

## **On-the-Job Training: What Works**

*On-the-job training involves engaging your workforce in training their peers in a structured way. Listen in as Fara Allen (Program Coordinator) and Alicia Willis (Instructional Development Specialist) discuss essential components, key roles, and the benefits of incorporating on-the-job training into your program.*

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Fara Allen: Welcome to CETE Works, a podcast produced by the Curriculum and Training Team at the Center on Education and Training for Employment—a translational research center on Ohio State's campus. We work where research meets reality. I'm your host, Fara Allen, a Program Coordinator at the Center. Our first series of podcasts focuses on workforce development and will feature discussions about preparing an organization for implementation or modification of a training program. To learn more about our work, you can visit our website [CETE.osu.edu](http://CETE.osu.edu), that's C-E-T-E dot O-S-U dot E-D-U

Fara Allen: Today we're going to talk about OJT, on the job training, with our guest Alicia Willis, a curriculum specialist and OJT expert at the center. A little background for our listeners about this model of learning and development... one of the most accepted models is known as the 70, 20, 10 model, developed by Morgan McCall and the Center for Creative leadership in the 1980s. In a nutshell, the model describes how people learn - 10% for formal training, 20% from developmental relationships, and a whopping 70% in on-the-job experiences. That being the case, it's extremely important that thought and effort go into the development of an OJT experience for both new and current employees. OJT can certainly be approached in a non-structured way, but at CETE, we advise approaching it with a bit more planning. This helps ensure consistency and teaching and allows the organization to select the best mentors that represent the positive culture they have or strive to have. The mentors will teach the trainees not only job related or technical skills, they will also portray cultural norms, organizational expectations, and so forth. So, imagine what happens if an organization selects a mentor who is excellent at their job, but it was also disgruntled, may not show up consistently, or speaks poorly about their leadership or coworkers. That could be detrimental to an organization. Now I'm going to turn it over to Alicia. Alicia, welcome. Can you outline the central components in forming a structured OJT program?

Alicia Willis: Yeah, Hi Fara. Thanks for having me. Yeah, OJT is often a component of a larger professional development program to transfer learning that took place either in a classroom, lab, or online into the day to day on the job work. So, the five main components that an OJT should have are learning organizational culture, structure, resources, evaluation, and supports.

Alicia Willis: A learning organizational culture is essential to the success of any training program, whether OJT is only one component or is the only component. Employees must be willing and able to train and learn from their peers. That is why learning organization is essential.

Alicia Willis: Structure is also very important to be successful and OJT program must be well structured. This provides a strong foundation and ensures that everyone is aware of all aspects of the program.

Alicia Willis: Resources are also necessary to ensure everyone involved in OJT is well prepared, every training program should have training materials that explain exactly what is involved in the OJT process and how a mentor is supposed to train the employee to go with that an orientation is always recommended to make sure that every trainer or mentor has the opportunity to learn about those training materials and also have any questions answered.

Alicia Willis: Something else that really needs to be put in place as a resource is a guideline that explains the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved. The supervisors, the mentors, and the employees being trained so that everyone knows what their responsibilities and roles are.

Alicia Willis: Another thing that is very essential. The most important resources are OJT manuals. The OJT manuals list the task steps tools, equipment, the gradual release instructions for the mentor a rubric that explains exactly how to evaluate an employee's progress on steps of a task. Other things that could be part of the OJT is a manual, or videos, and other resources that provide instruction. Evaluation is also essential. You need to evaluate an employee's skills on a task. You also have to evaluate trainers to ensure that they are properly training on tasks and also you need to evaluate the entire OJT program.

Alicia Willis: Another thing that every OJT program should have is supports. Supports need to be in place for supervisors, trainees, mentors. Supports can include reference materials accessibility supports and policies and procedures. Another resource could be a community of practice. A community of practice can be put together for trainers, supervisors, and employees. Each would have their own community of practice since they have different roles and responsibilities.

Fara Allen: Okay, so, Alicia, it sounds like everyone has a role to play in developing a quality OJT program as part of professional development for employees. So, we just heard about the five essential components. What are the steps an organization would take to establish a program once those components are in place?

Alicia Willis: For any training program, a logic module should be created to help an organization determine what their organization wants to focus the training on, how they want to focus training. Dave Julian explains that a little bit in a different episode. However, when it comes to the actual tasks that need to be trained, every training program should start with a job analysis and John discusses job analysis in another episode. The job analysis kind of explains all the tasks for one position. And then after you have all of the tasks identified for a particular position, then you need to create task analyses to dig into all the steps of a task, as well as tools and equipment needed to do the job. And so, task analysis is what really is used to form the team manuals, because it lists all the tasks exactly how each task needs to be done with each step. And what equipment and tools needs to be used in order to do that.

Fara Allen: So, Alicia you explained how to use an OJT manual. How does an organization, select their peer trainers?

Alicia Willis: That's great question. Selecting peer trainers, mentors, or coaches - different organizations call them different things - but essentially, anyone who is going to train an employee on a task needs to be selected carefully. Selecting the peer trainer mentor or coach, whatever your organization is going to call whoever is training employees on OJT, you need to really be careful who you select first they need to be highly skilled and the tasks that they're

going to train other employees to do. If they don't know how to do the task properly or the way that your organization wants them done, then they're going to pass on their improper way of doing it to your employees. So, you have to make sure that they are highly skilled and they're doing it the way that it should be done. Also, employees who are going to train their peers need to demonstrate the organizational culture. They need to have the core values that your organization holds dear in mind, and they have to follow those because whatever that employee does is what they were going to transfer to those their training. So, if they have a bad attitude, they're going to pass that on to someone else. You want someone who is going to help build the culture and sustain the culture that your organization wants.

Fara Allen: It makes a lot of sense. Um, there's been a lot of value in providing mentors or peer trainers as you described them Alicia with a place to come together to learn from one another, to discover how one another's meeting challenges or providing encouragement from success stories. I know that can be a huge benefit. This component is often referred to as a community of practice. After all, mentors are skilled employees first; they don't always necessarily know how to teach. Providing them with the support can greatly enhance their chances of success and keep them motivated in their role. Can you explain this in a little bit more detail for us, Alicia?

Alicia Willis: Yeah, sure. Communities of practice are groups of people who work together to learn how to do something that they do better. And with OJT, especially for the trainers, they know how to do the work of their job, but they may not know how to necessarily train other people. So, in a community of practice, they can all come together and learn how to do this better for a community of practice, it allows the participants to share tips and best practices, ask and answer questions and provide support for one another. In a community of practice, if someone has a question or someone is facing a challenge with one of their trainees, someone else may have already, you know, found a solution to that challenge, or if they haven't already found a solution to that challenge by working together and discussing it they can probably come up with a great way to solve that problem. Communities of practice are not just for the trainers or mentors; they can also be for the learners. So, if you group. Some learners together who are going to be trained on similar things they can work together so that they can help each other, improve their skills. And also, supervisors because supervisors are big supports in the OJT process for both trainers and learners. Having a community of practice for supervisors helps them support their employees better.

Fara Allen: At CETE, we typically recommend a gradual release model where the peer trainer will share their approach to a particular task with a trainee, then the trainee may observe one or multiple times before they work together on the same task. Then, eventually the trainee feels comfortable to perform that task on their own, as the peer trainer oversees the work and documents what they observe using a rubric from there and organization may wish to formalize the trainee's ability to now perform this task independently. Alicia, can you share some options for how an organization may wish to do this?

Alicia Willis: Yeah, so Fara you mentioned the rubrics and every trainer should use a rubric to evaluate learner progress. Rubrics help ensure that everyone is evaluated using the same criteria so that way it eliminates bias and it's not kind of random of like today, I want to, you know, evaluate the skill harder than this other one, right? So, rubrics help to make sure that there's consistency in the evaluation and OJT is competency-based training, meaning that employees must master competencies are in this case tasks, rather than getting a passing

grade, you know, like an 80% like to have someone really skilled in something, you know, you want them to be able to perform it perfectly, right? So, mastery ensures that employees can fulfill and successfully completed tasks before they are assigned to complete tasks on their own. Organizations with a high level of trust may allow the trainer and an employee supervisor to make the decision as to whether an employee has mastered a task again and using the rubric. Other organizations may want multiple trainers and or supervisors to evaluate and employee's mastery. Another option is to bring in an assessor from outside at an organization or from a different department to ensure that employees are evaluated without any bias. Regardless of who determines mastery. The skills from the OJT manual and the rubric should be used to determine that mastery is only achieved when the highest rating on the rubric is achieved for each step of a task.

Fara Allen: So where does it fit into a training program, is it something that needs to be implemented, from the very beginning? Can it be established in the middle of a program? What is the most ideal for implementation?

Alicia Willis: Really for a proper OJT program, it needs to be planned upfront. You need to know what is going to be included in your training program at the beginning to make sure that everything fits seamlessly together. OJT should be one part of a comprehensive training program. Typically, OJT follows classroom lab or online training to ensure that employees can apply what they learned in the training on the job within the organization, using the organization's equipment and procedures. This is why you need to plan up front so that way everything works lockstep together.

Fara Allen: What jobs are best suited for an on-the-job training program Alicia? Or I mean can any program implement this, or is it only suited for certain jobs where there is a team environment or there's multiple people needed for a job or a task?

Alicia Willis: Well, I would say that most people may think that only like on-the-job training should be done for jobs where the work is highly technical such as skilled trades jobs, like maintenance, carpentry, plumbing, electrical or HVAC. So, you work where everything is hands on and they might think that yes, you have to have like a whole bunch of people to be trained. But OJT, if you put it in place properly, could be used when one person needs to learn a skill or a whole team of people need to learn a skill. I think that OJT should be used for all jobs. For example, I have trained fellow employees on how to determine social media analytics, how to record and edit audio, and how to use image editing software. And I've done this by, you know, using video conferencing and sharing my screen while I walk somebody through it, or I've even created videos to remind myself of how to do it because I might do it only once a year or something. So, there are multiple ways...

Fara Allen: That's a great idea.

Alicia Willis: To do. Yeah.

Alicia Willis: I need to do that because, especially if I only do it once a year. It's like I have it to reflect back on it. I actually have a cousin who remodels houses and he said he does it, he knows how long it takes to do something so he can estimate a job properly.

Fara Allen: Very smart.

Alicia Willis: Yeah, and so, as I suggested, like, it doesn't even have to be just face-to-face. It can be done using video conferencing software and screen sharing and with technology now, realistic simulations can be created using augmented reality or virtual reality that can simulate much of the OJT experience. If simulations are used, I would suggest those still like making sure that you see someone doing the task when you're evaluating them. So, you're not, I wouldn't use the simulation as an evaluation tool I would use it as a training tool so they can practice. One of the skilled trades OJT trainers that we've worked with even used video conferencing to train a fellow employee on equipment in a different building. It was like an emergency job that like had to be done, and no one could get to him, and he had never done it before he had done similar work, but he hadn't done it before. So, he just had his tablet and had it so it was facing him working and another employee was able to walk him through the process to make sure that he was doing it properly. This isn't ideal, but it did work to make the emergency repair quicker.

Fara Allen: Right. They found a way to innovate and solve the problem at hand. That's great. So, Alicia, thank you for taking the time to explain to us how invaluable on-the-job training is as an experience for new employees, but also for other employees. It's how they learn new skills and ensure that they are able to perform those skills as an organization wants them to be performed.

Alicia Willis: Yeah. Thank you for having me. Yeah, I think that people just don't realize how important it is. I mean, you need to include OJT because trainings can only do so much, classroom lab trainings can only do so much, but to really have it so that your employees are doing the job the way that your organization wants them done. You really need that OJT component. So, thanks again for having me.

Fara Allen: Thank you, Alicia.

Fara Allen: Thank you for taking the time to listen to today. We hope you enjoyed this episode and will share with your colleagues and friends. If you'd like more information on this topic, you can contact us at [atgo.osu.edu](mailto:atgo.osu.edu)\OhioState4Work. See our description for details. Be well and bye for now.