



STEPHEN HODGES looks at learning techniques that help employees master and retain the three 'building blocks' of job competence – knowledge, skills and attitudes.

It's a process that helps employees make the link between developing themselves as learners and improving their work performance. But it calls for support, so it is essential that managers provide access to appropriate channels of learning. On-the-job training is mostly dependent on what individuals learn from colleagues or other information within the business. Though this may sound vague, around 80 per cent of learning is done informally, either by asking for advice and help or by accessing information such as product literature, technical manuals, company procedures, or internet based resources such as blogs and FAQs. However, this needs to be supplemented by more formal learning, both in-house and externally. Examples of the former

include workplace 'shadowing', coaching, and mentoring (perhaps by consultants). External resources include e-learning, skills workshops, conferences and seminars. But bear in mind that competence is based on three building blocks – knowledge, skills and attitudes. Each requires different types of input: **Knowledge** – whether it's for car repair or sales negotiation – is needed for immediate application. So 'access channels' range from websites and e-learning to textbooks and professional journals. **Skills** are actions, both cognitive and physical, so are best developed through practice. Most skills are acquired through day-to-day work and customer interactions. However, where skills gaps are significant, development

may often require safer settings that don't involve an end product or interaction with the customer. Instructor-led workshops are generally the most effective channel for developing 'soft' skills, such as communication (sales and interpersonal), while higher level cognitive skills are more effectively developed through academic courses. Practical skills, such as those required by technicians, are usefully developed through class-based and on-the-job practice. **Attitudes and behaviours** require an altogether different and often much longer-term approach. While basic visible behaviours can be effectively learned through instructor-led workshops or active coaching, more deep rooted attitudes are often interwoven with the effectiveness of the company's leadership, communications, and

performance management. In these cases, external management-level interventions, such as mentoring and externally arranged workshops are appropriate. Modern techniques, such as blended-learning, make more effective use of the different learning channels than traditional methods. They generally combine e-learning and workshops with on-the-job support, such as coaching and tutoring. In short, they embrace the best of all practices to ensure that employees have mastered the intricacies of all three of those building blocks. **MM**

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# Block retention

Attracting, developing and retaining talented employees

## PART FOUR

"I can't afford to have my staff out of the workplace for that amount of time" is a common employer response to training. Employees on commission-based pay are likely to give the same excuse. So let's try and overcome those objections by examining the scope and benefits of on-the-job training.

Critically, because most on-the-job training involves learning from experience, it shifts the emphasis from employee training to employee learning. This in turn forces an employee to ask "what do I need to learn to be able to do this task better?" The answer may be found in what's known as the Experiential Learning Cycle. This proposes that individuals who have gone through a bad experience – a customer complaint over a car service, for example – progress through a loop where they reflect on what's happened, think about how things could have been done differently and test this new approach before the cycle repeats itself.

Figure 1: The Experiential Learning Cycle

