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Intensively Extensive Training

This time I wanted to share with you my ideas about structuring adult learning programs so that they have more impact. The information in this article is based largely on my own experiences and opinions after spending 8 of the last 10 years designing and delivering staff performance programs in China.

First of all, I should make a clear distinction about the nature of this article. I will focus most of my comments on soft skills rather than technical skills. For those of you not familiar with the difference between soft skills and technical skills, allow me to use this example to help illustrate my meaning:

If you receive training on how to operate an instrument for testing the hardness of the steel used in a ball bearing – this is technical skills training. It is very operational, hands on, measurable and usually easier to find 'in-company' expertise for on-the-job training. Companies tend to have less problem managing technical skills



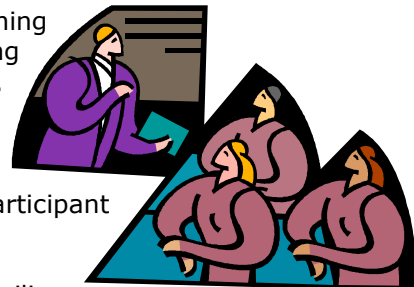
On the other hand, if you received the training for how to communicate more effectively and lead a team of quality testers – this is soft skills training. Soft skills are 'people focused'. Issues like communication and interpersonal skills, time management, leadership, team building etc. are soft skills programs. It is often much more difficult to find 'in-company' soft skills trainers. Also it is much more difficult for most training managers to measure the return on investment from investing in soft skills training.

Sales is an interesting training area. Is it technical? (Perhaps – certainly if you are selling a highly technical product, such as computer operated laser cutting devices); or is it soft? (For example – a lawyer, investment counselor, or business consultant that sell their expertise in units of time).

I often take the view that sales belongs to soft skills because of the communication and interpersonal skills required to be good at selling – but you can decide for yourselves.

What is Intensive or Extensive Training?

Next I want to introduce two more definitions: Intensive training and Extensive training. Most of us can picture intensive training and most corporate training tends to follow this model. Intensive training includes short courses, often from half a day to three days in length (possibly as long as five days). Often intensive training is delivered to groups of participants over a weekend (to minimize the disruption at work and reduce participant travel). The weekend workshops are often all-day affairs.



Extensive training is something that you might not be as familiar with in corporate training. All of us experienced extensive learning when we were in school – courses that lasted for a semester, a year, or even several years. Another good example of extensive training might be taking piano lessons. Extensive courses are delivered over a much longer period of time. The lessons are much shorter in duration each time and require the learners to practice the new skills on their own time in between the lessons.

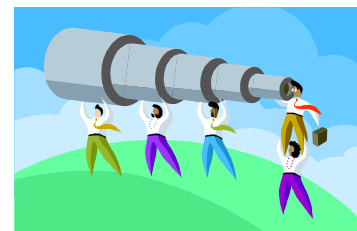


Ok, now you may be wondering **WHY** I am even bringing this up. I guess it is because I often see companies choosing the right (or wrong) training and then spending large sums of money in hopes of staff acquiring new learning – but often being let down. Many times their expectations are not met and their learning goals not achieved simply because they chose an intensive delivery model when an extensive model would have been more suitable.

So what I would like to do now is to make some comparisons to outline factors that I think are important when deciding on the best training program delivery format.

Intensive Training	Extensive Training
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short duration (i.e. 2 days) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Longer duration (i.e. 3 months)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Condensed, heavy course content in few lessons – often difficult for adult learners to absorb all the new information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course content spread out over several lessons - easier for adult learners to absorb the new information (digestible).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often need lecture style to deliver course content volume in shorter period of time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less lecture style and more facilitation possible – more exercises and practice.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trainer spends less time with individual learners and not usually able to get to know participants very well. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trainer gets to know participants over longer period of time and can help with specific problems they have.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not as much time for learners to ask the trainer questions due to tight time frame. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More time for discussion and asking questions during and between workshops.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less travel – the participants may spend less of their time traveling to and from the training if it is not in-company. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possibly more travel to and from training – unless programs delivered in-company where workers are already assembled.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less opportunity to practice the new skills during learning – less time for practice and no time for coaching. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More opportunity to practice the new skills during and between lessons – more time for coaching.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less opportunity to prove acquisition of new skills during the learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More opportunity to prove acquisition of new skills during and between lessons.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows less opportunity for supervisor’s involvement and monitoring the learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows more opportunity for supervisor’s involvement and monitoring the learning.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less chance to modify the course content during the program – the content is pre-set and will be delivered as is. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As necessary, course content can be modified and customized during the program to better suit their needs.

I think that intensive training is good for teambuilding and advanced level learning programs. It works well for refining existing techniques to improve on current skills. However, for most types of basic training where learners need time to practice and demonstrate their individual skills in the workplace, often extensive training with coaching between lessons is far more effective.



Prices for intensive versus extensive training are similar – the difficult thing can be finding training providers that can structure and commit to extensive programs.

Lastly I want to leave you with this thought. What you really want to buy is learning – not training. Training is a process. Learning is a result. It is the learning outcome we hope to buy when we purchase training. So be sure to buy the right training AND the right delivery format.



I wish to remind my readers that there may be others in the training industry that would disagree with some of my comments. In my research for this article, I could find very little information available that discusses this topic in detail. So this piece is based on my opinions developed over 18 years of corporate training experience. I remain convinced that in a cost - benefit analysis, often extensive learning delivers better results than intensive programs.

After all, who ever learned to play the piano after a weekend long workshop with 20 other learners and one piano teacher?

I hope that you have found some of this information to be useful and look forward to seeing you next time. Good business to you.



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