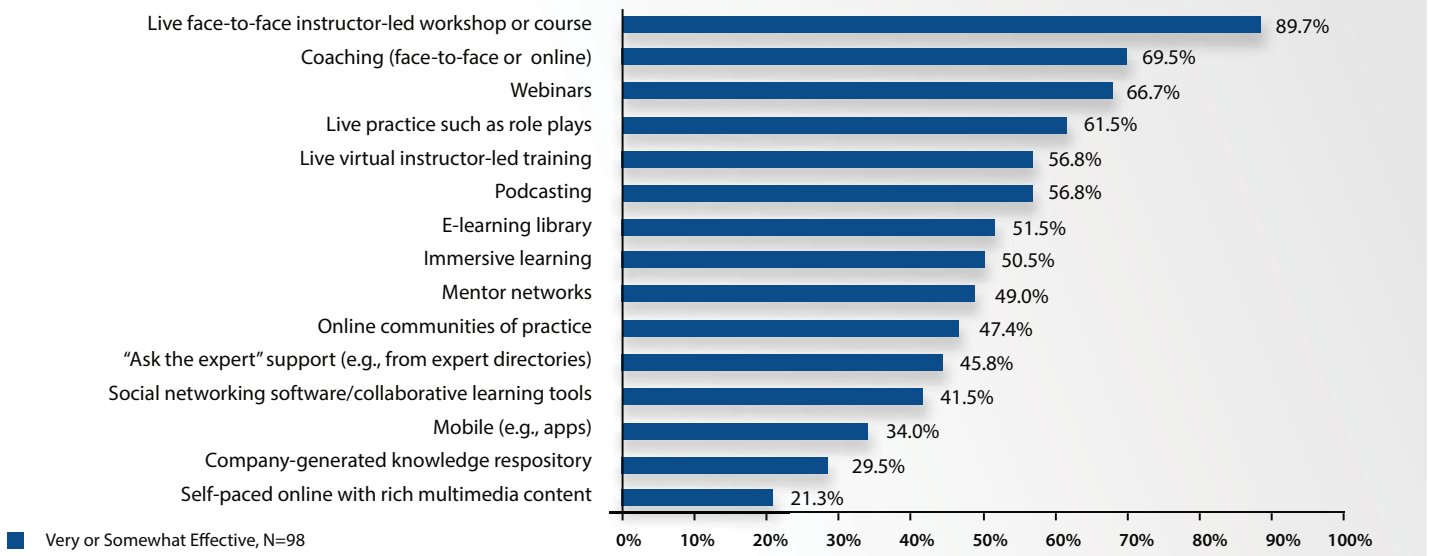
Interestingly, even with the countless advances in tools and enabling technologies, learning leaders showed a continued preference for traditional delivery methods for management training. Furthermore, live face-to-face instructor-led training was deemed most effective for leaders of technical professionals – an audience less likely to prefer interaction during training programs.

The majority of leaders of technical professionals prefer to self-direct their

FIGURE 1: DELIVERY METHODS FOR FIRST-TIME MANAGERS



FIGURE 2: EFFECTIVENESS OF DELIVERY METHODS WHEN PROVIDING TRAINING FOR LEADERS OF TECHNICAL PROFESSIONALS



learning, as learning leaders suggested in the research. More than 56 percent of learning leaders believe that managers of technical professionals would rather learn by accessing resources like web pages than attending an in-person class.

Yet, even with this preference highlighted, learning leaders from both studies suggested that the two most effective modalities for leadership training were live face-to-face instructor-led courses and coaching (e.g., face-to-face or online).

FIRST-TIME MANAGER TRAINING

The study on first-time manager training, which was completed in early 2012, focused on the attributes of effective training for emerging leaders. The research explored a range of areas that were considered important for developing and delivering high-quality training to this group. Additionally, learning leaders were specifically asked for their guidance on selecting the best delivery methods. The responses were overwhelmingly focused on live modalities, with face-to-face instructor-led programs and coaching rated as first and second respectively. (See Figure 1.)

TRAINING FOR LEADERS OF TECHNICAL PROFESSIONALS STUDY

The second study, which was completed earlier this year, focused on the training

needs and preferences of managers of technical professionals. This group has a somewhat unique set of needs, and the research focused on understanding whether learning leaders were considering and addressing these differences when designing their management training programs. Once again, the same two modalities, live face-to-face instructor-led programs and coaching, were deemed most effective by learning leaders. (See Figure 2.)

A BLENDED APPROACH

Learning leaders were also asked which methods should be blended with live face-to-face instructor-led courses or workshops to create the most effective management training program. The most frequent response was self-paced online courses with rich media content.

At our 2013 Partnering for Performance conference, the integration of media content to illustrate expected changes in behavior was a dominant theme. The usage of short-form video to drive learning across both soft skills and technical training is a growing trend.

While I'm not suggesting that we have hit the tipping point for video's incorporation in learning initiatives, we have definitely seen an increase in its use in both technical and soft skill training programs.

IN SUMMARY

Since we have long been told that training for soft skills is more effective when delivered via "live" sessions, these results weren't surprising. However, it is interesting to note that even with these two research pieces spanning a year, the use of technology-enabled modalities in the development of soft skills programs has gained little traction.

Our second study further examined the responses of those who considered their programs "very effective." These learning leaders cited "live methods" such as mentor networks and immersive learning experiences as effective far less frequently than other "classic" modalities.

So, is this really a bad thing?

Matching the appropriate modality to the program is critical to its success. While training programs for managers rely heavily on practice and hands-on experience, the fact that live face-to-face programs remain most effective shouldn't be a cause for concern. Technology has its place in training, but live face-to-face training proves to be more effective for soft skills training.

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