

Session Design

International Facilitator's Companion

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imaginal training

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The Theory

Section One: The Theory

A Training Philosophy

Training is about altering the behavior of people. Trainers often measure the success of programs by checking the response of participants at the end of the program. The real test of the effect of a program is the difference between the behavior before the training event and the behavior after it, especially six months or a year after.

Human beings understand the world and themselves and act in the world based on an image, a picture of the world and their place in it. This image is built and altered by the messages it receives. Messages have four effects on the image; leaving it unaffected, adding to it, radically altering it or affecting the value structure. The image is also one of values. It has one or several hierarchies of values. Messages can strengthen or weaken these value structures.

The trainer's role is to send messages that alter the participant's image which in turn alters his/her behavior.

The trainer cannot directly affect behavior but he or she can send messages which affect the image, creating new choices and possibilities for the participant. To be effective messages must be consistent with each other, strongly and clearly stated, repeated frequently and be internally consistent.

Session Design

Session design based on this approach starts with the following four points:

- 1** In order to learn a participant must be open to change. This openness must be inherently present or be created by the trainer.
- 2** The trainer's message must be communicated through a structure which is consistent with the image of the participant.

- 3 The trainer's message must be consistent, clear and precise and be regularly repeated.
- 4 The participant must be enabled to apply the learning to real situations in their own experience.

There are several implications of this approach. The first and most obvious concerns the flow of a training session. The flow should follow the four points above. That is, it should begin with an event which creates openness or raises a question in such a way that the participants realize that it is a critical issue to them. Then the trainer should present a message through a structure which is consistent with the structure of the image of the participants. Then the trainer must find ways to repeat his message in a consistent, clear and regular way. Finally the trainer must enable the participants to see the relevance of the message to their own lives.

The second is that the trainer needs to identify and use various methods which accomplish the four points above. For example:

- 1 The basic conversation method can be used very effectively to raise questions and issues and enable the participants to see the relevance of the topic to their own life and work. Other methods for doing this are reflective exercises, discussions, and some games.
- 2 The lecture method is very effective for communicating a message through a structure which the trainer can tailor so that it is consistent with the participants' image. Other methods for doing this are films, slide shows, demonstrations, etc.
- 3 The workshop or seminar methods are both good for sending a repeated, consistent and clear message. Other training tools are also good for this such as exercises, role plays, games, case studies, etc.
- 4 A reflective conversation using the basic conversation method is good for helping the participants see the significance of the message for their own life and work. Other ways of doing this are personal action plans and implementation plans.

Sometimes when two or more sessions are linked, one session would follow the conversation, lecture, workshop flow followed by another session made up of only exercises.

Structurally a training session thus becomes a matter of following the fundamental flow of how a person learns, and using the appropriate methods which most effectively communicate the message the trainer is sending. In addition each of these methods or processes should follow the same steps in the learning process.

- 1 Thus the structure of a basic conversation is objective, reflective, interpretive and decisional.
- 2 The structure of the lecture method is creating rationality, telling memorable stories and drawing powerful symbols, developing meaningful drama and being a commanding presence.
- 3 The structure of a workshop is setting the context, generating the brainstorm, rationalizing the data, naming the groups and reflecting on the experience.
- 4 The structure of a seminar is building the chart, developing an overview, grounding in depth and applying to real life.

The key to session design is to create a session that flows in the same pattern as the learning process and to use methods that also follow that same pattern. If this is done, the overall structure and the structure of each method within the event become supportive of the message and the learning process. This will greatly increase the power of the message and the possibility that real learning, i.e. changed behavior, will occur.



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The Process

Section Two: The Process

There are essentially four major steps to the process of designing a learning session. These steps flow in a logical sequence and will build on each other to create an effective event.



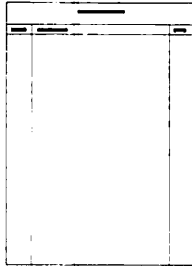
Determine the Session Intents The first step is to clarify the intents of the session. First determine the topic of the session. This should be written out as a way to make sure you are clear on the topic. In addition you should identify who will be participating in the session and make sure that the topic is appropriate to the group.



Setting the components The second step is to determine what components will be used in each part of the session and the sequence in which they will be used. This is done in the light of the intentions and objectives of the session and answers the question; a) How do we open the students' minds to learning? b) How do we create the framework through which they can learn? c) What is the most effective learning experience they can have? Then the learning objectives for the components are set. Decide on the rational objective. Decide on the existential aim.



Developing the components Next the trainer turns to designing the components of the session. The contents of the components are created which includes designing or adapting training tools such as conversations, lectures, exercises, workshops, games or demonstrations. Each step is written.



Writing the procedures The trainer then writes the procedures for the session. This involves writing out in as much detail as necessary for the people doing the training to understand exactly what is to happen. This step creates a type of script for the trainer which can be modified for a particular audience or a particular situation. The final step is to review all of this work and make sure that it is appropriately adapted to the audience.



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Examples

This sample is for a session on principled negotiations. It is the last session and focuses on difficult negotiating situations.

Session Design Worksheet 1

Place in Program Last Session	Preceding sessions: Communication Skills, Basic Concepts of Principled Negotiation, Role Play, BATNA (Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement, Role Play.	Following sessions: None
Topic	'Getting Past No' - dealing with difficult negotiations	
General audience:	Education level: Secondary and University Age range: 30 to 60 years old Sex (% of M/F): 50% men and 50% women, maybe a few more women. Experience in the topic: All are business people and have done negotiating but few if any have seen principled negotiation. Reasons for coming: This program is free to participants. Some are being sent by their employers and some are coming on their own. This kind of course looks good on CV's. Expectations from the course: Most will want to learn how to be more successful hard bargainers.	
Session Teaching objectives	Rational Objective: To understand the various techniques for dealing with one's own emotional response in negotiating, for creating a win win situation and for turning adversaries into partners. Existential Aim: To be confident enough about the principled negotiating approach to use it in future negotiations.	

Session Design Worksheet 2

Question raising tool such as Basic Conversation	Rational Objective: To create an awareness of the various difficult negotiations people have been in. Existential Aim: To experience the vast variety of ways people negotiate.	Question being raised: How could difficult negotiations have been dealt with more effectively?	Method The Basic Conversation Method - Difficult negotiations.
Context setting tool such as lecture	Rational Objective: To understand the basic 5 steps of Getting Past No. Existential Aim: To experience confidence in the possibility of dealing with difficult negotiators.	Framework being suggested: The 5 Steps of 1 Don't React, 2 Disarm Them, 3 Change the Game, 4 Make it easy to say Yes, and 5 Make it hard to say No.	Method Lecture - Getting Past No.
Learning tool such as workshop, seminar, game, case study, exercise, etc.	Rational Objective: To develop some personal methods for dealing with difficult negotiators. Existential Aim: To gain confidence in dealing with difficult negotiators.	Learning being applied The methods of difficult negotiators: Stonewalling, or 'take it or leave it'-stances, attacks or threats, insults or blaming you; and tricks or lies, false promises, revealing that the negotiator doesn't have the authority he says he has, or attempts to renegotiate after the deal is set.	Method: A techniques workshop for dealing with these 3 methods.



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When Appropriate

Section Four: **When Appropriate**

A trainer should use the session design method for designing learning events. It is effective if this is being done as an individual or with a team.

Developing sessions in detail is important for three reasons. The quality of programs improves with in-depth thinking through of what is to happen in the training course. Programs that will be delivered several times by several trainers and which need to be consistent in their content and methods need to be developed in detail. Even if the same trainer delivers the programs but they are delivered only occasionally, they should be developed in detail.



How to Develop

Section Five: How to Develop

Because people have a wonderfully stable image of the world it is necessary to find ways for participants to become receptive to knowledge before they can learn. People must want to learn before they will learn. So the first step in any effective session is to raise a question in the participants' minds. The next step is to create a mental framework in which they can learn. The third step is the actual process of learning.

The actual learning process can take two forms: learning from someone else's experience or from the participants' experience. In the first case a paper, film, case, field visit, demonstration etc. is used. The Basic Conversation Method is useful as the basic process in this type of learning. In the second type of learning the participants build a model by abstracting from their own experience. The Basic Workshop Method is useful in this learning process.

Often these two types of learning can be used in combination. For example, in a session on giving 'bad news' to employees, a technique for giving 'bad news' is presented using a film like John Cleese's 'Bad News'. After the film a discussion has to imbed the information in the students' memory. Then a series of role plays are held in which participants practice using the method. After the role plays a conversation is conducted in which participants discuss what they learned in the role plays. In this example, the first type is used in the first part of the session and the second type in the second half of the session.

This design method suggests that sessions have three parts: developing a way to raise a question, developing a means for setting an appropriate context, and developing the imbedding or model building part.

Clarifying the Topic

Use the Sessions Design Worksheet One. Write a sentence describing the topic. This should come directly from the curriculum design. It should be

as specific as possible. For example, it is unlikely that a session is on management skills, unless it is a very broad description of all of the skills required by all managers, from chief executive officers to line supervisors, in all companies.

Determining the General Audience

Describe in general terms which audience is using the form. This should be available from the training needs assessment but if not ask the client. Who are the people coming, education, sexes, ages, experience with topic, reason for coming to course and expectations. The more specific the better, for example, it is better to estimate the number of men (80%) and women (20%) and their ages (30 - 50) rather than just say that adults will be coming.

Determining the teaching objectives

This is not easy. Most people overestimate what can be taught in a 4 hour session. A driving instructor might have a teaching objective of 'to be able to make smooth, safe left turns' for a one session teaching objective. This would be preceded by sessions on starting the car, shifting gears, and accelerating.

There are 3 areas of questions you initially ask when setting teaching objectives. Are the students to learn a skill? If so, what skill and at what level of proficiency? Are they to acquire knowledge? If so, what information? Is an attitude to be changed? If so, from what to what? A session will normally contain elements of all three with an emphasis on one. These three determine the Rational Objective of the session. Again write as specific an objective(s) as possible in the Rational Objective box.

The next question is what experience do you want the participants to have in the process of the session? You might want the participants to

feel excited about building a financial plan, or to experience the burden of work required to manage effectively, or to be eager to try leading a team. This is the Existential Aim of the session. Write this in the Existential Aim box.

Deciding on the structure of the session

Most sessions have three components: **1** Raising the question, **2** Establishing a working image or model, and **3** Embedding the learning.

With ToP methods the normal way of raising a question in the participants minds is to do a Basic Conversation. That indirectly raises the question of the session. If you are teaching a seminar on curriculum design the conversation might raise the question, 'what are the qualities of an educated person and how can I practically teach a person to be one?' The key to this section is to raise the question and not answer it.

Establishing a working image or model in ToP methods is normally done with a lecture or talk but it can be done with a film, field visit, etc. This process creates an intellectual framework within which the question you raised in the conversation can be answered. If you are doing a session on session design you will want to give a talk on the dynamics of learning in a session.

Imbedding the learning is the most creative part of session design. It is here that the participants actually learn what is being taught. The tools available for this are many. For more explanation on these tools see the Curriculum Design Booklet and the specific tools booklets. Also see the Session Design Methods Overview sheet.

Use the Session Design Worksheet Two. Fill in the method for each of the components.

Setting component objectives

For each component (conversation, lecture, workshop etc.) fill in the Rational Objective and Existential Aim.

Evaluation of the Designs

At this point it is a good idea to evaluate the program. Even setting the work aside for a day before doing the evaluation will help. Having another trainer who has not been involved in the design help with the evaluation will contribute to a more objective view. Some of the questions to be asked of a session design are:

- Can the teaching objectives be done in one session and are they clear?
- Is the flow of the design clear and enabling?
- Can the design be done in 3 to 4 hours?
- Are the conversation, lecture, workshop, etc. about a single intent?
- Does the session raise a question, set a framework, and embed the learning?
- Will the design keep the group interested?

Writing the procedures

Several forms are used to prepare the procedures. The Basic Conversation Form is used for conversations, the 4x4 and Brief forms for lectures. For most other methods the Workshop and Movement forms can be used.

The Workshop form is used to create the basic steps of a component. This creates an overview of the component. The Movement Form can be used to write out the details of each step.

Now the procedures should be written. Procedures are a kind of script of the session. In ToP methods these include the conversation procedures,

lecture 4x4 and brief and game, exercise, workshop, etc. procedures. See the appropriate booklets for examples of these.



6 Worksheets

Session Design Worksheet 1

Place in Program	Preceding sessions:	Following sessions:
Topic		
General audience	Education level	
	Age range	
	Sex (% of M/F)	
	Experience in the topic	
	Reasons for coming	
	Expectations from the course	
Session Teaching objectives	Rational Objective:	
	Existential Aim:	

Session Design Worksheet 2

Question raising tool such as Basic Conversation	Rational Objective:	Question being raised:	Method:
	Existential Aim:		
Context setting tool such as lecture	Rational Objective:	Framework being suggested:	Method:
	Existential Aim:		
Learning tool such as workshop, seminar, game, case study, exercise, etc.	Rational Objective:	Learning being applied:	Method:
	Existential Aim:		

Workshop Worksheet
Title of Workshop _____

Rational objective:		Existential aim:	
Step		Procedure	Notes
Move-ments	I		
	II		
	III		
Conclusion			

Movement Worksheet
Movement

Steps	Procedure	Notes

Session Design Worksheet 1

Place in Program	Preceding sessions: <i>Put the sessions preceding this one here.</i>	Following sessions: <i>Put the sessions following this one here.</i>
Topic	<i>Put the topic of the session here</i>	
General audience	Education level <i>Put the educational level of expected participants here.</i> Age range <i>Put the age range of expected participants here.</i> Sex (% of M/F) <i>Put the ratio of men to women of expected participants here.</i> Experience in the topic <i>Put the experience in the topic of expected participants here.</i> Reasons for coming <i>Put the reasons why the expected participants are coming here.</i> Expectations from the course <i>Put what the participants expect from the course here.</i>	
Session Teaching objectives	Rational Objective: <i>Put the Rational Objective of the whole session here.</i>	
	Existential Aim: <i>Put the Existential Aim of the whole session here.</i>	

Session Design Worksheet 2

Question raising tool such as Basic Conversation	Rational Objective: <i>Put the Rational Objective of this component here.</i>	Question being raised: <i>Put the question being raised by this component here.</i>	Method: <i>Put the training method to be used for this component here.</i>
	Existential Aim: <i>Put the Existential Aim of this component here.</i>		
Context setting tool such as lecture	Rational Objective: <i>Put the Rational Objective of this component here.</i>	Framework being suggested: <i>Put the model, image or intellectual framework being taught here.</i>	Method: <i>Put the training method to be used for this component here.</i>
	Existential Aim: <i>Put the Existential Aim of this component here.</i>		
Learning tool such as workshop, seminar, game, case study, exercise, etc.	Rational Objective: <i>Put the Rational Objective of this component here.</i>	Learning being applied: <i>Put what the participants will learn in this component here.</i>	Method: <i>Put the training method to be used for this component here.</i>
	Existential Aim: <i>Put the Existential Aim of this component here.</i>		

Workshop Worksheet
Title of Workshop _____

Rational objective: <i>Put the Rational Objective of the component here.</i>		Existential aim: <i>Put the Existential Aim of the component here.</i>	
Step		Procedure	Notes
<i>Context</i>		<i>Write out the steps of the context here.</i>	<i>Put any teaching notes in this column.</i>
Move-ments	I	<i>Put the steps of the component here.</i>	
	II		
	III		
Conclusion		<i>Put the steps of the conclusions here.</i>	

Movement Worksheet

Movement Put the name of the movement for the component here

Steps	Procedure	Notes
Put the name of the steps for the movement here.	There should be one Movement Worksheet for each of the movements and one each for the opening and the closing. Write the detailed procedures for each of the steps here.	Teaching notes can go here.

Session Design Methods Overview

Conversation Construction

- 1 Determine the topic of the conversation and state as clearly as possible.
- 2 Set the Rational Objective and Existential Aim.
- 3 Brainstorm potential questions.
- 4 Organize into the Objective, Reflective, Interpretive, Decisional sequence.
- 5 Check flow of questions.
- 6 Write introductory context.
- 7 Write closing comments.
- 8 Test conversation.

Lecture Building

- 1 Determine topic of the lecture and state as clearly as possible.
- 2 Set the Rational Objective and Existential Aim.
- 3 Brainstorm 100+ items about the topic.
- 4 Organize into 4 points, then 4x4 and then 4x4x4.
- 5 Write sentences at 4x4, 4 and overall summary levels.
- 6 Reorganize the sequence of the 4.
- 7 Write out introduction.
- 8 Write out closing line(s).
- 9 Brainstorm illustrations for each of the 4x4 points and select the 16 key illustrations.
- 10 Draw sample board images and select the most effective.
- 11 Adapt to the audience.

Workshop Design

- 1 Determine the topic of the workshop.
- 2 Set the Rational Objective and Existential Aim.
- 3 Decide the practical product(s) of the session.
- 4 Decide the 3 or 4 broad movements of the session.
- 5 Determine what the group will have at the end of each movement (a list of ideas, a grouped list, etc.)
- 6 For each movement write the specific steps.
 - Imagine standing in front of a group and leading the movement.
 - Write down questions, comments and suggestions you might have to make while doing the session.
 - Separate them into procedures (questions and comments you must make in the movement) and short courses (comments and suggestions that may be needed in the session).
- 7 Determine how much time is required for each movement and where time can be saved if the session is running late.
- 8 Write the introductory context including what the workshop is about, why it is important and what the product(s) will be.
- 9 Write the closing (a reflection on the session, etc.).
- 10 List materials etc. needed for the session.



Tips for Developing and Using

Section Seven: **Tips for Developing and Using**

- 1** The clearer you are able to articulate the intentions and objectives of the session, the easier it will be to design the components.
- 2** Do not underestimate the time it will take to do particular components in a session. It usually takes longer than you think. At the same time don't overestimate the time required. People will get bored quickly if you are unnecessarily dragging out a session.
- 3** If possible working with one or more people to design a session will speed up the work, evoke more creativity and generally improve the quality of the final product.
- 4** The person who is delivering the session should participate in its design if at all possible.
- 5** If the session you are designing is part of a larger construct keep the larger construct's objectives and flow in mind. Your session should contribute to and support the intentions of the larger construct.
- 6** In deciding about and designing the components of a session two key things to keep in mind are: 'How does this contribute to our session objectives' and 'How will the participants experience this event?'
- 7** Consider any special factors that might influence your design. For example, the meeting room has large windows and no curtains making it very difficult to show a movie in the middle of the afternoon.
- 8** When the session is finished go through the whole construct imagining you are facilitating it. Look for inconsistencies, repetitions, unclarity, etc.
- 9** Make sure that the context has all the information that the participants will need to successfully participate in the event and that the closing is future-oriented.
- 10** Appropriate humor is always helpful and can help ease tension in a difficult session but it needs to be carefully planned.



References

Section Eight: References

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Notes