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Methods and techniques used in vocational training

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METHODS AND TECHNIQUES USED IN VOCATIONAL TRAINING

Introduction

In order to make a vocational training effective, it is necessary to choose good training methods and techniques. Therefore, they should not only convey the necessary knowledge in the most effective way but also arouse participants' interest and involve them in the course.

The main goal of this paper is to present 'on the job' and 'off the job' techniques. In order to do it, the author used a variety of sources from the literature on this subject.

Training forms and techniques – the way of classification

A vocational course shall involve as much forms, methods and techniques as possible, because it makes it more attractive and effective (Celińska-Nieckarch, 1999, p. 54). However, this choice cannot be random and it should depend on the importance of theoretical and practical aspects of the training. A chosen method shall stimulate and facilitate gaining knowledge as well as using it in professional life.

Training forms and techniques may be classified in many ways, depending on a chosen criterion, e.g.

- Criterion: relation with processes at work
 - On the job and off the job techniques
- Criterion: number of people at the training
 - Individual and group techniques
- Criterion: degree of participant's involvement in the training
 - Active and passive learning techniques
- Criterion: improving the professional qualifications
 - Informational and visual techniques, incentive techniques, and improvement of actions
- Criterion: place of training
 - Internal and external trainings
- Criterion: achieving the goals of the training
 - Training for a job, improving professional qualifications and retraining.

The chart below presents a classification of training techniques, using the most common criteria:

- Group and individual training techniques (criterion of number of people at the training course),
- On the job and off the job techniques (criterion of the relation with the processes at work).

Group training techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation in design works for training purposes • Group forms of work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conferences and seminars • Incentive techniques • Role games • Action Learning • Outdoor Training
Individual training techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New employee orientation training • Training without stopping work • Consultations with a superior • Mentoring • Coaching • Employee rotation • Specialist training • Assigning tasks • Replacement at work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lectures • Audio-visual techniques • E-learning • Planned training • Case study • Studies (external, postgraduate)
	On the job techniques	Off the job techniques

Fig. 1. Vocational training techniques in a company
Source: own study on the basis of (Pocztowski, 1993, p. 88).

On the job techniques focus on transmitting knowledge, skills and behaviour by superior and other employees at the place of work.

Off the job techniques take place outside the place of work and are organized to convey theoretical knowledge and behaviour. Such training does not have 'production effect' (Szałkowski, 2000, p. 116).

In the next part, training methods are described both at work and outside work.

Individual 'on the job' training techniques

1. New employee orientation training – A new employee who for the first time meets the company code, wants to learn quickly and can do it in two ways: other more experienced employee may introduce him or he may use hit-and-miss style. It has been proved many times that the former method is much more effective. Experience of first months at work is significant for a new employee, so the new employee's orientation program shall be carried out meticulously and competently. A company has to convey the new employee the set of clearly defined and necessary information which can be classified in three main functional categories (Cascio, 1992, p. 225):

- Standards, expectations, norms, traditions, company's policy,
- Social affairs, work ambiance, introducing to other employees and management,
- Technical aspects.

The training shall be effective both for the company which acquires qualified employee and for the employee, because it will increase the pace of his integration with the company's mission, culture and assigned tasks. (Kuryłowicz-Rodzoch, 1999, part 1, p. 6–8).

2. Training without stopping work (sharing experience) – it is one of the oldest methods of internal training and consists in attributing an employee to a more experienced one who enables the employee to watch the more experience colleague and learn through observation. The new employee is being taught his duties at a particular post, under guidance of the more experience colleague who has been working at this post for a few years. When we look into companies which have been using these techniques for many years, we have to remember that in order to make it effective it has to

be planned carefully and the worker – trainer has to be thoroughly trained beforehand.

3. **Consultation with a superior** – a technique that consists in conveying an orientated professional experience. Thanks to it, managers with a long professional experience can train their successors. The managers are so-called development trainers which is one of the most important roles in an organization (Szałkowski, 2000, p. 120–121). Such consultations are regarded as the training techniques when they are organized systematically for a specific purpose and they do not disturb a course of work. (Kuryłowicz-Rodzoch, 1999, part 1, p. 11). They allow solving problems which may occur in a specific post. Efficiency of this method depends on the superior's qualifications both professional and educational.
4. **Mentoring** – a process, in which a mentor is responsible for a carrier and a development of the second person, excluding the standard relationship between a superior and an inferior. (Filipowicz, 1997, p. 46). Mentoring is designed to form desired behaviours of employees (i.e. learning procedures and company's code)¹. Its essence is a specific relationship² with the superior and his inferior³ which consists in identification of the inferiors with their superior who serves as a model to follow. (Kuryłowicz-Rodzoch, 1999, part 1, p. 11) and may act as an advisor (Pocztowski, 1998, p. 230) who makes use of his professional experience, broad knowledge and access to information (Ziębicki, 2000, p. 65). Mentors are interested in the professional development of their inferiors in the long term. (Knap-Stefaniuk, 2002, s. 21). The help of mentor is not limited to current affairs but it also focuses on long-term development of the worker. Properly carried out mentoring involves four parties: inferior, mentor, direct manager and employees from training department. (Sidor-Rządkowska, 1998, p. 9). The parties are to create the most optimal forms and methods of the worker's development.

¹ Advices of mentor focus mainly on training and development, see Sloman, 1997, p. 174.

² Mentoring may be both formal and informal relationship. There is a common view that informal mentoring is more effective². However, some companies use more formal mentoring programmes, to train graduates. In such cases it is necessary to carefully choose mentors, or undesirable code of behaviours may become established (Sajkiewicz, 2000, p. 261).

³ Mentor should be in direct professional relation to a trainee and should not be his direct superior but rather somebody who is higher in company's hierarchy (Urbanik-Papp, 2001b, p. 58).

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5. **Coaching** – it is a planned bilateral process⁴ in which a person develops his skills and acquires specific competences, through reliable assessment, directed practice, and a regular feedback (Persloe, 1998, p. 10). Coaching also means equal terms with a superior and an inferior⁵ which are expressed in common setting goals and ways of carrying out the work and that the coach is constantly present with the trainee, observes his actions, and helps him when it is required, (Pocztowski, 1998, p 229) but the initiative should come from the trainee and the coach is only an advisor (Kuryłowicz-Rodzoch, 1999, part. 1, p. 9). In practice, coaching is an individual guidance of specialized consultant over a manager of higher rank or a manager who has just started his carrier and has a big potential. In the former case, coaching deals with solving communication problems between top managers and in the latter case, it is an analysis of strong and weak sides of the manager in order to prepare him for promotion (Janowska, 2002, p. 145).
6. **Employee rotation** – in this technique a worker is moved to different posts so he can learn different skills (Stoner, Freeman, Gilbert, 1999, p. 379). Such a rotation is used on each level of an organization (Sekula, 1999, p. 119). Such changes enable employees to improve their qualifications, experience, and develop interpersonal skills (Szałkowski, 2000, p. 130). Trainees work in different departments⁶ for a specific period of time, they get involved in the work of these departments which allow them to acquire information about the whole company and to understand processes occurring between different organizational cells. It might also prove useful in the course of a professional carrier⁷. Trained employees get to know their

⁴ There is a one-way transfer of knowledge in mentoring training – more experienced person teaches the less experienced one. On the other hand, when a communication between the inferior and the superior is of bilateral character and both the trainee and the trainer gain new experience then it is coaching.

⁵ Coaching may have informal and formal forms, deliberately inspired, undertaken and organized by the company management. This technique requires proper qualifications, thus a formal coaching must be preceded by the training of managers in the field of observing others, playing roles and assessing the current situation (Sajkiewicz, 2000, p. 260).

⁶ In specialist literature, there are two types of employee rotation: planned horizontal rotation, where employees improve their skills and progressive rotation, where a change in post results in new scope of duties and responsibilities and increase in remuneration. The latter is used in case of managerial posts. (Kuryłowicz-Rodzoch, 1999, part 1, p. 11).

⁷ In order for the training to be effective, it is necessary to define which posts will be involved in the training and how long will the training take place. See: Ibidem.

associates, meet new problems which they have to solve. Thus, their motivation and interpersonal skills improve and the worker identifies himself more with the company (Szałkowski, 2000, p. 130). On the other hand, the worker may become less involved in the work he does because of its temporal character. The employee rotation increases the elasticity of labour potential. (Pocztowski, 1998, p. 232).

7. **Specialist training** – is usually used in case a worker is introduced to a new post and duties (Kuryłowicz-Rodzoch, 1999, part 1, p. 11) or in case his is assigned to a new scope of duties. Such training is designed to help the worker with standard practices in a specific post. It may have a form of written statement or an oral instruction which describe, gradually, a set of activities, characteristic for a post. (Szałkowski, 2000, p. 119). The trainee benefits more from the training if he is presented with the description of a post. It can also be connected with demonstration of duties. It initiates coordination of activities necessary to carry out the duties specific for the post. In order to carry out the demonstration, it is necessary to make careful preparations and should be done in stages. The training person discusses each step and after the trained persons, try to do these activities on their own, and the trainer corrects possible mistakes (Wdowicz, 1999).
8. **Assigning tasks** – consists in assigning tasks to a worker which are not the standard duties. (Kuryłowicz-Rodzoch, 1999, part 1, p. 11). Scope of these tasks depends on the addressee. (Celińska-Nieckarz, 1999, p. 59–61). The assigned tasks may concern either general problems or more specific ones which enables the superior to obtain some information about abilities and potential of his inferior and for the latter it is a chance to prove in different untypical situations (Szałkowski, 2000, p. 119–120).
9. **Replacement at work** – is similar to the previous technique (Celińska-Nieckarz, 1999, p. 59–61). It may be caused by e.g. leave, illness, or deliberate assigning some tasks to check the worker in new situations and in a new post. However, the worker should be given some instructions before starting replacement (Kuryłowicz-Rodzoch, part 1, p. 11). Usually such replacement takes place at the same level in the company hierarchy or at a level which is higher (Szałkowski, 2000, p. 120).

Group ‘on the job’ training techniques

1. **Participation in design work for training purposes** – this technique is an alternative of replacement at work and a counterpart of the technique of assigning tasks. Here, a team that works on a certain project is assigned an instructor. Members of the team have a possibility to acquire specialist knowledge from different fields (by solving various problems), and train their interpersonal skills (*ibidem*).
2. **Group forms of work** – if the project teams are not dissolved after they finish the project they can be regarded as group forms of work. Such a term can be attributed to teams which carry out activities being a whole of a work process. In these teams, members have equal rights. This technique is used when it is necessary to exchange experience between the members of the team or to gain new knowledge.

Individual ‘off the job’ training techniques

1. **Lecture (presentation)** – allows presenting, in a methodical way, necessary information, facts, opinions to a large audience, but with their limited involvement during the training. A lecture allows acquiring theoretical knowledge, and if it is connected with other methods, it enables quick learning.
2. **Audio-visual techniques**– they consist of (Sajkiewicz, 2000, p. 257) films, internal TV, audiotapes, and videotapes. Thanks to them, the same educational materials can be presented in different places. These data carriers also can be used many times. Usually, audio-visual methods are used together with other training techniques, mainly lectures which may precede the audio-visual techniques, in order to introduce the listeners with problems in question (Janowska, 2002, p. 144) e.g. analysis of order of activities specified by a procedure or presentation of difficult problems. Audio-visual techniques have such advantages as replays, slowed motion and animation (Kuryłowicz-Rodzoch, 1999, s. 10).
3. **Planned training** – guided by appropriate software, created specifically for a company and taking into consideration its uniqueness. Computer gives information to the trainee and then asks questions. Therefore, the progress

of the learning person is constantly checked. Persons taking part in this kind of training can adjust it to their pace which increase their efficiency. Another advantage of this technique is its flexibility – it is possible to set the difficulty level⁸.

4. **Case study**⁹ – a method which first was used and developed in Harvard Business School. Currently, it is one of the most often used and best evaluated techniques, taught at universities and training centres (Kuryłowicz-Rodzoch, 1999, part 2, p. 11). Trainees, after learning about real or hypothetical situations or problems¹⁰ have to analyse materials, identify the problem, and propose optimal solution and alternatives (Sajkiewicz, 2000, s. 259). Then these solutions are being discussed (Szałkowski, 2000, p. 122). In order to make the right decision, the participants of the course have to possess specialist knowledge and analytical and synthetic skills. Well-prepared case study gives learners a chance for active participation in analysis and discussion about situations similar to the ones occurring in the real life. The aim of this method is to make the participants to draw conclusions, on the basis of presented facts and information (Wdowicz, 1999, part I).

Group ‘off the job’ training techniques

1. **Conferences and seminars** – allow listening to reports and statements presented by their participants. Conferences and seminar allow not only to broaden knowledge from a specific field but they also give a chance for employees to talk with experts (scientists, advisors) and employees from other companies (Kostera, 2000, p. 113). Participants of a conference can share their views, suggestions and experience with others, they meet with the most up-to-date results of researches, and they also can submit their own

⁸ Usually, it is not easy to programme such software, and its purchase is very expensive, thus companies do not use this method very often (Szałkowski, 2000, p. 124–125).

⁹ This method can have different form. Mr. H. Groenewald distinguishes the following alternatives: case-problem-method, case-study-method, incident method, live-case-method, (Pocztowski, 1993, p. 92).

¹⁰ Case may be taken from current or past activity of a company, but it can also be taken from outside the company.

proposals (Sekuła, 1999, p. 123). Therefore, conferences give a chance to know problems which may occur in various companies and ways to solve them. They also integrate people from the same branch¹¹.

2. **Incentive techniques** – they take place in conditions similar to real situation and are designed to improve skills such as negotiating, solving problems and interpersonal skills (Janowska, 2002, p. 144). Learners make decisions, take actions, and then analyse their results from the angle of real actions at their own companies. This method is used when training an employee, using the real equipment or in real conditions would be too expensive or dangerous (Kuryłowicz-Rodzoch, 1999, part 2, p. 10). Due to artificial environment, learners do not have to answer for making wrong decisions, because potential costs are not very high compared to the costs in the real life (Wdowicz, 1999, part 1). On the other hand, if the learners have too good results when doing simple exercises, they may become conceited that they will also achieve such results in real situation (Sajkiewicz, 2000, p. 259).
3. **Game role** – one of the most interactive training methods. Here, course participants play specific organizational roles which might happen in their professional life and they learn appropriate behaviours (Wdowicz, 1999, part 2, p. 55). During game role training, the participants present a situation, by playing roles of persons involved in the situation. It reflects relationships between two persons or persons in the whole group (Amstrong, 2000, p. 752). The participants by playing different roles can understand their adversary and learn various strategies and tactics which result in victory. Such training allows a better understanding of our own social and professional role and roles of other employees within an organization and outside it.¹² Thanks to the training, the participants improve their functional behaviours and correct those which disturb proper realization of these roles (Szałkowski, 2000, p. 124). This method creates opportunity to try new roles, gain experience, and skills and broaden our knowledge (Celińska-

¹¹ Participation in conferences involves long and tiring trips. This nuisance can be eliminated using up-to-date communication and tele-transmission technique e.g. videoconference (Janowska, 2002, p. 144).

¹² Often people switch roles, e.g. a manager is an assistant and the assistant is the manager.

Nieckarz, 1999, p. 56), through checking various behaviours and situations both on ourselves and on other persons taking part in the training¹³.

4. **Action Learning**¹⁴ – this method was created by Revans in 1982 who assumed that Learning (U) may be described as $U=Z+P$ (Wensteing Fitzgerald, 1999); (Urbanik-Papp, 2001a, p. 109), where Z is programmed learning i.e. patterns and theoretical knowledge and P is asking questions which checks if the theoretical knowledge is in accordance with practice. To use this method we need a group of 5–6 persons, each carrying out a separate project – so-called ‘tool to learn’ which is a real task experienced by a company or a participant of the programme in his post. There are many ways to solve the problem, so there is chance to use hit-and-miss method, by analysing one own experience. The group meets in regular intervals of time (e.g. once a month), to support each other in solving the problems. Period of time of such training must be long enough to check at the meetings the effects of implemented solutions (Urbanik-Papp, 2001b, p. 60).
5. **Outdoor training (Learning through adventure)** – a spontaneous and intensive outdoor activities, often in extreme conditions (Feliniak, 2002, p. 43). It is based on tasks which often require good physical condition and it always checks the ability to cope in surprising situations. Outdoor training is a very effective method when it comes to overcoming the routine of company’s trips. (Wilemajtys, 2001, p. 39). It gives a chance to experience unforgettable adventure, together with other employees, so except of educational function outdoor training has many others. Outdoor training is a completely different situation for its participants, very different from everyday situations, so it is often used as a remedy for tiredness or even professional burnout. In addition, it improves self-motivation of the participants, give them faith in their own abilities, and improve efficiency of teamwork. Outdoor training improves interpersonal skills, leadership, solving problems, conflict management, and risk taking (Janowska, 2002, p. 145). The

¹³ It should be remembered that such training has to be well prepared, including written information for each participant which explain the situation and briefly describe its role, see: (Armstrong, 2000, p. 752).

¹⁴ Action learning can be used in many ways to achieve different goals. In specialist literature there is a typology that classifies a variety of forms of this method to four main schools silent, scientific, experience and critical reflection. See: (Yorks, O’Neil, Marsick, no. 2); (Makin, Cooper, Cox, 2000).

participants know well limits of their abilities and are aware that it may be dangerous to exceed them.

Conclusion

Choosing appropriate training form and technique is essential in the training process. There was a widespread view that formal methods of training were superior to 'on the job' techniques which played important role only in adaptation of a new worker, and development of personal skills could take place only during organized training. Nowadays, this is changing and 'on the job' training is regarded as beneficial in acquiring key competences. This change results from changes in the organization of work i.e. bigger independency and responsibility in specific posts, simplification of organizational structures and bigger importance of teamwork.

The above is confirmed by the research carried out by the author, implying that companies use a wide range of training techniques, in various scopes. 'On the job' training techniques are used more often than 'off the job' training techniques. However, it is worth mentioning that formerly more traditional training techniques were more popular contrary to time-consuming and costly techniques of 'a new generation'.

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METHODS AND TECHNIQUES USED IN VOCATIONAL TRAINING**Summary**

This paper describes methods and techniques used during vocational trainings. In order to complete the aim of work, the classification of training forms and techniques have been presented, described in the literature. Also a two dimensional matrix has been created which groups training methods and techniques described in the literature. They apply the most commonly used criteria, such as the number of participants in the training (individual and group) and 'on the job' and 'off the job techniques'. To each of the above categories otraining methods and techniques have been attributed.