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# Cultural Diversity in the Workplace: a Guide for Effective Instruction for All Adult Learning Styles

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**Regis University**  
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CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE:  
A GUIDE FOR EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION  
FOR ALL ADULT LEARNING STYLES

by

Lauren M. Barela

A Research Project Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Education

REGIS UNIVERSITY

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## ABSTRACT

The Changing Demographics of the U.S. Workforce:

The Need for Diversified Corporate Training Strategies

The makeup of the United States work force is changing. An increased number of immigrants in the work force have significantly affected the corporate atmosphere creating the need for a new approach to employee training. All adult learners have different learning styles which are culturally influenced and which impact training in the workplace. By applying educational theory and methods to workplace training, corporations can more effectively train employees with diverse learning style preferences. This project provides a guide to corporate educators who work with culturally diverse employees and provides an educational foundation for effective workplace training based upon analysis of: (a) preferred student learning styles, (b) cultural influences on the learning style preferences, (d) effective teaching strategies to respond to each learning style, and (e) planning, implementing, and assessing effective and relevant corporate training programs.

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

The demographics of the American workforce are rapidly changing. Retiring baby boomers are being replaced by a new generation of more diverse workers in U.S. corporations. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2004), 12 percent of the civilian population in the United States is made up of foreign-born individuals. Of the population of foreign-born individuals, 53 percent are from Latin American countries (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) estimates that immigrants accounted for 35 percent of the U.S. population growth from 1990 to 2000 and make up about 40 percent of growth in the labor force since the mid-1960s (Little & Triest, as cited in Bierema, 2002). The diversity of the new American workforce has impacted the way corporations function and has created a need for new approaches to employee training and development.

The federal government has done little to help prepare incoming immigrants to work in American corporations. Social service funds were established by the federal government in the 1980s to help immigrants orient themselves to life in the United States. Social service programs were used to provide language and job training in addition to job placement assistance for immigrants (Zimmerman, 1994). Declining federal funds have reduced education and job training for immigrants and have instead been used only for job placement, leaving immigrant workers unprepared to work in American corporations (Zimmerman, 1994).

The responsibility of job preparedness of employees has become the responsibility of the corporations which employ American workers. “America’s employers and educators will need to work together more closely to ensure that workers receive the type of training that employers need” (National Alliance of Business Inc., 2000, p.7). Having well prepared employees is essential to the overall success of a corporation. “The need for an efficient and effective workforce [has become] vital to the ability of U.S. companies to compete” (N.A.B. Inc., 2000, p.5). Employee training and preparedness has become an essential element to the current and future success of American corporations.

#### Statement of the Problem

The changing demographics of the American workforce have impacted corporations’ needs regarding employee training and development. Corporations need workers who are more skilled than ever and who can grow in their jobs as corporate needs change. As baby boomers retire and leave the workplace, a more diverse workforce will emerge. American corporations face the task of preparing diverse workers to succeed and develop in their jobs. “The training must match what employers need workers to know, and it must be delivered fast enough to meet employers’ immediate and future demand for qualified workers” (N.A.B. Inc., 2000, p.5). The increase of immigrants in the American workforce creates even more complicated training approaches since many immigrants entering the U.S. workforce speak little or no English. Individuals from various cultures also bring with them unique working and learning styles which are culturally influenced and which can greatly impact corporate education and training.

Understanding the unique needs of culturally diverse adult learners is essential to the effectiveness of employee training in American corporations.

#### Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project is to present corporate trainers with effective strategies for creating training programs for culturally diverse employees. An analysis of learning styles specific to different cultures should help to determine which teaching strategies are effective for diverse learners. A training manual was designed outlining effective educational approaches for diverse employee populations in corporate settings. The training manual offers comprehensive suggestions for facilitating adult training within the work environment.

#### Chapter Summary

The increased diversification of American workers has created the need for unique solutions to employee training. Chapter 2, Review of Literature, analyzes the effects of diversity on corporate education, identifying specific learning styles which appeal to individuals from diverse cultures. Strategies for designing effective corporate training programs were outlined. Chapter 3, Method, details the development of the project.



## Chapter 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this project is to provide a training manual outlining how to design effective corporate training programs for culturally diverse employees. It is important to understand the effect of diversity on corporate education, evaluating learners' preferred learning styles and designing training programs with educational activities that are relevant to each employee's preferred learning style. In this chapter, the researcher reviews literature related to: a) the changing American workplace b) the effects of cultural diversity on employee training, c) the different learning styles of adult learners, d) learning styles and cultural diversity, and e) designing instructional programs which complement the learning styles of diverse adult employees.

#### The Changing American Workplace

The American workforce is currently experiencing significant changes. As the baby boomers age, corporations are facing a shortage of workers. Corporations are also in need of employees with various skills which can transfer to multiple jobs and tasks creating increased emphasis and expenditure on corporate training programs. Finally, corporations are faced with an increasingly diverse workforce, which has significantly impacted the way corporations must approach employee training and development.

The workforce available to American corporations is shrinking due to the retirement of baby boomers, or those individuals born between the years of 1946 and 1964 (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). "Researchers predict that the number

of people in the workforce could exceed 180 million by 2028. However, if employment demands continue to expand at the levels they have over the past 20 years, the number of jobs could approach 200 million, leaving nearly 20 million unfilled positions by 2028” (N.A.B., Inc., 2000, p.3). This dramatic decrease in available workers will create an increased need for training and employee development within American corporations. As skilled employees retire from their jobs, new workers with unique training needs will become the new American workforce.

The changing American workforce has created the need for employees with skills that transfer to various jobs. “Technical and soft skills – those that enable workers to process information, respond to changing environments, work in teams and manage complex projects – will continue to replace static skill sets as employers react to changes and innovation in the marketplace” (N.A.B. Inc., 2000, p.5). Corporations want to create flexibility within their workforces, enabling workers to adapt to changes in their job responsibilities.

In response to the changing workforce and greater training requirements, American corporations are beginning to invest in employee training and development. “Businesses are recognizing that a worker is a resource and an asset, rather than merely a fixed cost” (Coates, Jarratt, & Mahaffie, 1991, p.9). By investing in employee training and development, American corporations are able to develop their employees’ careers, establishing long term goals, instead of providing short term training for individual positions. Some American corporations are supporting the academic endeavors of employees by providing literacy and basic skills classes and by reimbursing employees

for continuing education tuition. “At current spending rates, training budgets are likely to approach \$100 billion annually by 2015” (N.A.B. Inc., 2000, p.7).

Perhaps the most significant change to the American workforce is the increase in cultural diversity amongst American workers. Retiring baby boomers are being replaced by workers from diverse cultural backgrounds, including those who have immigrated to the United States. “A shrinking labor pool will create opportunities for traditionally underemployed workers” (Coates, et. al., 1991, p.11). The increasingly diverse workforce in American corporations has greatly impacted corporations’ approaches to employee training and development.

#### The Effects of Cultural Diversity on Employee Training

The increase of cultural minorities in the American workforce has created the need for unique approaches to employee training. Many corporations are responding to increased workforce diversity by offering diversity training, which focuses on integrating diversity into corporate goals and values and seeks to create a corporate culture which is inclusive and accepting of all cultures. “Training plays a key role in ensuring that employees accept and work more effectively with each other, particularly with minorities and women” (Noe, 2002, p.18). For diversity programs to be effective in American corporations, certain characteristics must be present. Some corporate diversity programs fail for various internal reasons, and few diversity initiatives in American corporations address the career development of employees from other cultures.

The majority of diversity training programs in American corporations focus on the integration of cultural sensitivity and acceptance into the corporate culture. “Many companies are providing skills and cultural awareness training to help their employees be

more knowledgeable, understanding, and sensitive to the differences which may exist between themselves and people from other countries” (Wentling, 2002, p.1). Such diversity initiatives can be effective in creating corporate cultures where all employees feel valued and accepted. In order for diversity initiatives to succeed, however, they must be integrated into the corporation’s goals and must be treated as a priority by management as well as employees. Employees must understand the value of diversity within the corporate environment and must acknowledge that diversity is a business imperative (Wentling, 2002).

Unfortunately, not all diversity initiatives succeed in American corporations. Diversity initiatives often fail due to competing agendas which exist within the corporate structure. Some corporations also fail to integrate diversity initiatives into all business divisions, which results in inconsistent support of diversity programs (Wentling, 2002). When diversity initiatives lack the support of management or are implemented inconsistently, employees fail to see the value of diversity and therefore do not embrace diversity programs.

Perhaps the most significant oversight in corporate diversity initiatives is the lack of opportunities for cultural minority workers to develop within their jobs and corporations. Some corporate diversity initiatives do focus on employee development in corporate training; however, the training can sometimes be ineffective due to language or learning style barriers. “Non-English speakers are particularly disadvantaged because they are excluded from training or have limited ability to understand it” (Bierema, 2002, p.75). Job training and development opportunities are often not offered in languages other than English and therefore are unavailable to non-English speaking workers. While 60 to

70 percent of American corporations offer diversity training, only 30 to 40 percent offer English as a second language courses, and even fewer offer basic literacy skills, such as remedial reading and writing, which would be beneficial to employees learning English (Noe, 2002). Effective diversity programs might offer English language training to employees while also offering Spanish language training, thus establishing the value of bilingualism in the corporate culture (Arai, Wanca-Thibault, & Shockley-Zalabak, 2001).

Cultural diversity in American corporations has established the need for attention to the specific needs of learners from various cultural backgrounds. Successful integration of cultural initiatives can help corporations create “an environment in which individuals can fully utilize their talents to benefit the company, and [can smooth] over cultural and professional differences” (Arai, et. al., 2001, p.449). As American corporations recognize the value of a highly skilled workforce, they will continue to contribute money to the career development of their employees. Effective training which addresses employees’ preferred learning styles and is relevant to learners’ cultural backgrounds is essential to the success of corporate training programs.

#### Adult Learning Theory and Learning Style Inventory

Adult learning theory should be the foundation of adult training and development programs and practices. “As commonly understood in the world of teaching and training, adherence to adult learning theory calls for the design of learning activities to be based upon the learners’ needs and interests so as to create opportunities for the learners to analyze their experience and its application to their work and life situations” (Sims & Sims, 1995, p.3). Much of adult learning theory is based upon Malcolm Knowles’ andragogy, which is based on the assumption that adult learners are different from

children. Andragogy establishes several assumptions about adults as learners. Andragogy assumes that adult learners are more self-directed, possess extensive life experiences which can be used in the learning transaction, and are motivated by social and personal factors (Merriam, et. al., 2007). Andragogy focuses on adult learners and their specific life situations and attempts to determine the best way to enhance adult learning. Knowles' theory focuses on the learning climate, suggesting collaborative learning between peers but also in working in collaboration with educators. Andragogy is the foundation of many adult educational theories.

Andragogy introduces the importance of experience in adult learning theory and practice. Various experiential learning theories have been developed by several adult education philosophers including Kolb, Dewey, and Jarvis. Experiential education is significant for adult learning because it involves application of knowledge to real world situations (Sims & Sims, 1995). Experiential learning theory can include theory of learning from previous experience, learning through classroom experiences, or learning by reflecting upon experiences. "The two principles of continuity and interaction are always interconnected and work together to provide the basis for experiential learning" (Merriam, et. al., 2007, p.163). Experiential learning theory states that knowledge obtained in the classroom can be made more relevant to adult learners if it is tied to personal experiences. "Kolb spoke of learning through experience as being empowering to adults learners, in that it allows them to ignite the learning process from a base that is familiar, unthreatening, and opens the students to a sense of ownership of new material through its connection with the safe and known in their lives" (Sims & Sims, 1995, p.85). By incorporating experiential learning theory and techniques into educational situations,

adult educators can make learning and training experiences more relevant and effective. Experiential learning techniques are especially effective for use in classrooms with diverse learners because academic material can be made to be culturally relevant and can include various points of view. “By invoking the personal world view of the students, the interaction in the classroom can develop true intercultural relationships between diverse groups and provide a methodology of engagement that is nurturing and inclusive to all students” (Sims & Sims, 1995, p.84). Experiential learning theory can be useful to adult educators because it helps to make education more relevant and effective by incorporating student views and experiences into the learning transaction.

While learner engagement is important in adult learning situations, it is equally important for educators to determine the learning style preferences of their learners in order to design educational activities which appeal to all adult learners. “Inherent in the establishment of pedagogical strategies for pupil engagement in learning is the ability to systematically acknowledge areas of real student difference, and establish clear indications that some students, although equal in intellectual capacity, might have demonstrably different potentials for success in a range of disciplines” (Sims & Sims, 1995, p.84). Three educational theories which address such differences in learners are the Learning Style Inventory Theory of David Kolb, The Multiple Intelligences theory of Howard Gardner, and the VARK Learning Assessment Theory of Neil Fleming.

Kolb designed his Learning Style Theory around the learning cycle described in experiential learning theory. Kolb’s theory focuses on four competing dimensions of learning: the concrete/abstract dimensions and the active/reflective dimensions. The concrete/abstract dimensions focus on the way learners process experiences and

information. “Over time, most individuals develop preferences for a specific dimension by selecting one of the two competing dimensions of the learning cycle: concrete versus abstract and active versus reflective. These preferences are a result of personal experiences, personality differences, and environmental and prior educational factors” (Sims & Sims, 1995, p.6-7). Kolb identified four different kinds of abilities related to his dimensions of learning: Concrete Experience abilities, Reflective Observation abilities, Abstract Conceptualization abilities, and Active Experimentation abilities (Barmeyer, 2005). When Kolb considered the four learning abilities in relation to his learning dimensions, he created a two-dimensional model of adult learning which allowed him to illustrate specific preferred learning styles. The four learning styles identified by Kolb include: Accommodating, Diverging, Converging, and Assimilating. Students demonstrating a preference for the Accommodating learning style showed preference for learning activities which focused on initiation, leadership, and accomplishing a task. Learners who preferred the Diverging learning style preferred activities using imagination, working with peers, and open-mindedness. Converging students preferred activities related to problem solving, decision making, and reasoning. Finally, students with the Assimilating learning style preference tended to prefer activities which included planning, theory development, and modeling (Barmeyer, 2005). Research studying the effectiveness of Kolb’s theory has shown that in courses that identify and cater to various student learning profiles, students whose learning styles tended to be overlooked in traditional learning environments experienced greater success and satisfaction (Sims & Sims, 1995). Kolb’s Learning Style Inventory theory can help adult educators to identify student learning styles and preferences for learning activities. By designing training



activities aimed at reaching each learning style group, adult educators and trainers can more effectively educate all employees involved in a training program.

Gardner's Multiple Intelligences theory states that learners differ in terms of type of intelligence and tend to develop knowledge differently. Gardner identified eight unique intelligences: linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and classification of nature (Jacobsen, Eggen, & Kauchak, 1999). Linguistic Intelligence refers to a learner's awareness of the meaning, order, and use of words. Logical-mathematical intelligence includes understanding pattern recognition, reasoning and order. Musical intelligence represents an awareness of pitch, melody, and tone. Spatial intelligence refers to visual ability. Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence uses the body in learning. Interpersonal intelligence refers to one's ability to notice and read other people. Intrapersonal intelligence refers to one's own awareness of themselves. Finally, Classification of Nature intelligence refers to one's ability to identify and understand relationships in nature (Jacobsen, et. al., 1999). In his theory, Gardner emphasizes the need for educators to be aware of the various intelligences of their students and to incorporate various teaching methods into their classrooms in order to effectively educate each individual.

Neil Fleming's VARK learning assessment seeks to identify the sensory method of learning preferred by adult students. VARK is an acronym for: Visual, Aural, Read/Write, and Kinesthetic (Fleming, 2009). The VARK assessment is administered as a 13 question online or paper questionnaire. In the questionnaire, students answer questions based upon their preferences for acquiring and sharing knowledge. Based on their responses to the questionnaire, students are categorized into 5 different modes, the

four modes represented by the VARK acronym, and a fifth mode described as Multimodal, meaning the learner prefers two or more modes in combination (Fleming, 2009). Student's who fall into Fleming's Visual category prefer learning through charts, diagrams, and graphs. The Aural category includes preferences for learning by hearing, as in lectures or tutorials spoken by others. The Read/Write category contains students who prefer information displayed as words, and includes a tactile element which refers to students who prefer note taking as a learning activity. The Kinesthetic category refers to students who prefer to learn through experience, practice, and simulation (Fleming, 2009). Multimodal students typically prefer two or more modes equally but in combination with one another. Like Kolb's and Gardner's theories, the VARK learning assessment calls to attention the diverse learning preferences of adult learners.

#### Learning Styles and Cultural Diversity

Researchers have used Kolb's learning style theory to determine the effect of a student's cultural background on their preferred learning style. "As diverse learners process, organize, and assimilate information, they seek to make it meaningful, relevant, familiar, and evaluative within their own cultural parameters in ways different from other learning types" (Sims & Sims, 1995, p.74). Barmeyer's 2005 study focused on Kolb's learning style inventory and attempted to discover whether a student's cultural background affected their preferred learning style. Barmeyer wanted to determine effective methods of cross-cultural training that related to the learning profiles of students (p.577). Barmeyer believed that student's learning styles are rooted in the society in which they were raised. "[Learning styles are] determined by national socialization through institutions such as family, school, universities, and work" (Dubar, as cited in

Barmeyer, 2005, p.579). Barmeyer found that student learning preferences did differ depending upon the students' cultural backgrounds. French students who participated in the study preferred Accommodating learning styles as did students from Quebec. The Accommodating learning style is characterized by personal involvement with problems or situations and typically includes active experimentation in learning activities. Students from Germany preferred the Converging learning style which emphasizes logical and theoretical approaches to learning and have a more cognitive focus (Barmeyer, 2005). Using Kolb's theory, Barmeyer was able to establish differences in learning styles for students with diverse cultural backgrounds.

Robbins and Craven's 2003 study also sought to determine how students' diverse cultural backgrounds and preferred learning styles affect training and development. In contrast to Barmeyer's study, the purpose of Robbins and Craven's study "was to increase the understanding of the differences of learning styles of international and domestic students and its possible implications for practice (teaching styles)" (Robbins & Craven, 2003, p.14). Robbins and Craven used Fleming's VARK (Visual, Aural, Read/Write, and Kinesthetic) learning style assessment to determine how students from diverse cultural backgrounds preferred to learn in academic settings. In addition to a learning style assessment, Robbins and Craven asked participants to evaluate various speakers' teaching styles to determine which teaching styles (based on Grasha's five teaching styles) they identified from each presentation. Grasha's teaching styles included: Expert, Formal Authority, Personal Model, Facilitator, and Delegator (Robbins & Craven, 2003). Based upon the student's evaluations, the preferred teaching styles were the Personal Model and Facilitator, two models which employ guidance and direction

through demonstration and discussion. The least favorite teaching styles were Expert and Delegator, which expect more self directed learning from class participants. When Robbins and Craven analyzed the student's preferred teaching styles in relation to the learning style assessment results, they discovered that most of the students, both international and domestic, preferred a multimodal approach to learning that incorporated two or more learning styles in academic situations. Of the individual learning styles, the most common learning style preference amongst the international students was the Kinesthetic style, which emphasizes hands on experience with learning materials. Since the international students in Robbins and Craven's 2003 study were students in American classrooms, the researchers hypothesized that the students show a preference for Kinesthetic learning due to possible language barriers (Robbins & Craven, 2003).

The Barmeyer study and the Robbins and Craven study demonstrate the need for understanding of diverse learning styles in adult training and development. "Due to the diversity of learning styles within a group, 'an effective intercultural training pedagogy will use learning activities that address all of Kolb's basic four learning styles'" (Paige, as cited in Barmeyer, 2005, p.591). Adult educators must also possess an understanding of how students' cultural backgrounds may influence their experience in the classroom and approach to learning. Through Barmeyer's study it is possible to understand the learning style preferences of French, Quebecois, and German students. Students from France and Quebec preferred learning styles which incorporated active experimentation with learning materials, a finding similar to that of the international students in Robbins and Craven's study. A preference for hands on and collaborative learning might also be the result of specific cultural dimensions within some cultures. Countries such as France,

China, and Mexico share certain cultural dimensions in common. The Masculinity-Femininity dimension focuses on valuing competitiveness versus helpfulness. The United States, Japan, and Germany value competitiveness while China, France, and Mexico value helpfulness and collaboration (Noe, 2002). Such cultural dimensions might explain why French students showed a greater preference for collaborative learning and discussions in classroom activities (Accommodating). In Barmeyer's study, the German students preferred a logical, cognitive approach to learning activities (Converging). Such students, according to Kolb's theory, are good at the application of reasoning and ideas but prefer dealing with tasks rather than interpersonal issues (Noe, 2002). Considering the diversity of American corporate training classrooms, it is possible that such varying student learning styles would exist in every adult learning classroom. Barmeyer and Robins and Craven's studies have brought to light the necessity of multimodal teaching techniques in classrooms where students come from diverse cultural backgrounds.

#### Designing Training Programs for Diverse Adult Learners

Adult educators in charge of training culturally diverse employees must take into account several variables when designing training programs. Instructional design incorporates various phases which are essential to the effectiveness and success of the training program. The planning phase is the first step an adult educator takes in designing a training program and should incorporate the input of the students who will ultimately benefit from the training and development (Gill, 1989). The implementation phase of instructional design is the actual execution of training methods and must also incorporate diverse points of view and instructional techniques in order to reach each student in a training program. The final phase is the assessment phase where the training program

would be evaluated to determine whether or not it was successful and to identify areas of improvement for future training.

The planning phase of designing an adult training program sets the foundation for what will be achieved through the training program, how that training will be used, and what information will be presented. The first step in the planning phase is identifying the goals of the training program. “Whatever the intent, the establishment of some type of goal or purpose is a first priority in teaching” (Jacobsen, Eggen, & Kauchak, 1999, p.15). In developing goals, adult educators must integrate various opinions, including those of the corporation, management, and the employees who are receiving the training. “Often the first sign that education and training programs are warranted surfaces as a specific idea, need, problem, or opportunity from one of these four primary sources: People, responsibilities and tasks of adult life, organizations, and communities and society” (Caffarella, 2002, p.116). Educators must also take into consideration the context in which the training will be administered and eventually used within the corporation. The context in which information is learned and the situation where that information will be used are closely related and must be considered when planning adult training programs (Merriam & Caffarella, as cited in Wilson & Hayes, 2000). Finally, educators must plan for what content will actually be presented in the training program. In cases where participants of the training program come from diverse cultural backgrounds, an adult educator wants to take care to include participants’ cultures and opinions in the planning of a training program. Participants in adult education programs should be viewed not only as consumers of knowledge but also as producers of knowledge (Gill, 1989). By integrating various cultural viewpoints into training programs, corporations can also take

advantage of the diversity of employee's backgrounds and can translate their opinions into corporate strategies. "Harnessing these differences may create a productive environment in which everybody feels valued where their talents are being fully utilized and in which organizational goals are met" (Hearns, Devine, & Baum, 2007, p.352). The planning phase of instructional design is essential to the integration of culture into adult training programs and can help to make training more inclusive and relevant to all participants in a training course.

The second phase in instructional design is the implementation phase and involves the actual execution of the training program. An adult educator must take several variables into consideration when implementing an instructional program. The implementation phase of an educational program is the strategy which an educator plans to use in order to achieve the goals they established in the planning phase (Jacobsen et. al., 1999). In developing the curriculum for a course or program, an adult educator must take into consideration the goals of the program in order to design learning activities that achieve each desired goal. As was discussed in the previous section, it is essential to incorporate various educational activities into the educational curriculum in order to reach all learners, regardless of their preferred learning style. If the traditional method of delivering information in a training classroom is through lecture, an educator might take into consideration other methods they could implement outside of the classroom that would assist in training and development. One hands-on training method that could be used in a training program is On-the-Job Training (OJT). OJT includes introducing employees to new jobs or skills by having employees observe peers as they work and then having the trainee imitate the behavior they have seen (Noe, 2002). OJT might also

include apprenticeships and self-directed learning, where a student works with an educator to master predetermined skills or content (Noe, 2002). Hands-on training techniques can be used in combination with lecturing, video, and collaborative learning activities to help cater to students who prefer the Diverging style of learning techniques. Students with a greater preference for Assimilating learning techniques might benefit from working on simulation activities, where they are able to actively interact with learning materials. Adult educators may also want to consider whether language training activities would help them to achieve program goals with students who work in a bilingual environment (Hearns, Devine, & Baum, 2007). Finally, it is important for instructors to incorporate culturally relevant information into the program curriculum in order to create an environment which is inclusive to students from various cultural backgrounds (Banks, 1994).

The final phase of designing an educational training program is the assessment phase. In the assessment phase, an educator seeks to determine whether or not the educational program was effective in reaching the goals established in the planning phase. The goal of the assessment phase is to determine whether or not learning has occurred and is also called Transfer of Learning (Jacobsen, et. al., 2002). The program evaluation will help not only to determine whether or not the educational program was successful, but will also help educators to improve future training programs by evaluating the effectiveness of their curriculum, delivery method, and program activities (Caffarella, 2002). The assessment phase will help adult educators to design training programs which are effective, culturally relevant, and which help their organization to achieve their goals.



## Chapter Summary

The changing demographics of American workers have significantly changed American corporations. The cultural diversity of American workers has impacted the way corporations function, and has impacted the way educators must face the task of training employees. Educational theory surrounding adult education has set the foundation of establishing effective methods for training working adults. Experiential learning theory is the foundation of Kolb's learning style inventory, a useful tool for adult educators. Adult students have different learning style preferences, which are greatly influenced by the cultural backgrounds from which they come. Students' preferred learning styles greatly influence the teaching styles of adult educators and trainers. Adult educators must take into consideration the various learning styles of adult learners and must make sure training programs include educational activities designed for each group of learners. Thorough planning and the establishment of clear program goals can help adult educators when they are designing training programs. Implementing a training program requires attention to established goals, but also requires the consideration of student learning styles in the creation of curriculum and course activities. Through program assessment and evaluation, an adult educator can determine whether or not the training program was successful and can make appropriate changes to the curriculum for future training programs.

## Chapter 3

### METHOD

The purpose of this project was to provide corporate educators with effective techniques for creating training programs for culturally diverse employees. Individuals from different cultures have different preferred learning styles, requiring diversified teaching strategies from corporate educators. By incorporating different educational techniques, paired with relevant educational and professional activities, corporate educators can better respond to the changing corporate environment and can help to prepare diverse employees for various job functions. This approach to corporate adult education can help corporations adjust to increasingly diverse workforces while helping employees to develop within their careers.

#### Target Audience

This project is designed to be used by corporate educators who are in charge of creating training programs for culturally diverse employees. This project might also be useful to human resource professionals who are responsible for communicating job and benefit information to diverse employee populations.

#### Goals and Procedures

The goal of this project is to help corporate educators to create effective training programs which can help to provide relevant and effective instruction to employees from diverse backgrounds. Included in the training manual are strategies for addressing diverse learners' various learning styles. The project seeks to provide activities and methods of

instruction which address each different learning style. By analyzing different learning styles, the researcher will design a comprehensive training manual including relevant activities and professional applications which can appeal to various learning styles. The format of the project is intended to provide guidelines and suggestions for creating a comprehensive corporate education program. Diversified learning activity suggestions are included in the training manual. The manual also provides tools for assessing the effectiveness of the training program.

#### Peer Assessment

The training manual was reviewed by three professionals in the field of adult education and higher education to ensure a sound educational foundation. The manual was also reviewed by two professionals outside of the field of education who evaluated whether or not the training manual would satisfy the training needs of their corporations. Specific responses were elicited through a questionnaire included with the manual.

#### Chapter Summary

In response to the diverse needs of employees in the workplace today, the researcher has prepared a training manual designed to address the unique training needs of culturally diverse employees. Based upon an analysis of the literature provided on learning styles and the effect of culture on individuals' learning preferences, the training manual seeks to provide corporate trainers with the tools to create relevant and effective training programs for all employees.

## Chapter 4

### RESULTS

Research has shown that adults' learning style preferences can be influenced by learners' cultural backgrounds (Barmeyer, 2005; Noe, 2002; Robbins & Craven, 2003). Incorporating learning activities designed to appeal to all learners has serious implications on how adult educators should approach workplace training. By examining the learning style inventories developed by Kolb, Gardner, and Fleming, adult educators can determine the best way to appeal to various learners' preferred learning styles. Kolb's Learning Style Inventory analyzes a learner's cognitive approach to learning, dividing preferences into four learning styles: converger, diverger, assimilator, and accommodator (Lincoln & Rademacher, 2006). Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory focuses on the different abilities that learners bring to the learning transaction and analyzes the ways learners might process knowledge. Finally, Fleming's VARK learning style assessment, focuses on the sensory aspect of learning, as is indicated by the elements of the VARK acronym: Visual, Aural, Read/Write, Kinesthetic, and Multimodal (Lincoln & Rademacher, 2006). Since learning styles and preferences are culturally influenced, adult educators must pay attention to the unique needs of culturally diverse employees when designing corporate training programs.

The goal of this project is to provide corporate educators with an instructional guide which should help them to understand and address diverse learning styles within the same classroom. The guide addresses the various educational needs which may exist

in corporations faced with training learners from differing cultural backgrounds. The project includes strategies for planning and implementing effective and relevant corporate training efforts. The guide includes teaching techniques which would be effective in various corporate training situations and addresses incorporating diversity into training materials. The guide offers examples of learning activities which address various adult learning style preferences and which can assist in transfer of learning and collaboration in the workplace. Finally, the guide provides tools for assessing the effectiveness of the training program to help educators improve future corporate training efforts.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE:  
A GUIDE FOR EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION  
FOR ALL ADULT LEARNING STYLES

By  
Lauren M. Barela

## THE DIVERSE AMERICAN WORKFORCE

- 12% of the American Workforce is foreign-born (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004).
  - 53% are from Latin American countries
- Immigrants made up 35% of growth in U.S. Population from 1990-2000
  - Make up 40% growth in labor force since the 1960s.
- Declining federal funds for immigrants have been used for job placement instead of providing incoming workers with training and education (Zimmerman, 1994).
- The number of people in the workplace in 2028 could exceed 180 million
  - The number of jobs could approach 200 million by 2028 (National Alliance of Business Inc., 2000).
  - Potential of 20 million unfilled positions by 2028 (N.A.B., 2000).
- Decrease in availability of workers will create an increased need of training and employee development.
  - Corporate training expenditures are expected to reach \$100 billion annually by the year 2015 (N.A.B., 2000).

## PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

The purpose of this training guide is to provide adult educators in corporate training positions with the knowledge they need to plan, create, and implement training programs which effectively educate employees from various cultural backgrounds. As the American workforce continues to diversify, corporate training will require unique approaches to employee education with training programs developed from educational research, theory, and practice. By understanding the unique ways that adults learn, corporate trainers can create effective training programs which can help employees to transfer their classroom learning to their everyday jobs. By incorporating multiple approaches to classroom training activities, educators can make sure training programs are effective and relevant for every learner and employee. Close attention to program elements such as context and content can also help to make training more relevant to employees. By providing a checklist of educational elements essential to adult learning, corporate trainers can create and implement workplace education that will help to achieve both corporate and individual employee goals. This guide also provides assessment tools to help educators determine the effectiveness of their training program and should help them to improve future training efforts.

Each section of this guide provides quick reference points for trainers followed by in-depth explanations and examples for greater understanding of each subject.



## OVERVIEW OF TRAINING GUIDE

- Understanding the Learning Styles for Culturally Diverse Adults
  - Kolb's Learning Style Inventory
  - Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory
  - Fleming's VARK Assessment
- Implications of Diverse Learning Styles for Corporate Training
  - Identifying Adults' Preferred Learning Styles
  - The Need for a Diversified Approach to Training
- Planning a Corporate Training Program
  - Identifying Program Goals
  - Context and Content
- Implementing a Corporate Training Program
  - Traditional Classroom Instruction
  - Diversified Training Activities
    - Simulations
    - On the Job Training
    - Mentoring/Coaching
- Assessing Corporate Training Programs
  - Purpose of Assessment
  - Assessment Tools
- Implications of Training Guide for Corporate Educators

## UNDERSTANDING THE LEARNING STYLES OF CULTURALLY DIVERSE ADULTS

Adult learners come to training programs with life experiences which significantly impact their experience in the classroom. Some life experiences can be useful tools for educators because they can be used to help make instructional materials relevant to adults. Adult learners experience training in different ways depending on various factors including age, gender, education, and cultural background. Culture has been found to have a significant impact on adults' preferences for learning (Barmeyer, 2005; Robbins & Craven, 2003). Learning is culturally influenced through social institutions such as family, school and work. Adult educators can understand ways to make education more meaningful and effective for learners from diverse backgrounds by understanding the educational theory behind the various learning styles.

Adult educators who take into consideration the various learning style preferences of their students can use this understanding to create effective corporate training programs. "Researchers have found students' preferred ways of absorbing and processing information are divisible into categories: cognitive, affective, environmental, sociological, and sensory" (Lincoln & Rademacher, 2006, p.486). By studying educational theory and research about the way adults learn, educators can create training programs which effectively accomplish the goals set out in corporate training programs while making sure students are acquiring the skills and knowledge that are essential to each employee's success in an effective learning context. Here we will analyze three educational theories about learning style assessments that can help adult educators in creating effective corporate training programs.

### Quick Reference: Adult Learning Styles

- **Kolb:** Learning Style Inventory (LSI)
  - Based on experiential learning theory: Adults learn from experience.
  - Four distinct learning styles: Accommodating, Diverging, Converging, Assimilating.
    - Accommodating: learners prefer involvement in learning tasks.
    - Diverging: learners prefer collaboration and creativity
    - Converging: learners prefer logic, problem solving, and reasoning
    - Assimilating: learners prefer theory development and planning.
  - Possible weaknesses of theory:
    - Does not take context of learning into consideration.
    - Only focuses on cognitive aspect of learning
- **Gardner:** Multiple Intelligences Theory
  - Focuses on individual talents/abilities of learners
  - Multiple Intelligences: linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and classification of nature.
    - Linguistic intelligence: learners prefer learning activities using words.

- Logical-mathematical intelligence: learners prefer numbers and logic/reasoning activities.
- Musical intelligence: learners prefer musical activities
- Spatial intelligence: learners prefer visual observations for learning.
- Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence: learners prefer active experimentation in learning.
- Interpersonal intelligence: learners prefer collaborative learning and can read/understand others well.
- Intrapersonal intelligence: learners prefer to experience learning individually/personally.
- Possible weakness of theory:
  - Does not attempt to understand the way learners process information, only attempts to understand the way learners obtain information.
- **Fleming: VARK Learning Assessment**
  - Internet or paper questionnaire that seeks to identify learners' preferences for perceptual (sensory) learning techniques.
  - VARK: acronym standing for Visual, Aural, Read/Write, Kinesthetic.
    - Visual: learners prefer visual learning through charts, graphs, and diagrams.

- Aural: learners prefer lectures, tutorials, explanations of learning materials.
  - Read/Write: learners prefer combination of visual and tactile learning and information in the form of words.
  - Kinesthetic: learners prefer to experience learning through simulations and practice.
  - Multimodal: learners who prefer two or more of the above learning styles.
- Possible weakness of theory:
  - Model only focuses on sensory concept of learning.
- **Overlap of theories:**
  - Kolb's Accommodating learner, Gardner's Bodily-kinesthetic learner, and Fleming's Kinesthetic learner.
  - Kolb's Diverging learner, Gardner's Interpersonal learner, and Fleming's Aural learner.
  - Kolb's Converging learner and Gardner's Logical-mathematical learner.
  - Gardner's Linguistic intelligence learner and Fleming's Visual learner.
- **Implications on Corporate Training:** Learners absorb and process knowledge in vastly different ways. Corporate educators should take into consideration the diverse learning styles of adults when designing corporate training programs.

## **Background Information: Adult Learning Styles**

### **Kolb's Learning Style Inventory**

David Kolb's Learning Style Inventory (LSI) is based on adult experiential learning theory, stating that adults learn from experience and process their experiences into knowledge in varying ways. Kolb's theory focuses on the cognitive realm of adult students' learning experiences which differs from other learning style theories that focus on physical, environmental, or sensory experiences (Sims & Sims, 1995). Kolb's LSI theory divides an adult learner's cognitive knowledge into four learning styles: Accommodating, Diverging, Converging, and Assimilating (Barmeyer, 2005). The Accommodating learning style incorporates involvement in a task to facilitate learning. The Diverging learning style uses collaboration and creativity. The Converging learning style focuses on problem solving and reasoning in learning activities. Finally, the Assimilating learning style incorporates theory development and planning into learning activities. These four learning styles call attention to the need to diversify of educational activities that are chosen for training purposes.

Kolb's model has strengths and weaknesses that must be taken into consideration in its application to corporate training. While Kolb's model draws attention to the various ways adult students may learn, it does not take into consideration the context in which learning occurs (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). It is important for adult educators to consider the context in which learning will take place in order to ensure both an effective and relevant learning context in which to perform the training. Kolb's model only focuses on the cognitive aspect of adult learning and should be considered in combination with other learning style theories, in order to give adult educators the ability

to create training programs which are effective for students with various learning style preferences.

### Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory

Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences focuses less on learning style than it does on students' individual talents or abilities. Gardner's theory again draws attention to the need for multidimensional approaches to adult education but calls attention to factors other than cognitive ability in adults' ability to learn. Gardner's multiple intelligences include: linguistic intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, musical intelligence, spatial intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence, and classification of nature intelligence (Jacobsen, Eggen, & Kauchak, 1999). Some of Gardner's intelligences are self explanatory, such as linguistic, musical and classification of nature intelligences. Gardner's spatial intelligence refers to a student's ability to visually observe and learn. Interpersonal intelligence refers to one's ability to read and understand other people. Intrapersonal intelligence refers to a student's sense of themselves and their experiences in life.

Gardner's intelligences do refer to cognitive knowledge and learning in some cases. Several of Gardner's intelligences overlap with Kolb's learning styles. For example, students with Gardner's logical-mathematical intelligence might relate to Kolb's Assimilated learners because both learning "styles" prefer patterns, reasoning, and order in learning activities (Jacobsen, et. al., 1999). Kolb's Accommodating learner might relate to Gardner's bodily-kinesthetic learner because they both prefer physical interaction with learning activities and tasks.

The overlap in these two learning style theories can help to give adult educators an idea of the various ways students learn both inside the classroom and in their daily

lives. Gardner's theory can help educators to understand the knowledge and abilities that adult learners bring with them to the classroom. Kolb's theory can help educators to understand the way adult learners process knowledge and information. The two theories together give educators a multidimensional understanding of the processes involved in adult learning. In order to gain a more in-depth picture of student learning and knowledge, we will analyze one more learning style assessment.

#### Fleming's VARK Learning Assessment

The VARK learning style assessment was created by New Zealand researcher Neil Fleming. Fleming's theory also focuses on only one dimension of learning, in this case, the sensory dimension. The VARK assessment is administered to students in the form of an internet or paper questionnaire of 13 questions which seeks to identify the learner's preferences for perceptual, or sensory, learning techniques (Lincoln & Rademacher, 2006). VARK is an acronym standing for Visual, Aural, Read/Write, and Kinesthetic. The Visual category refers to students who prefer visual learning through graphs, charts and diagrams. The Aural category refers to learners who prefer lectures, tutorials, or explanations of learning materials. The Read/Write style demonstrates a preference for a combination of visual and tactile learning and conveys a learner's "preference for information displayed as words" (Fleming, 2009). The Kinesthetic category refers to learners who prefer to experience, simulate, and practice learning activities. Finally, learners can fall into the Multimodal category in Fleming's model which means they prefer more than one mode of learning and are typically split equally between two modes.

Fleming's categories, or modes, for learning correspond to the learning styles and intelligences described by both Kolb and Gardner respectively. Kolb's Accommodating



learner, who corresponded to Gardner's bodily-kinesthetic learner, would probably fall into Fleming's Kinesthetic category, since all three learning styles demonstrate a preference for physical interaction with learning materials and activities. Kolb's Diverging learning style might also correspond to Fleming's Aural mode of learning because both learning styles incorporate collaboration with others, as Fleming's Aural students would prefer lectures, explanations and tutorials which require the involvement of another individual.

While none of the three models corresponds perfectly with any of the others, the three comparisons of the theories bring to light the fact that adult learners absorb and process knowledge in vastly different ways. By analyzing educational research and theory, it is obvious that no single instructional strategy would be appropriate or effective for a diverse group of adult trainees. It is therefore essential for adult educators in corporate settings to take into consideration the diverse learning styles of adults in order to create effective corporate training programs.

## IMPLICATIONS OF DIVERSE LEARNING STYLES FOR CORPORATE TRAINING

The implications of the diversity of student learning styles in adult education are significant. It is obvious there is a need for adult educators to diversify the instructional techniques they use in corporate training programs in order to create effective programs for all adult trainees. Research shows that adult students' learning style preferences are culturally influenced (Barmeyer, 2005; Robbins & Craven, 2003). Since American workforces are increasingly culturally diverse and since culture affects preferred learning styles, there is a profound need for adult educators to take into consideration adults' diverse learning styles when designing corporate training programs.

### **Quick Reference: Studies Identifying Specific Learning Preferences**

- **Barmeyer's 2005 Study:** Learning styles and their impact on cross-cultural training: An international comparison in France, Germany, and Quebec.  
(*International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 2005.)
  - Used Kolb's Learning Style Inventory
  - Chose French, German and Quebecois students for study.
    - French and Quebecois students share Francophone cultural characteristics. Quebecois students may differ due to North American orientation. German students served as contrast to other two.
  - Primary learning style preferences of all three groups: Assimilator learning style, showing preference for planning and development of learning activities.
  - Secondary learning style preferences differed:
    - German students: preferred Converging learning style (problem solving & logic activities).
    - French and Quebecois students: preferred Diverging learning style (creative & collaborative learning activities).
  - All three groups showed strong preferences for multimodal learning.
- **Robbins & Craven's 2003 Study:** Cultural influences on student learning.  
(*Academic Exchange*, 2003).
  - Used Fleming's VARK Learning Assessment.
  - Studied students from United States, Taiwan, Brazil, and Bangladesh.

- Compared learning styles of “domestic” (American) students in contrast to learning styles of “international” students.
  - Study showed that majority of students, domestic and international, showed preference for multimodal learning (learning that incorporated two or more learning styles).
  - International students showed a strong preference for the Kinesthetic learning style in combination with other learning styles.
  - Robbins & Craven believe international students in American learning environments might prefer Kinesthetic learning to other learning styles due to language barriers.
- **Implications of these studies:**
  - Most students, regardless of cultural origin, prefer multimodal approaches to learning.
  - Secondary learning preferences vary according to learners’ cultural backgrounds
  - International learners in American classrooms prefer hands-on learning to overcome language barriers.
  - Both studies demonstrate the importance of incorporating diverse learning activities into training programs.

### **Background Information: Identifying Adults' Preferred Learning Styles**

In his 2005 Study, Barmeyer used Kolb's Learning Style Inventory to determine the preferred learning styles of three culturally diverse groups of students. In Barmeyer's (2005) study, he focused on French, Quebecois, and German students. Barmeyer chose French and Quebecois students for his study because they are both Francophone cultures, and therefore would have some cultural characteristics in common (Barmeyer, 2005). To contrast the two Francophone cultures, Barmeyer chose another non-Anglophone culture, Germany, to make up his third group of student subjects. Using Kolb's LSI model, Barmeyer (2005) was able to determine that the German students' primary preferences for learning were similar to that of the French and Quebecois students. Their secondary preferences, however, varied greatly from that of the French and Quebecois students. A majority of the German, French, and Quebecois students were found to prefer the Assimilator learning profile, meaning they show preferences for learning activities that involve planning and development of learning activities. The second most common preference for German students was the Converging learning style, which involves problem solving and logic based learning activities (Barmeyer, 2005). The French and Quebecois students showed secondary preferences for the Diverging learning style which demonstrates a preference for creative and collaborative learning activities (Barmeyer, 2005). All three groups of students demonstrated a multimodal preference for learning which included active development of knowledge through learning which was supplemented by secondary learning preferences.

Robbins and Craven's 2003 study also sought to identify the specific learning styles of select cultural groups. The findings of Robbins and Craven's (2003) study had

similar findings to that of Barmeyer (2005) in that they were able to determine that most students preferred a multimodal approach to educational activities. Robbins and Craven used Fleming's VARK model to identify the preferred learning styles of international (Taiwan, Brazil, and Bangladesh) students versus that of domestic (American) students (Robbins & Craven, 2003). By administering the VARK learning assessment, Robbins and Craven (2003) determined that 47% of their subjects (international and domestic) preferred a multimodal learning which incorporated three or more of Fleming's learning styles. Of the remaining students, 27% preferred a combination of two learning styles and 26% showed a preference for only one learning style (Robbins & Craven, 2003). The international students showed strong preference (83%) for the Kinesthetic learning style either alone or in combination with another learning style. The Kinesthetic learning style incorporates active involvement and hands-on experimentation with learning materials in the classroom. Robbins and Craven (2003) contribute the international students' strong preference for Kinesthetic learning in part to possible language barriers they may face in American classrooms. Of the subjects in their study, Robbins and Craven (2003) found that 74% of students, both international and domestic, prefer a combination of two or more learning styles. Robbins and Craven's (2003) findings are significant in that they demonstrate an overall preference for diversified learning activities.

## A DIVERSIFIED APPROACH TO TRAINING

Educational research has demonstrated a significant need for corporate training that incorporates diversified learning activities into training programs. The primary means of delivering instruction in classrooms is through lecture (Robbins & Craven, 2003). Since most students demonstrate a preference for learning which incorporates active experimentation with learning materials, lecture is not always going to be an appropriate teaching method for most adult learners. Robbins and Craven's study found that almost all students, both international and domestic, preferred teachers who incorporated active examples, student interaction, and in-depth descriptions into oral presentations. This finding demonstrates students' desire to be actively involved in learning activities, even if the predominant delivery method for training is in the form of a lecture.

## PLANNING A CORPORATE TRAINING PROGRAM

A well planned corporate training program can help adult educators, employees, and corporations to reach desired goals. Identifying these goals is the first essential step in planning a corporate training program (Caffarella, 2002). Corporate training techniques will vary depending on the desired outcome of the training program. Once an educator has identified the expected goals they can begin to account for the other variables which will affect the training program, including the context in which the training will be administered and the content that will be presented in the training materials. In planning a corporate training program, it is important to consider the cultural diversity of the employees who will be receiving the training to make sure the program is culturally sensitive and relevant to the employee's professional and personal lives.

### **Identifying Program Goals**

Most corporate training programs come about because of a specific need or goal that has been identified within a corporation (Caffarella, 2002). The main goal of training programs is to provide employees with the skills and knowledge necessary for them to be able to successfully do their jobs. Within that goal, corporations may wish to achieve more specific goals, such as better teamwork, improvement of basic work skills, acquisition of advanced skills, training for new technology, employee development, and sometimes even language or cultural diversity training (Noe, 2002). Figure 1 shows the types of training offered by American corporations and the average percentage of corporations offering each type of training.



**Figure 1.** Percentage of companies providing different types of training (Noe, 2002, p.25)

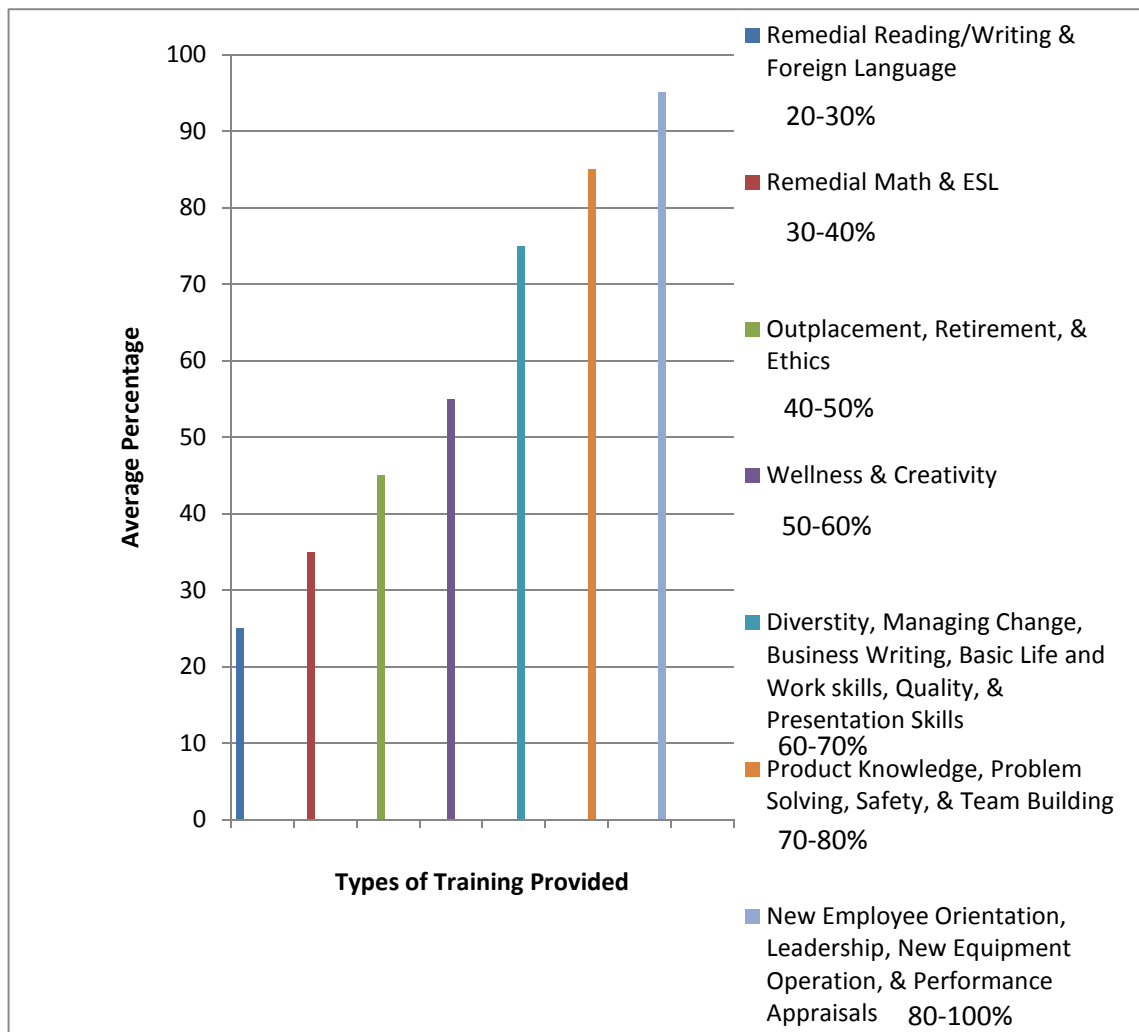


Figure 1 shows that a majority of corporations are training for purposes such as orientation for new employees, integration of new equipment or technology into the workplace, leadership, problem solving, basic work skills, and team building. Fewer corporations are investing in basic literacy, math, and language programs for employees. Most American corporations are using training programs to improve employee performance and development in the workplace. Training focusing on managing job complexity and the use of new technologies has become increasingly important to American corporations (Coates, Jarratt, & Mahaffie, 1991). Research has shown that the

main goals of training programs in American corporations is focused on improving employee performance and developing employees' skills for new technology and responsibilities (Noe, 2002; Coates, et. al., 1991).

Once the goals of the training program has been established, corporate trainers must consider the actual use of the training and make sure that the context of the training is consistent with the context in which the information will be used. The context of the training can contribute to the effectiveness of the training and has direct impact on reaching the training program's goals. The content presented in the training program must also convey the program goals and requires special consideration in programs where employees are from various cultural backgrounds. Planning for context and content are discussed in the next section.

## **Context and Content**

### **Quick Reference: Context and Content**

- **Context:** The situation in which the training will occur and the eventual situation in which the skills or knowledge will be used.
  - Incorporates purpose of training and how skills will be used in workplace.
  - Effective training uses learning contexts that are authentic and applicable to employees' actual job tasks.
  - Contextual learning is interactive and provides background for the working context.
- **Content:** The actual learning materials and information presented to learners.
  - To be effective, content must be relevant to employees' personal and professional lives.
  - To incorporate employees' points of view into training content, include employees in planning and development of training program.
  - Use learning materials that incorporate diverse cultural perspectives to create an inclusive training environment.

## **Background Information: Context and Content**

Educators in charge of planning corporate training programs must take into consideration other factors outside of the actual goals of the program. The context of training programs refers to the situations in which the training will be administered and eventually used. The content of the program refers to the actual material that will be presented, and requires special considerations in planning training programs with adults from diverse cultural backgrounds.

The context of the program has to do with the purpose of the training in relation to the employees' jobs and how the training will be used. By paying attention to the context of the training program, an adult educator is acknowledging the fact that what employees are learning is closely related to the context in which that information is learned (Caffarella & Merriam, as cited in Wilson & Hayes, 2000). The context of the training program can help educators ensure that employees are able to transfer their learning from the classroom to the workplace. By incorporating authentic, real-life learning activities into a training program, educators can take advantage of the interactive nature of contextual learning (Caffarella & Merriam, as cited in Wilson & Hayes, 2000). The context of the training provides the background for both how the training will occur but also how the training will be used in the employees' actual positions within the company.

The content of the training program is the actual material that will be presented to learners. Program content should incorporate learners' prior experiences in order to make the training more personally relevant. Including employees in the process of planning a program can help to incorporate information into the program that is of interest to training participants. Creating relevant training programs involves treating employees as

sources of knowledge, not just consumers of knowledge (Gill, 1989). In addition to including employee input in the preparation of program content, educators should also consider using literature and materials that reflect the cultural diversity of the participants in the training. By including content from sources with varying cultural viewpoints, employees will feel more valued and recognized in the context of their training (Hearns, Devine, & Baum, 2007). By integrating culturally relevant training content and by including employees' opinions in the planning of training programs, educators can create relevant and effective corporate training programs which help to achieve the goals established by key interest groups.

Planning a corporate training program begins with establishing the purpose and desired outcomes of the training. In addition to establishing goals, corporate educators must consider the context of the training in relation to the context in which the knowledge acquired in training will be used. Finally, the content of the training program should incorporate the employees' input and should reflect the cultural diversity of the training participants. By incorporating student input and culturally relevant training materials, employees will feel valued and included in the training process.

## IMPLEMENTING A CORPORATE TRAINING PROGRAM

Once the goals, context, and content for a training program have been developed, educators can incorporate these elements into carefully planned learning activities. As was discussed in a previous section, the educator must pay special attention to the variety of educational activities chosen in order to create learning activities which will appeal to all adult learning styles. The actual implementation of a training program can be seen as the strategy that an adult educator plans to use in order to achieve the goals they set out in the planning phase (Jacobsen, Eggen, & Kauchak, 1999). This section will provide suggestions for diversified learning activities for corporate training programs. Attention will be paid first to the traditional training techniques in many corporate programs. The subsequent section will provide training activities which would appeal to employees with diverse learning style preferences.

## **Quick Reference: Diversified Learning Activities**

### **1. Traditional Classroom Instructional Techniques:**

- a) **Lecture:** a one-way organized, formal talk given by a resource person for the purpose of presenting a series of events, facts, concepts or principles.

a. **Uses:**

- i. To convey information to large groups of employees.

b. **Methods:**

- i. Oral presentation in combination with various learning aides such as power point presentations, videos, and tutorials.

c. **Learning styles it appeals to:**

- i. Kolb's Converging and Diverging learners  
ii. Gardner's Linguistic intelligence learners  
iii. Fleming's Visual and Read/Write learners.

d. **To increase appeal to all learning styles:**

- i. Including case studies, debates, problem solving and discussion forums would make lecture more appealing to Kolb's Converging and Diverging learners.  
ii. Including charts and graphs would help to appeal more to Gardner's Spatial intelligence learners and Fleming's Visual learners.  
iii. Including games and tutorials into lectures would appeal to Kolb's Accommodating learners, Gardner's Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence students, and Flemings Kinesthetic learners.

e. **Pros and Cons of using lecture techniques:**

- i. **Pro:** Time efficiency: trainers can reach many employees at the same time.
- ii. **Pro:** Video lectures and teleconferencing would allow trainers to reach large numbers of employees at various locations.
- iii. **Con:** The context of the training may not be appropriate for the context in which the training will be used.
- iv. **Con:** Lower transfer of learning since employees are an audience, receiving information to be used later.



### **Background Information: Traditional Classroom Instruction**

The traditional method for instruction in adult educational programs is typically lecture (Robbins & Craven, 2003). “Lecture: A one-way organized, formal talk is given by a resource person for the purpose of presenting a series of events, facts, concepts, or principles” (Caffarella, 2002, p.176). Lectures are often used when the primary goal of the training is for employees to acquire knowledge. Lectures might incorporate various educational aides including video presentations, tutorials, and Power Point presentations. Lectures might be administered in combination with learning activities such as assigned readings, handouts, and group discussions. Traditional training techniques such as lectures are often administered in large group settings although they can occasionally also take the form of small group panels, face-to-face group discussions, or committee meetings (Caffarella, 2002). Lecture training that is presented to large groups of employees can be time effective in that it allows educators to communicate training information to a large group of employees at the same time. Teleconferencing can add to the efficiency of such techniques when employees in different locations can view the same presentation at the same time (Ziegahn, as cited in Wilson & Hayes, 2000). Lectures can help educators to achieve training goals related to relaying information to large groups of employees and might used to address training needs such as leadership, safety, diversity, and product knowledge training.

Lectures, tutorials, and similarly presented training programs do appeal to various learning styles. Learners who would be categorized under Gardner’s Linguistic intelligence group and those who fall into Fleming’s Aural category would learn very effectively from lecture based training as they prefer learning that is presented in the form

of words, specifically spoken words. Fleming's Read/Write students might also prefer lectures, especially those that employ Power Point presentations, because they can see the information in a presentation and can take notes or create lists (Fleming, 2009). Lectures which include group discussions would further appeal to Fleming's Aural learners because they prefer to process information by discussing or speaking about it, rather than seeing it in a presentation. To make lectures more appealing to other learning styles, educators might consider including activities such as case studies, debates, and forums, where students, such as Kolb's Converging and Diverging learners, are able to collaborate and problem solve (Caffarella, 2002). Including visual aids, such as charts and graphs, where appropriate would help educators create a lecture that appealed to Fleming's Visual students and Gardner's Spatial intelligence learners. Including games and tutorials into lectures would give Kolb's Accommodating learners, Gardner's Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence learners, and Fleming's Kinesthetic learners the opportunity to actively interact with learning materials and activities.

Presenting learning content in the form of lectures can be extremely effective and time efficient for corporate trainers, and should be included into training programs. Educators should take care to include culturally relevant information in the content being presented in order to create an inclusive training experience for employees. By integrating various other training elements into their lecture, such as discussions, visual aids, and games, educators can help to make traditional training techniques more appealing to a variety of learning styles. The limitation of lectures as the sole instructional technique in training programs is their context. By presenting training information in lecture form, the context of the training can become isolated from the job

in which the training will be used (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Lecture-based training is best used to convey information that will later be used in a training context which provides greater transfer of learning to the actual job the employee will be expected to perform. The next section will discuss training activities which can help educators make corporate training more contextually relevant, by providing direct training in the employees' actual positions.

## **Quick Reference: Diversified Training Activities**

### **2. Other Training Instructional Techniques:**

b) **Job Simulations:** learning activities aimed at creating learning experiences designed for a specific training purpose/context.

a. **Uses:**

- i. To create new learner experiences through active interaction in controlled and realistic settings.
- ii. To allow learners to practice the skills and knowledge they have obtained through training.

b. **Methods:**

- i. Simulation activities are designed by adult educators to mimic real-world situations. Simulations can take the form of computer programs or can be implemented as role-playing and problem solving activities.

c. **Learning styles simulations appeal to:**

- i. Kolb's Accommodating learners
- ii. Gardner's Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence learners
- iii. Fleming's Kinesthetic and Multimodal learners

d. **To increase appeal to all learning styles:**

- i. Simulations appeal to almost all learning styles due to the fact that they can incorporate several senses into the learning experience: visual, aural, and tactile.

- ii. Including collaborative activities would make simulations more appealing to Kolb's Diverging learners and Gardner's Interpersonal learners.
- iii. Including theory development and planning activities into simulations would make them more appealing to Kolb's Assimilating learners.

e. **Pros and Cons of using simulation activities:**

- i. **Pro:** Provides contextually relevant learning situation.
- ii. **Pro:** Can encourage collaborative learning and team building.
- iii. **Pro:** Allows employees to practice skills, knowledge, and new technology in controlled environments.
- iv. **Con:** Less time efficient than other activities.
- v. **Con:** Can be expensive and time consuming.

c) **On the Job Training Activities:** training through observation of peers or managers who are performing job tasks.

a. **Uses:**

- i. To train newly hired employees
- ii. To train existing employees who are taking on new responsibilities in the workplace.

b. **Methods:**

- i. Observations, role-playing, apprenticeships, self-directed learning activities.

c. **Learning styles they appeal to:**

- i. Kolb's Accommodating and Diverging learners
- ii. Gardner's Spatial , Bodily-kinesthetic, Intrapersonal, and Interpersonal intelligence learners
- iii. Fleming's Aural, Kinesthetic, and Multimodal learners

d. **To increase appeal to all learning styles:**

- i. Activities that include planning and problem solving would appeal to Kolb's Assimilating learners.
- ii. Activities that include problem-solving would appeal to Kolb's Converging learners and Gardner's Logical-mathematical and Intrapersonal intelligence learners.

e. **Pros and Cons of using On the Job Training:**

- i. **Pro:** OJT provides trainees with opportunities to interact with and learn from experienced employees. Encourages collaborative learning.
- ii. **Pro:** Can be designed to specifically appeal to almost any learning style and can be catered to each individual's training needs.
- iii. **Con:** Less time efficient than lectures or simulations.
- iv. **Con:** Requires the time and cooperation of various employees. Can reduce the job efficiency of employees training their peers.

d) **Coaching and Mentoring:** Coaching involves peers working together to achieve a desired goal. Mentoring involves less formal training relationships aimed at long-term goals and career development.

a. **Uses:**

- i. Both coaching and mentoring are intended to achieve long term training goals.

b. **Methods:**

- i. Coaching involves including a manager or peer in the long term training of an employee.
  - 1. Coaching usually takes place for 6 months or longer.
  - 2. One-on-one training with feedback and recommendations.
  - 3. Development of resources and experts to assist employees in acquisition of skills and knowledge.
  - 4. Identification of resources including educational and job opportunities.
- ii. Mentoring also involves managers or peers but seeks to achieve long term career development.
  - 1. Involves long term working relationships.
  - 2. Informal compared to coaching. Not focused on development of skills or training.
  - 3. Mentors offer career guidance and support, psychosocial support and can foster improved teamwork.
  - 4. Mentors can serve as sponsors for future career opportunities.

c. **Learning styles they appeal to:**

- i. Coaching and mentoring are individually implemented and therefore can be designed to appeal to each individual learner.

d. **Pros and Cons of Coaching and Mentoring:**

- i. **Pro:** Can help corporations to prepare employees for future positions within the company.
- ii. **Pro:** Helps employees to grow within their current jobs and grow within their corporations.
- iii. **Pro:** Coaches and mentors can serve as confidantes and role models for employees providing various levels of support to developing employees.
- iv. **Con:** Less time efficient than any other training strategy.
- v. **Con:** Cuts into productivity of employees participating.



### **Background Information: Diversified Training Activities**

By supplementing traditional training techniques with diverse opportunities for learning, corporate trainers can make sure they are implementing training that is relevant and effective for every employee in a training program. By diversifying their training strategies, educators can incorporate various learning activities which will not only appeal to various learning styles but which will also make training more contextually relevant to the trainees' jobs. This section contains recommendations for training activities that supplement traditional training techniques and offer adult educators a diverse selection of activities which appeal to various learning styles.

#### *Job Simulations*

Job Simulations are learning activities aimed at creating learning experiences designed for a specific training context. Simulations seek to create new learner experiences through active interaction in controlled, realistic settings. "Complex learning environments, such as simulations, encourage identifying relationships between concepts, to view the topic or subject matter from different perspectives and put emphasis upon active application of knowledge or skills to a practical problem" (Lainema & Lainema, 2007, p.186). Job simulations allow trainees to practice the skills and knowledge they have obtained in controlled settings designed to represent real-world situations. "Simulations immerse learners in a reality that mimics real life, allowing them to experience what might remain abstract in textual materials and traditional classes" (Wlodkowski, 2008, p.297). Simulations are designed by adult educators to achieve specific goals and often offer an opportunity for assessment and feedback within the simulation activity. Such feedback allows learners to reflect upon the decisions they

made during the simulation activity to determine the reasons behind their actions and decisions and to ultimately determine whether their simulation experience helped them to reach their goal (Wlodkowski, 2008).

Simulation activities can encourage collaborative learning and team building, which in some cases is the overall goal of the training program. “Learning arises from people working together to achieve practical outcomes and building practical know-how in the process” (Lainema & Lainema, 2007, p.183). Since many employees work in collaboration with other employees in their daily jobs, being able to incorporate collaborative learning into training strategies is an important tool for corporate training aimed at improving teamwork. Simulation activities might also be used in situations where the goal of the training is the operation of new technology or equipment. Allowing employees to manipulate new technology in a controlled environment gives them the opportunity to practice the skills they have acquired through training. Other training goals that could be achieved through simulation activities include: language training, English as a Second Language, and problem solving (Noe, 2002).

Simulation activities are most likely to appeal to learners who prefer hands-on interaction with learning materials. Such learners include Kolb’s Accommodating learners, Gardner’s Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence students, and Fleming’s Kinesthetic learners because all three learning styles prefer active experimentation with learning materials and activities. Since simulations are designed, in many cases, by adult educators, they can incorporate learning activities which could appeal to several learning styles at once. Simulations designed for team building would appeal to Kolb’s Diverging learners since they tend to prefer collaborative learning. Kolb’s Converging learners who

prefer problem solving activities might prefer a simulation designed for problem solving and reasoning. Simulation activities could even be made to appeal to Assimilating learners if they included theory development and planning activities (Barmeyer, 2005). Simulation activities could appeal to almost all of Gardner's Multiple Intelligences if they are designed with each individual intelligence in mind. Since simulations include almost all of the senses, students falling in any of the five VARK categories would find such activities helpful. Simulation activities might appeal most to Fleming's Multimodal learners since they would incorporate multiple senses in the learning transaction (Fleming, 2009).

Job simulation activities implemented in combination with lectures would be an effective strategy in creating a corporate training program. Through a combination of lecture and simulations, educators could create training programs that convey critical information and offer learners the opportunity to apply their knowledge in real world settings. Various other instructional techniques would also be effective in combination with lectures and simulations and will be discussed in the next section.

#### *On the Job Training Techniques*

On the Job Training, or OJT, refers to training employees receive while observing peers or managers performing actual job tasks (Noe, 2002). OJT is typically used for training newly hired employees or for training existing employees who are taking on new jobs in the workplace. OJT can include various subcategories of training, including role playing, apprenticeships, and self-directed learning activities. OJT provides trainees with the opportunity to interact with employees who have experience with the skill or knowledge that is the desired outcome of the training activity. Role playing activities

involve a dramatization of a situation or problem and can be followed up by a discussion surrounding the outcome of the dramatization (Caffarella, 2002). Apprenticeships involve breaking down the desired task or skill into specific steps. The steps are demonstrated by the trainer, or experienced colleague, and then repeated with explanations of key points or behaviors (Noe, 2002). Participants in apprenticeships would complete part of the task and eventually the entire task, repeating their actions until it appears that they have effectively mastered the skill at hand (Noe, 2002). Self-directed OJT can involve various activities, including structured exercises, skill practice exercises, and problem-based learning activities. Structured exercises might include individual participation in a planned exercise using a guide provided by the trainer (Caffarella, 2002). Structured exercises give learners the opportunity to problem solve and practice skills on their own, in order to develop their own method for completing an activity. Skill practice exercises may or may not include the trainer and focus on developing a desired skill through repetition and practice. Finally, problem-based learning activities seek to improve problem solving skills through a problem presented by the trainer. Problem-based learning activities can be implemented in various ways depending on the desired outcome of the training (Caffarella, 2002).

OJT is frequently implemented in corporate training programs in combination with other training techniques. OJT can help educators achieve goals such as new employee training, new equipment operation, problem solving, product knowledge, and the development of basic and advanced work skills. OJT, like simulation activities, can appeal to various learning styles depending on how it is implemented in the training program. OJT will specifically appeal to those learning styles, Kolb's Accommodating

learners, Gardner's Bodily-kinesthetic learners, and Fleming's Kinesthetic learners, who prefer hands-on experimentation with learning tasks (Lincoln & Rademacher, 2006). OJT activities such as role playing would appeal to Kolb's Diverging learners and Gardner's Interpersonal intelligence students because such activities allow trainees to collaborate with other individuals. Apprenticeships would appeal to Kolb's Assimilating learners because they involve patterns and planning in learning activities but would also appeal to Gardner's Bodily-kinesthetic and Fleming's Kinesthetic learners because they offer trainees the opportunity to actively practice the skills they are learning (Noe, 2002). Self-directed learning activities are similar to simulations in that they are designed by the corporate trainer and can be specifically catered to individual learning styles. Structured exercises could be designed to appeal to any trainee depending on the type of training activity chosen by the educator but might specifically appeal to Kolb's Converging learners because they prefer problem solving activities (Barmeyer, 2005). Skill practice exercises could be designed to appeal to any of Fleming's sensory students and could also carry over to Gardner's intelligence categories depending on the structure of the activity. Finally, problem-based training activities would be especially appealing to Kolb's Converging learners since they are directed at developing problem-solving skills. Problem-based training activities might also appeal to Gardner's Intrapersonal intelligence learners because such activities are completed individually and require personal skill building to achieve a desired goal (Jacobsen, Eggen, & Kauchak, 1999).

By diversifying the activities presented in OJT, adult educators can make sure to include activities that appeal to every adult's preferred learning style. On the Job Training activities involve more time and consideration on the part of corporate trainers than

simulations or lectures because they require the involvement of managers and other employees in their implementation. The amount of time allotted to achieve specific training goals must be kept in mind when implementing corporate training programs (Caffarella, 2002). In the next section we will analyze Mentoring and Coaching, training techniques aimed at continuous learning in the workplace.

### *Coaching and Mentoring*

Coaching involves peers working together to achieve a desired goal. Coaching is typically implemented to help employees improve motivation and work skills and is often a source of feedback for an employee's performance (Noe, 2002). Mentoring relationships are not typically included in corporate training programs because they tend to be informal and are typically initiated by an employee who wishes to gain knowledge and skills through a working relationship with a peer (Noe, 2002). Coaching and mentoring do not typically have start and end dates but are learning activities that develop and change as an employee's training needs change and therefore require a longer period of time for implementation in a training program.

Coaching is similar to apprenticeships in that it involves including managers or peers in the process of training an employee. Coaching usually occurs over a longer period of time, usually six to eight months, and involves aspects of employee development that move beyond simply training an employee for a new task or skill (Noe, 2002). Coaching relationships can comprise of three different elements, depending on the desired outcome of the relationship. First, coaches can involve an experienced employee working one-on-one with a trainee to give feedback to the trainee regarding certain skills or behaviors (Noe, 2002). Second, coaches can help trainees to find resources and experts

to help them develop desired skills and knowledge. Finally, coaches can provide trainees with resources such as additional educational opportunities and job experiences (Noe, 2002). In some cases, coaches may not be supervisors or managers of the trainee but would be peers who could provide the trainee with feedback and recommendations for an employee's training and performance.

Coaching activities can help corporations to groom employees for future positions within the company while also developing that employee's skills within their existing position. Coaching relationships might also help corporations to achieve other goals such as creativity training, managing change, business writing, presentation skills, leadership skills, and performance appraisals (Noe, 2002). Coaching relationships can give employees the opportunity to continually grow within their jobs and companies, giving employees the opportunity to develop long term career goals instead of just developing short term immediate need training (Coates, Jarratt, & Mahaffie, 1991). Since coaching activities typically take place in a one-on-one format, the trainer, trainee, and any other participants can be sure to cater the training activities to be specifically relevant to the trainee's needs and learning preferences.

Mentoring relationships are similar to coaching relationships in that they are implemented over a longer period of time than traditional training and they seek to achieve long term employee development. "Most mentoring relationships develop informally as a result of interests or values shared by mentor and protégé" (Noe, 2002, p.304). Mentoring relationships are similar to apprenticeships and coaching in that they involve having more experienced employees or managers train and mentor a less experienced employee. Mentoring relationships often attempt to pair successful and

experienced employees with those who need additional training. In addition to training, mentors offer career guidance to less experienced or new employees. Informal mentoring relationships have given way to more formal mentoring relationships aimed at helping historically neglected groups develop their careers within corporations (Hansman, as cited in Wilson & Hayes, 2000). Mentoring programs are designed to help employees in various ways. First, mentoring relationships provide career support, which involves providing training and exercises but which also includes sponsorship and exposure for future career opportunities. “Mentoring programs may be designed to help those who, because of race, class, gender, or sexual orientation, may have limited opportunities for advancement” (Hansman, as cited in Wilson & Hayes, 2000). Second, mentoring programs can provide psychosocial support to employees, where mentors serve as role models and confidantes with whom trainees can discuss problems and fears (Noe, 2002). Third, mentoring can be implemented in small groups to help achieve teamwork and harmony within the workplace and can encourage the sharing of information amongst employees. Group mentoring is also necessary in corporations where fewer mentors are available due to retirement and an aging workforce (Hansman, as cited in Wilson & Hayes, 2000).

Employees who serve as mentors must be carefully selected by corporate trainers. Mentors are selected for having high performance evaluations by their superiors, for having good communication and listening skills, for being willing to serve as a mentor, and for being a match to mentees in terms of character and personality compatibility (Noe, 2002). Mentoring relationships are monitored and regulated by corporate trainers to make sure the relationship stays positive, effective, and on task to achieve training goals.



Trainers should specify the purpose of the mentoring relationship in advance so both parties are aware of what is expected of them through the mentoring process. Trainers should also specify the amount of contact that is expected between the mentor and protégé (Noe, 2002). The beginning of the mentoring relationship should include an orientation meeting to allow mentors and protégés to become acquainted with one another. After the orientation, mentoring programs can progress in specific stages, planned out by the trainer and meant to keep the mentoring relationship on track. The first phase includes establishing a foundation of trust between the mentor and protégé and may not involve actual training or developmental activities (Hansman, as cited in Wilson & Hayes, 2000). The second phase of a mentoring relationship involves developing career goals and implementing strategies for achieving these goals. The final phase involves implementing training, networking, and counseling activities to help the trainee, or protégé, achieve the goals set out by the trainer, the mentor, and the trainee (Hansman, as cited in Wilson & Hayes, 2000). Mentoring relationships can vary in length, intensity, and involvement depending on the goals and desires of the parties involved. Corporate trainers can be involved in assessing mentoring relationships to help the participants determine an appropriate end to the mentoring activity (Noe, 2002).

Mentoring relationships can serve a variety of purposes and can help an organization to achieve specific goals through training. Mentoring relationships can help with new employee orientation, ethics training, managing change, developing basic and advanced work skills, developing presentation skills and product knowledge, developing leadership skills, and improving teamwork and collaboration in the workplace (Noe, 2002). Mentoring relationships help to develop and achieve long term career goals for

employees and contribute to the likelihood of promotion for employees involved in mentoring (Noe, 2002). Since mentoring relationships are personally developed between protégés and mentors, the training and development activities can be developed to reflect the trainee's preferred learning style. Mentoring relationships can be an effective training strategy when implemented in combination with any of the above mentioned training activities. Mentoring gives corporate trainers the opportunity to personalize training and to diversify the training techniques used with individual employees and can be a useful tool in planning and implementing a corporate training program.

By incorporating both traditional and diversified learning activities into corporate training programs, corporate educators can create and implement effective and relevant training for employees with varying learning style preferences. In training situations where employees are from diverse cultural backgrounds, corporate trainers must be sure to include training activities that appeal to all learners, since learning styles are culturally influenced and can affect the outcome of training.

## ASSESSING CORPORATE TRAINING PROGRAMS

Assessment is a step that should be built into every corporate training program. Assessments can be administered before, during, and after the implementation of a training program and can serve different purposes depending on when they are administered. Some assessments can be designed for specific training activities in order to determine the effectiveness of single training components in relation to the training program as a whole. There are various tools educators can use to assess training programs and each tool can be used to elicit specific feedback about the effectiveness of the training.

## **Quick Reference: Program Assessment**

### **1) Purpose of Assessment**

#### **a) Assessment during Planning:**

- i) Administered to potential participants, managers of potential participants, other key constituent groups.
- ii) Helps to develop training program goals, content, activities.
- iii) Helps to incorporate personally and culturally relevant content into training materials.
- iv) Helps trainers to identify possible learning style preferences of participants.

#### **b) Assessment during Implementation:**

- i) Administered to participants, managers, and other key constituent groups.
- ii) Helps to determine whether program goals are being met.
- iii) Allows trainers to make adjustments to programs while they are being implemented.

#### **c) Assessment after Implementation:**

- i) Administered to participants, managers, and other key constituent groups.
- ii) Helps to determine whether the training was successful.
- iii) Determines whether training goals were achieved.
- iv) Helps to identify changes for future training programs.

### **2) Assessment Tools**

#### **a) Formal Assessment Tools:**

- i) Are more structured and specific.

- ii) Administered to participants, managers, and other key constituent groups depending on the desired information.
- iii) Interviews, questionnaires, learning assessments, prior knowledge tests, and focus groups.

**b) Informal Assessment Tools:**

- i) Open-ended and have less structure than formal assessment tools.
- ii) Administered to participants, managers, and other key constituent groups.
- iii) Self-assessments, diaries, reviews, written observations, and journals.
- iv) Elicit more specific and personal information including anxieties and attitudes.

## **Background Information: Assessing Corporate Training Programs**

### **Purpose of Assessment**

Assessments of corporate training programs can be administered using formal or informal methods and can be administered before, during, and after the implementation of the training (Caffarella, 2002). Assessments administered in each individual phase serve different purposes in the design of the program. The assessment of training programs is an essential step in designing corporate training.

Assessments administered during the planning phase of developing a corporate training program can influence the content and activities that are integrated into the actual training program. Such assessments may be necessary to help the trainer determine the potential goals of the corporation, managers, and trainees participating in the program. Assessments administered in the planning phase can also evaluate how the context of the program will impact the implementation and outcome of the training (Caffarella, 2002). Assessments soliciting the opinions of trainees can help educators to incorporate personally, professionally, and culturally relevant information into the content of the training. Finally, educators could include an assessment in the planning phase that seeks to identify the learning styles of the employees who will participate in the training. Assessments administered during the planning phase can affect the design, implementation, and ideas incorporated into a training program.

Assessment that is administered during the implementation phase of program design can help the educator to determine whether their set goals are being met. By administering assessments in the middle of a training program, corporate educators can make adjustments to their training strategy if they do not feel that their existing training

practices are effective (Caffarella, 2002). Assessing mentoring relationships is especially important so the corporate trainer can determine whether the mentor and protégé are working well together and staying on track to achieve the training goals (Hansman, as cited in Wilson & Hayes, 2000). Assessments completed during the implementation phase can also help trainers to determine whether the goals established in the planning phase are actually what the employees need to learn.

Assessments administered after the completion of a training program are most common and are used to help educators to determine whether or not a training program was successful (Caffarella, 2002). Assessments that are administered after the implementation of a training program will tell educators whether the desired goals had been achieved based on employee transfer of knowledge and feedback provided from supervisors. Assessments administered at the end of a training program can give trainers an idea of what changes need to be made to future training efforts but also help trainers determine whether additional training is needed for employees who just finished the training program (Caffarella, 2002).

Assessments serve various purposes for corporate trainers depending on when they are administered. Assessments provide feedback about the effectiveness of training programs and can help educators improve future training efforts. Through assessments, trainers are able to determine whether the training program was successful in achieving the corporation's goals and can help trainers decide whether employees might require additional training activities (Caffarella, 2002). The following section will discuss the tools trainers can use to assess their training programs.

## **Assessment Tools**

As discussed in the section above, assessment tools can be formal or informal depending on the purpose of the assessment and the desired input obtained from the assessment. Using a combination of formal and informal assessment would give corporate trainers a more complete picture of the effectiveness of a training program. The formal and informal methods for administering assessments of training programs will be discussed in this section.

Formal assessment tools are usually more structured and are designed by the trainer to include specific periods of time for the assessment to be completed, specific questions that should be answered, and should clearly define the purpose of the assessment. Formal assessment tools for corporate training programs might include: interviews, questionnaires, tests, and focus groups (Caffarella, 2002). Trainers planning a training program for culturally diverse learners might include formal assessments such as interviews with trainees, learning assessment questionnaires, and tests to determine the knowledge and skills employees are bringing to the training. Interviews with trainees would help the corporate trainers to understand what the employees expect to learn from the training program and would help trainers to include culturally, personally, and professionally relevant content into the training program (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Learning assessment questionnaires would help educators to identify the various learning preferences of the employees who will be participating in the training, giving them the opportunity to consider appropriate learning activities in their planning of the training program. Tests that determine the learners' present knowledge and skills would give the trainer an idea of what information the trainees



already know and providing ideas of what information must be included into the content of the training. Formal assessments administered to corporate management would also help trainers to identify program goals and will help educators determine what context might be appropriate for the training program (Caffarella, 2002). Formal assessment tools can be used during the implementation phase of the training program in order to provide a basis for comparing what has been learned versus what was already known.

Questionnaires administered to both management and trainees would help to determine whether the participants believe the training is effective and useful (Caffarella, 2002).

Finally, formal assessments administered after the training has occurred can help trainers to determine what knowledge and skills were obtained through training and whether the trainees are able to apply what they learned to the workplace. Formal questionnaires administered to management after the training program has been completed can help the corporation to determine whether the training program was successful and can give recommendations for changes that might improve future training efforts. Formal assessment tools give corporate educators structured information that can be compared throughout the training program to determine the progress of the employees' training (Caffarella, 2002). Informal assessment tools provide more in-depth, personal input and will be discussed in the next section.

Informal training assessments are similar to formal assessments in that they can be administered during the planning and implementation phases of the training, and can provide additional insight into the effectiveness of the program when administered at the end of the training program. Informal assessments are typically open-ended activities that have less structure than formal assessment tools. Informal assessment tools might

include: self-assessments, diaries, reviews, and written observations (Caffarella, 2002).

Informal assessment tools usually require more time to execute and can take longer to process the data retrieved from such tools. Informal assessments provide input that differs from the input received from formal assessment tools. Informal assessment tools administered prior to the implementation of a training program might elicit trainees' potential anxieties related to the training program. Data received from participants during the implementation of the training program can reflect the employees' attitudes regarding the training while it is in progress (Caffarella, 2002). Finally, assessments received after the training has been completed can give trainers an in-depth view about whether employees feel the training was useful and whether they are able to apply their new knowledge to their jobs. Supervisors can also provide insight as to the effectiveness of the training program and can provide frank feedback that could be used in planning future training programs.

Assessment tools should be incorporated into every phase of a corporate training program to ensure the training is effective in reaching the training goals. Formal and informal assessments can provide two dimensional feedback and gives trainers the opportunity to improve training programs while they are being planned and implemented. The goal of assessment tools is to provide insight into the effectiveness of the training from the point of view of both the participants in training as well as the corporate managers who expressed the need for the training. Assessment tools give adult educators the ability to determine the employees' learning preferences, cultural backgrounds, present knowledge, and attitudes regarding the training program. Assessment tools help corporate trainers plan and implement culturally relevant and effective training programs.

## IMPLICATIONS OF TRAINING GUIDE FOR CORPORATE EDUCATORS

Diversity, when embraced in a corporation's framework, can enhance the corporate culture and can contribute to more effective and diverse corporate responses to an increasingly global market. Educators can incorporate culture into corporate training programs through assessments directed at eliciting the expectations, goals, and interests of employees and management. Assessments can also provide educators with feedback that can improve the training program while it is being implemented and can impact the effectiveness of future training efforts. The goal of this project is to provide corporate educators with the framework, research, and information necessary for creating a training program that would be effective for learners from various cultural backgrounds.

## APPENDIX

### VARK Learning Assessment Questionnaire

## The VARK Questionnaire (Version 7.0)

### How Do I Learn Best?

Choose the answer which best explains your preference and circle the letter(s) next to it.

**Please circle more than one** if a single answer does not match your perception.

Leave blank any question that does not apply.

1. You are helping someone who wants to go to your airport, town centre or railway station. You would:

- a. go with her.
- b. tell her the directions.
- c. write down the directions.
- d. draw, or give her a map.

2. You are not sure whether a word should be spelled 'dependent' or 'dependant'. You would:

- a. see the words in your mind and choose by the way they look.
- b. think about how each word sounds and choose one.
- c. find it in a dictionary.
- d. write both words on paper and choose one.

3. You are planning a holiday for a group. You want some feedback from them about the plan. You would:

- a. describe some of the highlights.
- b. use a map or website to show them the places.
- c. give them a copy of the printed itinerary.
- d. phone, text or email them.

4. You are going to cook something as a special treat for your family. You would:

- a. cook something you know without the need for instructions.
- b. ask friends for suggestions.
- c. look through the cookbook for ideas from the pictures.
- d. use a cookbook where you know there is a good recipe.

5. A group of tourists want to learn about the parks or wildlife reserves in your area. You would:

- a. talk about, or arrange a talk for them about parks or wildlife reserves.
- b. show them internet pictures, photographs or picture books.
- c. take them to a park or wildlife reserve and walk with them.
- d. give them a book or pamphlets about the parks or wildlife reserves.

6. You are about to purchase a digital camera or mobile phone. Other than price, what would most

influence your decision?

- a. Trying or testing it.
- b. Reading the details about its features.
- c. It is a modern design and looks good.
- d. The salesperson telling me about its features.

7. Remember a time when you learned how to do something new. Try to avoid choosing a physical

skill, eg. riding a bike. You learned best by:

- a. watching a demonstration.
- b. listening to somebody explaining it and asking questions.
- c. diagrams and charts - visual clues.
- d. written instructions – e.g. a manual or textbook.

8. You have a problem with your knee. You would prefer that the doctor:

- a. gave you a web address or something to read about it.
- b. used a plastic model of a knee to show what was wrong.
- c. described what was wrong.
- d. showed you a diagram of what was wrong.

9. You want to learn a new program, skill or game on a computer. You would:

- a. read the written instructions that came with the program.

- b. talk with people who know about the program.
- c. use the controls or keyboard.
- d. follow the diagrams in the book that came with it.
- 10. I like websites that have:
  - a. things I can click on, shift or try.
  - b. interesting design and visual features.
  - c. interesting written descriptions, lists and explanations.
  - d. audio channels where I can hear music, radio programs or interviews.
- 11. Other than price, what would most influence your decision to buy a new non-fiction book?
  - a. The way it looks is appealing.
  - b. Quickly reading parts of it.
  - c. A friend talks about it and recommends it.
  - d. It has real-life stories, experiences and examples.
- 12. You are using a book, CD or website to learn how to take photos with your new digital camera. You would like to have:
  - a. a chance to ask questions and talk about the camera and its features.
  - b. clear written instructions with lists and bullet points about what to do.
  - c. diagrams showing the camera and what each part does.
  - d. many examples of good and poor photos and how to improve them.
- 13. Do you prefer a teacher or a presenter who uses:
  - a. demonstrations, models or practical sessions.
  - b. question and answer, talk, group discussion, or guest speakers.
  - c. handouts, books, or readings.
  - d. diagrams, charts or graphs.
- 14. You have finished a competition or test and would like some feedback. You would like to have feedback:
  - a. using examples from what you have done.
  - b. using a written description of your results.
  - c. from somebody who talks it through with you.
  - d. using graphs showing what you had achieved.
- 15. You are going to choose food at a restaurant or cafe. You would:
  - a. choose something that you have had there before.
  - b. listen to the waiter or ask friends to recommend choices.
  - c. choose from the descriptions in the menu.
  - d. look at what others are eating or look at pictures of each dish.
- 16. You have to make an important speech at a conference or special occasion. You would:
  - a. make diagrams or get graphs to help explain things.
  - b. write a few key words and practice saying your speech over and over.
  - c. write out your speech and learn from reading it over several times.
  - d. gather many examples and stories to make the talk real and practical.

## The VARK Questionnaire Scoring Chart

Use the following scoring chart to find the VARK category that each of your answers corresponds to. Circle

the letters that correspond to your answers

e.g. If you answered b and c for question 3, circle V and R in the question 3 row.

Question a category b category c category d category

3 K V R A

### Scoring Chart

Question a category b category c category d category

1 K A R V

2 V A R K

3 K V R A

4 K A V R

5 A V K R

6 K R V A

7 K A V R

8 R K A V

9 R A K V

10 K V R A

11 V R A K  
12 A R V K  
13 K A R V  
14 K R A V  
15 K A R V  
16 V A R K

### Calculating your scores

Count the number of each of the VARK letters you have circled to get your score for each VARK category.

Total number of **V**s circled =

Total number of **A**s circled =

Total number of **R**s circled =

Total number of **K**s circled =

### Calculating your preferences

Use the VARK spreadsheet (which can be purchased from the [www.vark-learn.com](http://www.vark-learn.com) web site) to work out your VARK learning preferences.

(Fleming, 2009)

## Chapter Summary

This chapter presented a guide designed to help corporate educators create effective and relevant corporate training programs for learners from culturally diverse backgrounds. The guide provided insight into educational research and theory about adult learning styles and the influence culture has on learning preferences. The guide discovered learning styles that correspond to specific cultures and identified training activities that appeal to learners with specific learning preferences. Finally, the guide provided a framework for planning, implementing, and assessing effective corporate training programs. Chapter 5 presents the peer assessments of this project and identifies the strengths and limitations of the project. Chapter 5 also identifies opportunities for further research and development for this project.



## Chapter 5

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this project was to provide corporate educators with a guide for developing corporate training programs which are relevant and effective for training employees from diverse cultural backgrounds. The project calls attention to the influence culture has on the way individuals learn and seeks to create training activities that appeal to all learning styles. The research identifies learning preferences that are specific to various cultural groups in order to help educators recognize the affect of cultural diversity on corporate training. The project gives educators a framework and foundation upon which a comprehensive training program can be designed. The planning step calls attention to the need to carefully consider the context of the training and to consider including culturally relevant information in the training materials. The goal of the implementation section was to give educators a variety of effective training techniques that would appeal to every learning style. The final section focuses on assessing the training program in three phases to make sure the program is achieving its goals and to make sure it is effective, relevant, and appealing to all learners. The goal of this project is to help corporate educators to create training programs which are effective for culturally diverse learners and which can effectively appeal to all learners and learning styles. This project was developed in hopes that corporate educators would design corporate training programs that are well designed, culturally relevant, and that contain diverse learning activities designed to appeal to all learners.

### Peer Assessment Results

This project was reviewed by five peers to help determine whether it would be an effective guide for use by corporate trainers in American companies. Two of the peers who reviewed the project are educators who specialize in adult education. The remaining three peers are adult educators working in corporate settings. Peers were asked to evaluate the project and provide feedback on the following subjects: (a) the organization and research of the project, (b) the educational foundation of the project, (c) the practicality and usefulness of this project in a corporate setting, and (d) the inclusion or omission of teaching strategies in the project. The peers were given an electronic copy of the project including the Appendix materials that would be included for use with the guide. Peers were given the opportunity to return the assessments anonymously.

The evaluators believed the project was well organized but believed that the guide could have included a table of contents that would make the guide easier to use. The evaluators believed that the project was thorough and well researched but also thought the abundance of information included in the guide might be too much for use in corporate training settings. One of the evaluators wished that the project would have offered templates for actual learning activities and assessments. Two evaluators believed that a needs analysis for potential trainees would be an important element to include. Most of the evaluators agreed that the guide would be useful for diversity training in corporations. The evaluators also liked that the guide offered ways to increase the appeal of learning activities for all learning styles.

### Limitations of the Project

A few limitations were identified in regard to this project. They were:

1. The guide offers an abundance of information that may be difficult for trainers to absorb and put to use in corporate training settings. The information could have been organized better where a table of contents would help trainers refer back to sections of the manual when they needed to access specific information.

Narrowing the focus of the project would help.

2. The project could have provided actual templates for learning activities. Providing learners with handouts that they could take with them to their jobs might improve transfer of learning and retention of knowledge they obtained in training.

Providing templates of learning activities would further assist corporate trainers in creating effective training programs and would help them to save time.

3. The project could also have included specific assessment tools and templates. A needs analysis relating to what trainees want to learn through training would be useful to trainers.

4. The project might require too much time to execute in many corporate environments.

The limitations of this project involve the amount of research presented regarding assessing the learning styles of culturally diverse employees and effective training techniques to use in corporate settings. The project could also have provided more concrete examples and useful templates to be used by adult educators and corporate

trainers. Assessment templates focusing on a needs analysis of potential trainees would also improve the purpose of the project

#### Recommendations for Future Development

Further research in the following areas would support the purpose of this project:

1. Documentation of training techniques implemented in culturally diverse training programs to determine the effectiveness of the suggested learning strategy.
2. Documentation from culturally diverse managers and employees expressing their opinions of the effectiveness of such training programs.
3. Documentation from culturally diverse managers and employees reflecting a change in values, attitudes, and corporate cultures related to culturally relevant and inclusive training.
4. Identifying strategies directed at global training techniques.

Future research could help to determine whether such corporate training strategies are effective and whether such strategies contribute to the effectiveness of training programs and foster inclusive corporate cultures. Documentation from the actual implementation of such training strategies would provide insight into the effectiveness of the manual. Possible strategies for global training techniques could also be identified.

## Project Summary

The American workforce is increasingly culturally diverse. As baby boomers retire, they are replaced by a more diverse workforce that includes more immigrant workers than ever before in the United States. The cultural diversity found in American corporations has created the need for unique approaches to employee training and development in the workplace. The goal of this project was to provide corporate educators with the knowledge, structure, and strategies necessary for designing training programs that are relevant and effective for culturally diverse employee populations.

This project identified the diversity of learning style preferences of adults. Learning styles are culturally influenced and therefore impact the way culturally diverse employees learn during training activities. This project successfully identified and described various training activities and strategies that, when implemented together, would effectively train employees with diverse learning style preferences. The project also provided effective steps for planning, implementing, and assessing corporate training programs.

The strengths of this project are reflected in the well researched methods for training provided in the guide for corporate educators. The project provides extensive insight into the effects of cultural diversity on workplace training and provides educators with strategies for creating culturally relevant and effective training for all adult learners. The suggestion of implementing a variety of training methods in corporate training programs would be effective in achieving various corporate goals. The project also

provides educators with the tools necessary for designing effective training programs and for improving future training efforts through extensive assessment tools.

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## APPENDIX

Peer Evaluation Questionnaire

And Peer Evaluation Results

**Peer Assessment Survey:**  
Cultural Diversity in the Workplace:  
A Guide for Effective Instruction  
For All Adult Learning Styles  
By. Lauren M. Barela

1. Was the guide well organized and easy to follow?
2. Was the project well researched and relevant to Adult Learning, Training, & Development?
3. Does this guide provide a sound educational foundation for designing corporate training programs?
4. Would this guide be useful to corporate trainers?
5. Would the learning activities be practical in a corporate training setting?
6. What educational strategies would you have included in the project?
7. What strategies did you think would be effective in corporate training?
8. Additional feedback/comments?