
ARE YOU IN SEARCH OF COST-EFFECTIVE TRAINING?

Dr. Charles. R. Crowell¹
Dr. Paul D. Worland
University of Notre Dame

James W. Jones
PANTHEON PARTNERS INCORPORATED

Now, more than ever, companies must invest training and development if they are to survive. Most companies recognize the importance of training their employees. Yet, many bottom-line managers raise reasonable questions about the effectiveness and affordability of traditional training experiences. Some of the more common questions include:

- How do I know what value my employees and I will get from this training course?
- Will my employees be able to immediately apply what they learn in their work place?
- How can I make sure the effects of training are long lasting?
- Is there a way to train people without them losing so much valuable time being off work or using their personal time?

If you have asked yourself any of these questions or you now wonder about the answers, then you should know about *Performance-Based Training* (PBT). PBT is a learner-centered and learner-paced approach to developing relevant employee skills and knowledge. In a PBT training course the learning materials are organized into modular units. Each unit consists of an objective, study material and a performance review.

The objective defines the knowledge or skills learners will demonstrate upon completion of the unit. The study materials contain all the information needed to meet the criteria in the performance review and are included in the body of the unit.

Performance reviews are designed to measure competence - either the ability to describe one's understanding (knowledge) or the ability to execute a task (skill). Included in performance reviews are criteria the learner must meet to demonstrate satisfactory competence. These criteria explicitly establish the quality, quantity or timeliness with which competence must be displayed to be considered satisfactory.

Performance reviews are not like the tests experienced in school or those used in many training programs. Learners know the objective and performance criteria before they start working on a unit — it is part of the unit materials. As a result, learners know in advance exactly what is expected of them and what they have to do to “pass.” The value of knowing the performance reviews’ objectives and explicit criteria in advance, is learners can stay focused on what they need to accomplish, instead of being concerned about what “grade” they will get. Because they can see the target clearly from the beginning, learners tend to “hit the bull’s eye” the very first time. Experience has shown this method of testing greatly reduces evaluation stress, thereby improving learning efficiency and increasing the quantity and quality of learning — all desired outcomes.

A PBT program is also highly flexible. There are defined starting and concluding dates and times, however learners establish their own learning pace - depending upon their entry-level of experience, knowledge, abilities and learning styles. In PBT, learners are free to work where and when they perform best. They manage their own learning, by working on units and scheduling their performance reviews within the time limits set for the program. Learners may also help co-workers by acting as resources to explain a topic or by serving as role-play partners.

A primary reason for rapid progress in a PBT course is the readily available performance reviews. Learners can start a unit by looking at what they are expected to accomplish and, if it can be completed without further study, they can proceed directly to the performance review. This feature provides a “fast track” for those with higher entry-level skills or knowledge. Learners accept this as positive reinforcement and perform at a faster pace.

Not all work is self-paced. Sometimes group meetings or activities are scheduled. Such events are most likely at the beginning of the program and

during those times when special practice, demonstrations or explanations are necessary.

In PBT, the “instructors” are known as course managers. They have a somewhat different role than traditional trainers. As such, their primary responsibilities involve scheduling the program, arranging facilities, organizing materials, introducing and starting the program and, most importantly, conducting the performance reviews. Course managers are also available to assist learners with the study materials. Also, if they observe several learners experiencing difficulty with a particular topic, they may choose to reconvene the group and conduct a mini-lecture or a group discussion.

Course managers conduct performance reviews in a non-threatening manner. During these unit reviews, they ask questions related to the learning objective and performance criteria, to ensure the learners’ understand essential concepts and procedures. In addition, they ask learners to demonstrate the desired knowledge or skills either face-to-face or with taped role-plays.

After viewing or listening to the demonstration, the course manager will ask the learners to describe how their performance compares with the unit’s stated criteria. This enables the learners to make the primary judgment of their performance in relationship to unit standards - further reducing their apprehensions regarding the evaluation of their performance. Most importantly, it encourages the learners to carry out a self-analysis, an ability critical to future development and maintaining their new skills when they return to work.

PBT courses are designed to provide learners with specific performance tools to be taken back and used on the job. These tools reinforce learning by helping learners continue to accomplish their new skills and abilities in their working environments. These tools, together with other follow-up systems, are a part of the total PERFORMANCE CARE™ system.

What do these features of PBT mean to an organization in search of cost-effective training? PBT has the following important benefits:

1. Learners will achieve competence — guaranteed. Progress through the course is dependent upon successful completion of each unit. When learners do not “pass” a performance review, they know exactly what they need to do to meet the standards. After the necessary study and extra practice, they meet with the course manager for additional reviews, until they meet the standards.

2. Learners do not daydream or “zone” for long periods of time. In traditional lecture-type training this routinely occurs. Whenever the learners feel tired or have lost their concentration, they can take a break and refresh themselves. This means training time is highly productive and yields a greater return on the investment.
3. The PBT course adapts to the learners. The flexibility PBT affords by self-pacing and fast-tracking ensures maximum learning in minimum time, for each learner.
4. The modular construction of a PBT course allows for flexibility in program implementation. On the one hand, learners can complete the course in a concentrated period of time away from work, as they would in a more traditional course. Or, on the other hand, PBT can be arranged so learners can complete selected units right in the work place - minimizing time off the job.
5. Learners will conduct self-analysis of their performance. The objectivity practiced by learners during performance reviews carries over to the workplace. It keeps them ever mindful of their new skills and abilities. This greatly minimizes the amount of supervision needed and helps to ensure the longevity of training effects.
6. Learners become more self-confident and improve their self-esteem. After having demonstrated competence in their newly acquired knowledge and skills, they tend to immediately put their skills into practice. As a result, supervisors and peers seek them out to help others in their development.

Organizational survival in today's marketplace will be dependent upon the quality of the training programs implemented. Training has become a significant factor and a significant investment for the future success of an organization. With downsizing, companies are asking a smaller number of employees to perform at a rate greater than a larger number of employees previously did.

If you are responsible for training and you need to achieve the greatest yield on your training dollar investment *Performance Based Training* will guarantee learning and produce long-lasting skill development.

¹ Dr. Crowell can be contacted at the Department of Psychology, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN 46556; 574.277.4774; ccrowell@nd.edu