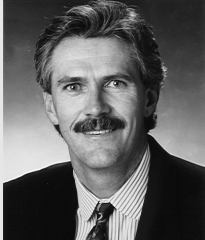


"Nothing is so well learned as that which is discovered." - Socrates

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Article by Quinn Dalton



The allure of computer-based training programs, whether CD-based or online, is significant. There is an expectation of less travel cost,

lower trainer cost, less time away from work, time flexibility, and customization for skill level. Weighing perceived benefits against those of face-to-face interactive training can present a confusing dilemma for training departments as they decide how to utilize limited developmental dollars most effectively and efficiently.

Making the case for face-to-face training to budget-minded executives who lack developmental expertise and are charged with ensuring the most efficient return on developmental dollars can be frustrating. This can bring two very different, although valid, mindsets into direct conflict.

For this issue of *Excursions* we hope to bring some clarity to this dilemma. We have talked with two highly experienced organizational development experts who have faced this very challenge. I hope this information not only provides you some clarity on the issue of face-to-face versus computer-based training, but also helps you with the education of colleagues who need to approve your approach as well as your budget.

Chris Musselwhite, President

Making the Case for Face-to-Face

Increasing security concerns and decreasing HR budgets mean more companies are turning to online training to address development needs. But when it comes to individual leadership and organizational development, in-person experiential learning is often the best option. Two experts weigh in on how to make the call—and then make your case.

In early 2001, Laurie Schamber, a manager of organizational learning at BorgWarner's Chicago, Illinois, headquarters, began looking for a partner to help revamp the company's high-potential leadership development program. BorgWarner is a maker of components and systems for automatic transmissions and engines, and four-wheel drive vehicles and employs nearly 14,000 people worldwide. "We knew we wanted a simulation and 360-degree feedback," says Schamber.

Why?

"We have to assess our high-potential managers on their ability to move into an executive rank—the experiential learning is a springboard to learn about their strengths and weaknesses as leaders," Schamber explains. "We can't assess, and they can't learn as much, without seeing themselves in action."

Experiential learning creates a safer environment for testing new behaviors and techniques, with the added benefit of on-the-spot feedback.

- Dr. Chris Musselwhite

The research bears out Schamber's perspective. A Center for Creative Leadership project that compared high-potential managers who reach their potential to those who do not suggests there are many similarities between "derailers" and "arrivers." They are both smart and ambitious. A key difference is that although the arrivers seem to make mistakes early in their

(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

careers, they showed a greater capacity to learn from these early experiences. BorgWarner’s new program incorporates Discovery Learning’s PressTime® simulation, Decision Style Profile™, and 360-degree Leadership Development Survey. Discovery Learning certified BorgWarner’s nine in-house trainers to deliver the simulation and assessment components of the two-day program, and the pilot ran in August 2001 with Discovery Learning assistance.

“There were rave reviews on the simulation,” Schamber says. “Even though it’s publishing-focused and therefore outside our industry, engineers responded to the roles and found them relevant because it’s about bringing a new product to market. The debrief has been very rich. Participants have gotten fresh insights about who they are and how they’re perceived.” The simulation was also intensely facilitated (one facilitator for every three participants), with voluminous notes taken on the individual and group dynamic.

Follow-up is key to the process. “We follow up within 30 days on each individual’s development plan, and discuss key things to work on, key

Learning is facilitated when the learner participates responsibly in the learning process. . . Significant learning is acquired by doing.

Carl Rogers

challenges,” says Schamber. “We may also give specific assignments to help them achieve their goals.”

To insure the success of face-to-face learning consider this:

Adults need to know why they are being asked to learn something.	Make sure the objectives are practical and clear and that the learning experience ties directly to the objectives.
Adults need to learn experientially.	For adults, experience (including mistakes) provides the basis for learning. It is critical to create a safe, non-threatening learning environment in which mistakes can be analyzed rather than hidden.
Adults approach learning as problem solving.	For adults, learning is process centered rather than content centered. This is especially true for complex subjects such as interpersonal skills.
Adults learn best when the topic is of immediate value.	The learning experience should have immediate applications to real problems.

Table 1. *Adult learning principals from Malcolm S. Knowles*

Without that ongoing, in-person commitment, she explains, BorgWarner can’t expect to reap much benefit from the investment.

This isn’t to say there is no place for online learning. “I see the value in both,” says Tammie Plouffe, who has been both consultant and employee with several of the world’s largest information technology companies like Dell Computer Corporation and Microsoft and is now president of Toronto based management consulting firm Innovative Pathways. In past organizational development roles, she had to assess when to use online learning and when to opt for in-person, experiential learning. “The business teams I partnered with asked, ‘When do we leverage technology for learning, and when is it best for

people to gather to learn?’ My perspective comes from the insights of addressing those questions in order to create the optimal learning

impact for achieving business goals.”

Plouffe likely shares the opinion of many HR professionals and consultants in offering the following set of circumstances for when online learning seems to be most appropriate.

- Policy, guidelines procedure, concrete information that requires understanding to act versus skill. For example, performance management.
- Technical questions such as hardware support.
- General reference.
- Online administration of assessments.
- Some soft skills, as in how to give feedback—but for understanding rather than skill.
- Demonstrations.
- Limited situational training, and only if there are few variables.

Adults value their experience so much that they want to invest it in the learning experience...they want to test new concepts and behavior against what they have previously learned.

- Dugan Laird

Plouffe actually developed a tool for evaluating when to use online versus experiential learning. “The higher the complexity of what is being learned—when there’s no set of easy answers, no black and white conclusions—the greater the need for experiential learning.”

It isn’t just the difficulty of the material being learned; it’s what must be done with it. “The more you need to engage in complex learning in order to act on it, the greater the need for experiential learning,” Plouffe explains. Only experiential learning allows for the full scale review and debate of all the different

possible permutations of a complex situation. And only experiential learning allows for exploration of the effect of human emotion on leadership.

Plouffe has successfully used her model (see Figure 1) to rationalize a greater budget because she was able to

clearly show when a client’s goals demanded experiential learning. And often, she says, the lower budget expectations companies have for online learning solutions are not realistic.

“Online learning is expensive to put together and to maintain,” she explains. “You have to keep up the knowledge management, and it’s harder when it’s complex content and therefore more dynamic. E-learning technology is evolving at an

increasing rate, however, most solutions today still assume the client has ample resources and intent to maintain it.”

So when is it best to use experiential learning?

When desiring long term, measurable results. The CCL research on “arrivers” versus “derailers” points out the long term impact of learning from one’s mistakes. Experiential learning creates a safer environment for testing new behaviors and techniques, with the added benefit of on-the-spot feedback.

To acquire behavior, the student must engage in behavior.

- B. F. Skinner

When addressing meaningful development issues. Put simply, one

can’t expect anyone another to become a great leader in front of a computer. Technology can provide assessment, information, and even some strategies to assist in developing skills such as teambuilding and emotional intelligence, but few people can translate static information into confident ability.

When nothing else will work. People learn the deepest lessons of leadership when they’re having fun—or at least experiencing some kind of emotion, even if it’s frustration. Adults, as Malcolm Knowles has written (see Table 1), want to apply their past skill and experience in acquiring new learnings. Adult learners want to be problem solvers. To really feed that desire, one has to provide a

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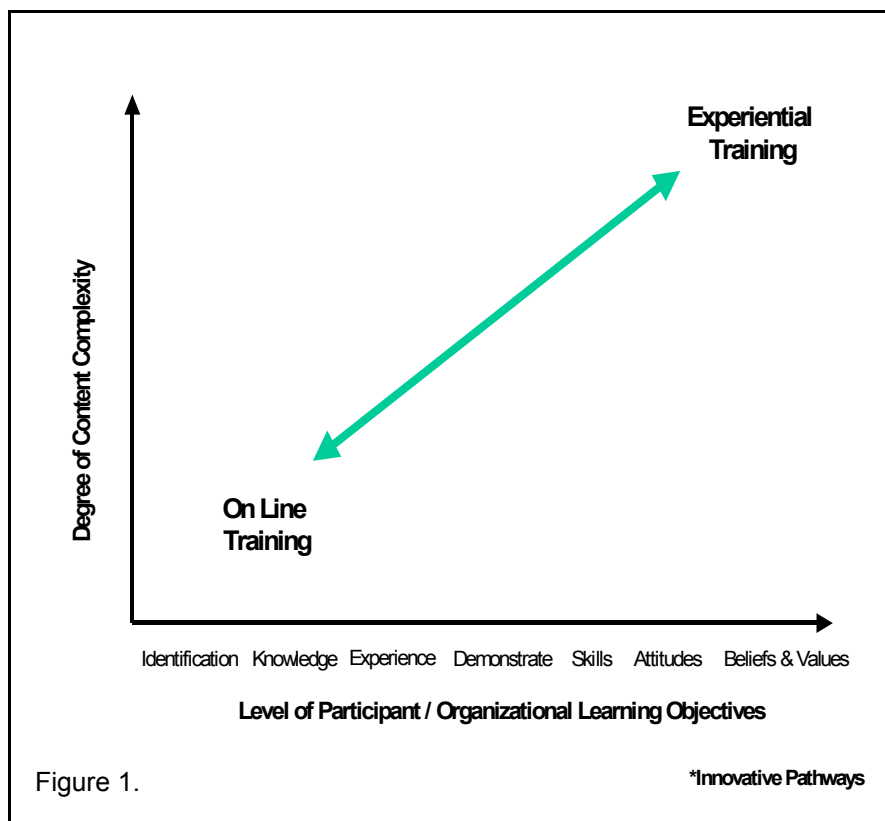


Figure 1.

*Innovative Pathways

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structured forum for developing the most important foundation of leadership—experience.

Conclusion

Even with all the advantages of online learning, perceived or real, experiential learning is still the gold standard for developing complex leadership skills. One way to leverage the advantages of both is to use technology to support experiential learning. For example, offer assessments administered online so that people can take them on their own time, but provide the in-person feedback and follow-up to ensure a lasting benefit. This blended approach could very likely help organizations control costs while still being true to the needs of developing leaders and the business goals of the organization.

What's happening at DLI?

A new face, a new voice

Discovery Learning is pleased to welcome Nash Musselwhite to our staff. As our Shipping Manager, Nash will be responsible for seeing that your packages reach you on time and in good condition. In addition, Nash will interact with clients on a regular basis, taking orders and answering questions. Look to receive a follow-up e-mail from Nash each time you order.—Welcome Nash!

A new way to keep track of your package from Discovery Learning

As a part of our continuing efforts to better serve our customers, we have implemented a system to inform our customers by e-mail when their packages are shipped. The e-mail notice contains information about the package including the shipper, a tracking number and a web link to the shipper's tracking service. By using this information, our customers can track their packages anytime—24/7.

Our Holiday schedule

Discovery Learning will be closed from December 23 through January 1 for the Holidays so that we may reconnect with old friends and spend time with family. We will be checking voice mail regularly but will only fill orders in emergency situations.

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