

Training Practice as Communication Medium: A Throughput Model

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We join the ORGanic conversation by introducing our throughput-based approach to evaluating organizational training. Our investigation of organizational training is organic in two senses. First, organic describes how fundamental elements in nature relate in dynamic interconnections and constitute the very substance of life itself. We argue that organizational training comes to life through the dynamic interconnections among the fundamental elements of all training communication: training content, process, and trainer. Second, organic refers to natural growth and evolution. Metaphorically, our theory development grew and evolved out of our extensive experiences in the field observing organizational training as it happened.

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The employee training industry continues to thrive worldwide as organizations attempt to capitalize on and improve their human resources (Quinn, Anderson, & Finkelstein, 1996). Employee education and learning programs are increasingly being treated as integral organizational functions (Goldstein & Ford, 2002; Noe, 2005). Not surprisingly, a significant portion of all organizational training is devoted to professional skills that can be used across job functions or duties (Filipczak, 1992); such skills complement technical requirements of the job. Communication and leadership skills—also called social skills (Segrin & Givertz, 2003)—are increasingly common topics of these training programs designed to develop organizational human resources (McGehee & Webb, 2009; Sogunro, 1997).

Training programs are a context ripe for investigation given that training is a complex, communicative activity (Beebe, Mottet, & Roach, 2004; McGehee & Webb, 2009), and often used as a programmatic approach to inculcating organizational messages (see Lewis, 2000). Whether delivered via technology (Muir, 2006) or in person (Brant & Harvey, 2005), a message is presented to an audience. However, the bulk of training research rarely privileges the role of communication in training, resulting in a *black box* perspective of training practice. A *black box* occurs in scientific reasoning when successful studies of the inputs and outputs of a mechanism obscure an understanding of the mechanism itself (Latour, 1999). Training evaluations often focus on the goals and objectives (inputs) and compares those to the outcomes (outputs), while the processes that comprise training are often overlooked or even dismissed (see Lien, Hung, & McLean, 2007 for an exception). Adopting a process approach to training evaluation has the potential to result in a thoughtful and comprehensive analysis of training throughputs.

Taking a process approach to training evaluation allows for the assessment of *training practice*, or the essence of actual training sessions. Instead of inputs and outputs, training practice examines the *throughputs*, or what transforms the inputs into outputs. In training, this consists of the manner in which training messages are communicated to trainees. A myriad of observable components comprise training practice. Training activities, handouts, complexity of material, the opportunity for trainees to become acquainted, and enthusiasm of the trainer are all examples found in training sessions. This essay argues that training evaluation should be expanded beyond the current conventions assessing training objectives and outcomes. Both are important to training program evaluation; however, examining the *ways* in which objectives are accomplished and outcomes are produced may provide trainers with a systematic way of considering their communication as the medium of training as it occurs.

This essay explains the communicative nature of three integral dimensions of any training practice within any training program: content, process, and trainer. First, training can only occur when *content* or subject matter is communicated to trainees. Second, the manner or *process* in which the trainer communicates content is critical to the success of training program outcomes. Third, characteristics of the *trainer* when communicating content and facilitating the training process creates a relationship (positive or negative) with trainees. Communication ties the three dimensions together, as it is the mechanism through which the trainer conducts his or her activity. Further in professional skill training (as presented in the four cases that follow), better communication skills are also the outcomes (also see Sharbrough, Simmons, & Cantrill, 2006), as training participants are expected to reproduce these (interpersonal, leadership, or decision

making) skills in their work activities (McGehee & Webb, 2009). In the following pages, these communicative dimensions are clarified through the presentation of an organically developed model of training practice evaluation.

Approaches to Training Evaluation

The impetus for training is to develop individuals' job-related skill set (Noe, 2005); thus, organizations providing or contracting training expect to see a return on their investment (ROI; Phillips, 1997; Phillips & Phillips, 2001). To assess ROI, there must be a purposeful evaluation of the training program, a task that is often conducted poorly, incompletely, overlooked, undervalued, or purposely ignored (Clarke, 2004). Evaluation itself can be costly, political, and labor intensive. Furthermore, program evaluations do not always produce the (i.e., positive) results desired or expected (Phillips & Phillips; Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001). Additionally, an outside, objective evaluator is not often available or even feasible, leaving the responsibility of evaluation to the trainer. While bias, esteem, and pride certainly have the potential to shape interpretations in such a scenario, a more holistic training evaluation model can help minimize these effects by helping either the trainer or an outside evaluator conduct a more thorough evaluation. Trainers need concrete dimensions on which to evaluate training throughout the program rather than relying on one's own affective reactions or those of participants.

One model of training evaluation in particular--Kirkpatrick's (1976, 1998) four level model of reaction, learning, behavior, and results--has gained prominence and widespread use (Alliger & Janak, 1989; Tannenbaum, Cannon-Bowers, Salas, & Mathieu, 1993). The hierarchical model focuses on the effectiveness of a training program as measured by its aggregated outcomes after the program is complete. The model presumes that a prior level must be satisfied before the subsequent level can be satisfied.

Despite its prominence, Kirkpatrick's model has received considerable criticism over the years, particularly for its inability to assess learning (Abernathy, 1999). The first level of Kirkpatrick's model, trainee reaction, has been misconstrued according to Tan, Hall, and Boyce (2003), who argued training participants' affective reactions (i.e., positive and negative) are not indicative of learning but simply of liking. Such an interpretation is keeping, however, with Kirkpatrick's (1998) view that participant reaction to both topic and trainer is similar to a measure of customer satisfaction and that training participants must react favorably to training, otherwise their motivation will not be sufficient for learning. Kraiger, Ford, and Salas (1993) posited that Kirkpatrick's evaluation of the second level, learning, which focuses on understanding and acquisition of knowledge, is too simplistic, as multiple types of learning (e.g., change of attitude, knowledge improvement, increase in skill) require different types of evaluation. Kirkpatrick's level three, behavior, evaluates changes in behavior from the perspective of the trainee, the immediate supervisor, a subordinate, or others (e.g., client) who are knowledgeable about the trainee's behavior. These behavioral changes are evaluated posttraining before returning to the environment in which the behaviors should be manifest. Finally, Kirkpatrick's level four, organizational results, references the tangible and quantifiable consequences of participant training, such as increased production, improved quality of work, or reduction in errors.

Ultimately, the model's usefulness is questionable (Holton, 1996), as it is perceived as a simple taxonomy of training outcomes and not theoretically based (Kraiger et al., 1993). Thus, researchers developed alternative training evaluation models. Among these are Kraiger et al.'s classification scheme for evaluating learning based on cognitive, skill-based, and affective learning outcomes and Alvarez, Salas, and Garofano's (2004) integrated model of training evaluation and effectiveness that identifies individual (e.g., motivation), training (e.g., training techniques), and organizational (e.g., aspects of the organization that encourage positive transfer of training) characteristics that affect posttraining attitudes.

Perhaps, the most comprehensive training system design is that of Tannenbaum et al. (1993), which includes individual, organizational, and situational characteristics; trainee expectations; trainee motivation across the training experience; training program characteristics; trainee's expectation fulfillment; and programmed intervention. Further, the system includes a training effectiveness model, thereby expanding Kirkpatrick's four-component typology into six: reactions, attitude change, learning, training performance, job performance, and results and organizational effectiveness. Tannenbaum et al.'s model is unique in that it begins to examine training practice; however, its emphasis is more summative than formative in nature. As these examples suggest, training evaluation takes a summative approach (Brown & Gerhardt, 2002) in which a program is assessed after its completion (Scriven, 1991). Many major corporations have adopted this approach to training evaluation (Blanchard, Thacker, & Way, 2000). Additionally, evaluation often consists solely of the evaluator's gathering reactions and assessments from training participants at the conclusion of the training (see Klein, Stagl, Salas, Parker, & Van Eynde, 2007 for an example). Formative evaluation, or evaluating a training program during its design and development stages, is conducted far less frequently (Brown & Gerhardt; Scriven). A formative evaluation enables the trainer to identify weaknesses in training and seek improvements prior to the completion of the training program. Unlike a summative evaluation, formative evaluation often occurs multiple times over the course of a training program.

A specific framework for conducting either a formative or summative evaluation is the CIPP model (Stufflebeam, 2000). This acronym stands for the components to evaluate in a program, project or other service: context, inputs, processes, and products. While the CIPP model offers flexibility in its application, it is still broad in scope and addresses the program level rather than the training practice level. Indeed formative and summative evaluations have value; however, they inherently reproduce the *black box* effect as they account for inputs and outputs, but overlook evaluation of training practice, the throughputs.

Evaluations of Training Process, Training Content, and Trainer

Calls for more sophisticated models of evaluation suggest Kirkpatrick's model may have run its course (Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001). The success of Kirkpatrick's and other extant training effectiveness models and training evaluation systems have created a *black box* mentality of training practice because they do not account for the communication of training. These models and systems identify, manipulate, and evaluate pre-training, post-training, and contextual/environmental variables surrounding training, but they are limited in that they fail to consider the potential interactions of evaluations of the training content, training process, and the trainer. Moreover, we advocate that the evaluation of these three critical elements of training

requires evaluation *during* the training, rather than using post-evaluations or pre/post comparisons, as well as conducted (and valued) from both perspectives of trainees and evaluator(s). Ideally, the evaluator will be someone external to the organization providing the training; however, the trainer can also provide a valuable evaluation. Therefore, the Paired Evaluation of Training Practice (PETP) model offered here (see Figures 1 and 2) provides a new perspective for examination by offering (a) an evaluation of training practice, or *what occurs during the training* rather than training outcomes, and (b) two distinct evaluative frames or perspectives—that of the trainee and that of an evaluator.

The PETP model does not replace nor discount the evaluation of learning outcomes; indeed, these are crucial to assess. However, evaluators seem to have too quickly jumped to evaluating outcomes instead of first evaluating training activities, their content, and the trainer--components comprised of, or that rely on, communication. The PETP model proposes an approach for examining three interrelated constructs central to the training experience as a communicative process. Results of this type of formative evaluation would assist trainers in designing and delivering training, increase the chances of obtaining desired outcomes, and help those responsible for training determine why trainees' favorable evaluations do not necessarily result in learning.

The PETP model is comprised of two frames that outline three integral dimensions to any training scenario: content, process, and trainer. The model is based on field observations made of four separate training programs aimed at teaching professional skills of the type documented by Madlock (2008; e.g., collaboration, communication competence, leadership). In the remainder of this essay, contextual information about each case will be provided, followed by explanation of the process through which the model was developed. After presenting the model, examples from one case study are presented to demonstrate how the training dimensions of content, process, and trainer can result in both favorable and unfavorable outcomes as evaluated by both evaluator and participant.

Description of Cases and Data Collection

While different in objectives, training participants, and locations within one state, formats were fairly consistent across all four training programs observed. Each was a multi-session program in which individuals representing various organizations came together at a neutral site for multiple days. Trainers were different for each session, as were training topics. All training programs were implemented by advocacy organizations promoting social, economic, or political causes (Lewis, Hamel, & Richardson, 2001). The first program was initiated by a mutual benefit organization (i.e., a chamber of commerce), while the other three training programs were provided by advocacy organizations funded by a philanthropic organization.

Community Leadership

The first program, Community Leadership (CL; this and other organizational names are pseudonyms), was a seven-month leadership training program in which 25 members were selected via an application process. Some training participants held supervisory positions (e.g., museum administrator, private school principal) whereas others had few formal supervisory duties (e.g., teacher, community volunteer). The goal of the program was to grow community leaders, educating them about various aspects of their community.

Each training day consisted of multiple training units, and was conducted by multiple trainers (generally 10 to 15 trainers per day). Training sessions consisted of invited speakers, group activities and assignments, and discussions. In addition to a two-day, 22-hour retreat at the outset of the program, training participants attended one class per month, each lasting approximately 9½ hours.

Two of the researchers were part of a four-person evaluation team who observed the 89 hours of class meetings, of which the vast majority was comprised of training sessions. Field notes were taken during meetings (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Silverman, 2005) resulting in more than 250 double-spaced pages of observation data. Additionally, one of the researchers interviewed (Dillon, 1990) 19 class members six months after the completion of the training program, resulting in 210 pages of double-spaced transcripts (Authors, 2007). Archival documents were also collected (Startt & Sloan, 1989), including training handouts produced.

State Leadership Initiatives

The second and third training programs, State Leadership Initiatives (SLI), were held two consecutive years (SLI1 and SLI2). Thirty-four trainees (68 total) were selected for each round of training; all were employees of state agencies or state organizations. The goal of the programs was to create a network among state agency employees in order to facilitate collaboration among various agencies with the ultimate goal of improving children's health.

Each training program consisted of 9 days (approximately 8 hours each), in either one-day or two-day sessions across a six month time period. Each session had different trainers (one to three trainers per day) as well as a different theme (i.e., seeing the big picture, facilitating collaborative leadership, partnering with the community). Group activities, discussions, and lectures comprised training sessions.

We were members of an evaluation team who observed approximately 136 hours of SLI1 and SLI2 training sessions. Field notes were taken during sessions, resulting in 360 pages of field notes. Copies of all training materials and correspondence from the training program executive were collected, resulting in 418 pages. Consenting training participants also completed surveys at three points during the training program. Finally, approximately four to six months following the training, two members of the evaluation team conducted follow-up interviews with training participants at their agency offices, resulting in 944 pages of double-spaced transcripts.

One State

The fourth training program, One State (OS), took a train-the-trainer approach. This training program was conducted for 123 trainees across five sites within the state. All training participants were selected by one state agency; training participants were either employees of this state agency or employees of the agency's community partners (e.g., United Way). The goal of this training program was to equip trainees with the skills and materials needed to conduct collaboration training within their organizations and communities.

While the themes, curricula, and corresponding materials of each session remained consistent across training sites, the dates, trainers, and trainees varied by location. OS participants saw the same two trainers at each session. All of the trainers were employed by a

university-affiliated community consulting group called University Community Consulting (UCC). UCC developed the training curriculum that featured a series of assignments, group activities, and discussions to teach concepts, as well as a model of how to teach the concepts to others. Three sessions, each two days in length, took place in various venues over the course of seven months.

Two of the researchers were members of the evaluation team who observed the 50 hours of OS sessions at one of the five locations, resulting in 121 pages of field notes. All training sites used the same training manual, schedule, and activities, ensuring program consistency. Additionally, one member of the evaluation team attended a day-long follow-up session four months after the conclusion of the training program. Copies of all training materials used by the training participants were collected, resulting in 504 pages. Consenting training participants also completed online surveys at three points during the training program.

Thus, across the four cases, we observed 283 hours of the training, and gathered data from 216 trainees in the field. Also, 141 trainers were observed delivering these training experiences (CL had at least 12 trainers per day, while the remaining three training programs utilized two to four trainers each day). We witnessed both the formal training programs, as well as informal interactions among trainees, among trainers, and between trainees and trainers. Observations resulted in 731 pages of field notes and 1154 pages of training participant interview transcripts, and 1072 pages of training documents. Across the four cases, there were slightly more female than males; trainees ranged between late 20s to early 50s, and were predominantly Caucasian.

Conundrums in the Field

After observing these training programs, it was clear to us that commonly used training evaluation models (e.g., Kirkpatrick, 1976, 1998) were inadequate for assessing the quality of training communication, or training practice. Most training evaluations use post-training assessments to determine an individual's effectiveness in a work-related task, often identified as the transfer of learning (Kirwan & Birchall, 2006; Noe, 2005). Not only are the outcomes the primary focus of these models of evaluation, the models generally acknowledge only one type of evaluator, that of training participant.

Two conundrums arising from our three-year experience in the field prompted us to reflect on these data collected across four training programs. First, training participants' assessment of the training almost never matched our assessment of the training. Second, we could not identify a systematic way to reconcile those differences. Thus, we posed the following question:

RQ: How do trainees and professional evaluators construct evaluations of training quality?

Data Analysis

Similar to Zorn, Page, and Cheney's (2000) case study investigation of a New Zealand city government's planned change process, the interpretive model offered here was not conceived a priori, nor did it necessarily emerge from the data (Charmaz, 2000, 2002). Rather, the PETP model emerged organically from dialogic analysis. Our experiences across these four

case studies were cultural observations, which we discussed regularly. In the earliest days of discussion, we met frequently to share our experiences via accounts and narratives of our training observations and evaluations. Reactions to these accounts varied greatly; some accounts were met with immediate agreement, others immediate contention. As we immersed ourselves in the data (i.e., read and reread) from these case studies as well as the training literature, our periodic conversations frequently involved debate and refinement of our own and each others' evaluative explanations of the quality of training practices we observed.

Our conversations underscored the necessary distinction between communication as the *medium* of training and communication as the *outcome* of training. Simultaneously, however, we tried not to privilege our assessment of training quality (i.e., whether or not the training achieved its outcomes; Kraiger et al., 1993) over the assessments of trainees. Thus, we met regularly to argue for interpretive models that could explain most accurately our own as well as trainees' perspectives on training across each of the case studies. Interpretive models ranged from line graphs, flow charts, and quadrants. Finally, after much debate, we came to intersubjective agreement (Anderson, 1996b) on the interpretive model presented here.

Results and Interpretation Across Four Cases

Examining training practice, rather than just training outcomes allowed us to achieve a nuanced explanation of the communicative processes that influence individual and organizational outcomes. Three communicative dimensions—training content, training process, and trainer—were found to be used either implicitly or explicitly by both training participants and evaluators when evaluating training in each of the four cases. Over time, patterns were observed in how the audiences of training participants and evaluators viewed the interrelation of the dimensions. These consistently contradictory evaluations led us to propose dual perspectives best represented by a paired model. Each of these dimensions is defined and applied to the cases, followed by an overview of the PETP model.

Content

The first evaluation dimension of training is the program's content, defined as the information, definitions, descriptions, concepts, or skills presented to trainees (Beebe, Mottet, & Roach, 2004). Across the four case studies, the content—delivered as messages from the trainers—consisted of information about topics such as leadership, collaboration, and community awareness. Content has typically been evaluated on the basis of its organization (Beebe et al.), relevance (Chesbro & Wanzer, 2006), and alignment with training objectives (Ogilvy, 1994).

Process

The second evaluation dimension of training is the program's process. In the case studies, processes utilized included lectures, group activities, and multimedia presentations. While there is no one best method of training delivery (Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001), researchers evaluate process on the basis of its variety (Beebe et al., 2004; Segrin & Givertz, 2003) as well as its cost-effectiveness, relevance to the content, ease of use, level of engagement, and use of technology (Salas & Cannon-Bowers).

Process is used in the literature to refer to training on a specific procedure or activity. In the PETP model, this term describes the training experience as a whole, referring to

appropriateness of the andragogical techniques employed. In essence, process consists of the way(s) in which content is delivered to training participants.

Trainer

The final dimension discernible in participant and evaluator evaluations is the program's trainer and his or her expressed characteristics. In the case studies, trainees worked with a trainer anywhere from 30 minutes to multiple days, and therefore became familiar with the trainer to varying degrees. Researchers have assessed trainers on their clarity (Chesbro & Wanzer, 2006), credibility (Myers & Martin, 2006), and immediacy (Richmond, Lane, & McCroskey, 2006), as well as trainers' abilities at the skills being trained.

Modeling Dual Perspectives

The three dimensions are present in each of the components of the PETP model. Beyond identifying three critical dimensions of training practice, this model accounts for insider and outsider views of training evaluation represented by the Involvement Perspective and Substantive Perspective, respectively.

The Involvement Perspective

The Involvement Perspective (see Figure 1) of the PETP represents *training participants'* perspectives among the three dimensions. Across interviews and field observations, evaluation of the trainer tended to be the primary area of focus for trainees when evaluating training. Based on the trainer's friendliness, general attitude, and approachability, training participants quickly appeared to form evaluations of him or her as likable or unlikable. For example, when asked about memorable training sessions, trainees often described the trainer rather than the content or process. In fact, six months after the training, many trainees could not remember training messages from a particular training session, but they recalled an evaluation of the person facilitating the session. This dynamic implies that trainees identified more with the trainer in terms of personality and communication style than the content. Because so many training participants lacked this recall, we also infer that neither trainee personality nor work environment created this effect.

According to our collective observations across the case studies, participants' affective reactions of the trainer seemed to influence their evaluations of the training process he or she employed. Trainees' judgment of process tended to be how interesting or enjoyable the training session was; this evaluation then dictated their involvement. Recollection of specific activities used during the training was frequent during follow-up interviews, even if the rationale for the activity (i.e., content), was forgotten. Involvement often consisted of participating in simple activities (e.g., training participants were asked to draw their vision of the city) that required little trainee effort and could be approached rather casually. Activities that took cognitive effort to apply ideas discussed in the session or that required trainees to work on a particular task for an extended period of time tended to be evaluated poorly. Overall, training participants felt the process was either boring or fun, resulting in an ineffective or effective rating, respectively, on the Involvement Perspective.

Training participants' evaluations were rarely based on the dimension of content. Specifically, trainees commented least on the information they learned in the training programs.

Despite the personal and professional long-term implications of training content, uninteresting, difficult, or repetitive information was given an evaluation of weak, whereas new and easily applicable information was given an evaluation of strong. Training participants did not appear to see relationships among the dimensions of training content, training process, or trainer, or suggest that one was contingent upon another. Generally, training participants' comments covered a broad spectrum of components, but most were pronounced on affective responses to the instructor and next on the perceived utility or application of the training (see Morgan & Casper, 2000).

The Involvement Perspective reflects training participants' rankings of trainer, process, and content from most important to least important on the left side of the model. Each dimension is evaluated in one of two ways: trainer is unlikable or likable; process is ineffective or effective; and content is weak or strong. Dimensions of this perspective are to be read from the top down, following the appropriate evaluation of each dimension. Once each dimension is evaluated, one can move to the composite and overall assessment of training quality—low, moderate, or high.

The Substantive Perspective

The Substantive Perspective (see Figure 2) represents the *evaluators'* implicit, but reflexively identified perspective of their training evaluation and is read in the same manner as the Involvement Perspective. Subordination of trainer to process and subordination of process to content are intentional. Interestingly, we implicitly ranked the dimensions exactly opposite of training participants.

Again, the dimensions are listed down the left side of the model. This model is also to be read from the top down, following the appropriate evaluation of each dimension. Once each dimension is evaluated, a composite and overall assessment of training quality—low, moderate, or high—can be made.

As is commonly recommended, content should be designed based upon learning objectives, and without strong content, training is not likely to be of high quality. Content should be both relevant and applicable to trainees' jobs and should support the specified objectives. Process, as the second dimension, can be ranked ineffective or effective based upon the level of engagement afforded by various training techniques and its suitability to the content and audience (e.g., small group discussions to discuss collaboration and problem-solving would likely be worthwhile). The last dimension, trainer, is assessed as unlikable or likable. While an unlikable trainer is not ideal, high quality training can still take place if content and process are of high quality (i.e., strong and effective, respectively). Likability is a subjective dimension, and is often based on communication style. Generally, trainers who are polite, respectful, friendly, helpful, and credible would generally anchor the positive pole of this dimension. While objectivity could be particularly challenging on this final dimension when trainers are also serving as evaluators, focusing the majority of the evaluation on the assessment of the dimensions of content and process rather than their appeal to trainees will likely yield the best results.

Training at Community Leadership

The PETP model was developed across all training observations in the three training programs. For the sake of brevity, the Community Leadership (CL) training case is used to exemplify its application.

Participant View of Training Practice

Inductive analysis of trainees' evaluations of training led us to evaluate this training program as High Quality on the Involvement Perspective (Figure 1). Discussion among project groups throughout training indicated trainees' evaluations of training were mixed, but mostly positive. In a few instances, trainees complained of being confused by instructions; usually, however, these same participants reported feeling appreciative and proud of their training. Additionally, constant comparative analysis indicated 15 of 19 trainees interviewed evaluated the training positively.

Trainer. Consistently, trainees' evaluations of training, whether observed in the field or during interviews, used the criteria of (a) likability of the trainer or (b) process enjoyment in order to evaluate training. In one instance, a class member described feeling like the executive director of CL was a "long-lost bud" after completing the training. Class members described a trainer as "very approachable," "caring," "fun," and an "ideal role model." Yet another trainer was described by class members as "articulate," "a super nice guy," "likable," and "a good leader." In each of these cases, the likability of the trainer was the implicit primary criteria trainees used in their evaluations of the training.

Process. Class members also referred to their enjoyment of the process. For instance, while discussing their impressions of the previous training day, one class member remarked, the training was "refreshing, just plain fun." During a debriefing a class member offered, "[I] enjoyed this afternoon;" in another, a class member explained, "everything was energizing and good." These positive remarks suggest the training was effective from the trainees' perspective.

Content. While rare, some trainees questioned aspects of the training's content specifically. For example, during a debriefing a CL class member directly challenged a position advocated by a trainer saying, "We need to decide if [the session] is about facts or policy." The member's implication was that the trainer was advocating political positions and not focusing on factual information. However, this same participant evaluated the training very highly when interviewed six months later, leading us to further confirm trainees' implicit prioritizing of the Involvement Perspective over the Substantive Perspective.

Evaluator View of Training Practice

As evaluators, and independent of training participants' assessments, we evaluated the training to be of moderate quality according of the Substantive Perspective (see Figure 2). Overall, CL training lacked content precision, but employed a variety of andragogical techniques, while trainer likability varied by trainer. The following analysis presents our evaluation of CL training, as evaluators, using the Substantive Perspective of the PETP model.

Content. Repeatedly, the professional skills training of CL failed to explicitly and discreetly define the basic terms it purported to instruct. Terms such as *civility*, *consensus building*,

facilitation, group decision making, listening, servant leadership, and vision were used throughout training. However, these terms were never defined nor distinguished from one another. Not distinguishing among these concepts resulted in confusion. For example, during a debriefing discussion regarding consensus building a class member questioned, "Are we talking about buying in or living with?" Others voiced equally confused statements such as, "Are there different types of consensus?" and consensus does "not [mean] that you agree." Despite the confusion voiced by trainees, no trainer provided clarification of these terms.

In addition to the lack of definitional precision, the CL training made erroneous claims about some of the outdated materials used. Kolb's (1981, 1984) learning styles inventory (LSI) was presented to draw training participants' awareness to their own, as well as others', personality traits. The LSI determines a person's preferred method of learning: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, or active experimentation. Kolb defended the LSI from Freedman and Stumpf's (1980) critique of the measure by explaining the LSI was never intended to present learning styles as fixed or genetic traits. Rather, Kolb argued that a static view of learning styles is erroneous and potentially dangerous when used to "stereotype" and "pigeon hole individuals and their behavior" (1984, p. 291). Kolb has most recently expanded the learning styles from the four mentioned above to nine, arguing this reconfiguration prevents such categorization and helps individuals conceptualize the styles as positions on continuous dimensions rather than fixed personality traits (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Despite Kolb's warning and his updated work throughout the years, CL presented the initial version of the LSI and emphasized preferred methods of learning as fixed traits. Thus, we deemed this portion of the curriculum's content inaccurate, as it consisted of inappropriate and outdated applications.

Also, while the explicit purpose of training was to enhance leadership skills, a majority of content was related to partisan and political appeals. We regarded this as a weakness of the content because these value-laden messages lacked a specific connection to the enhancement of leadership--the explicitly stated objective of the training. However, one aspect of the training strengthened content: Trainers were experts in their fields. Disappointingly, these experts rarely connected their messages to developing trainees' professional leadership skills. Thus, the lack of definitional precision, inaccurate use of the LSI, and the lack of connection between stated objectives and content led us to evaluate CL's training content as weak on this dimension.

Process. Even with content limitations, CL trainers employed numerous appropriate andragogical techniques. Across training sessions, class members took part in experiential learning (e.g., served in minor roles at nonprofit organizations), engaged in small and large group discussion formats, contributed to large group debriefings, participated in role playing activities (e.g., a game that reflected the difficulties of balancing a city's budget), heard lectures from experts in various fields (e.g., an official from social services explained the role of welfare in aiding families), individually interviewed local experts as homework between sessions, toured locations of training interest (e.g., the capitol building), and applied their learning to group projects benefiting area nonprofits. While the variety and appropriateness of these techniques for adult learners necessarily make the training's process sufficient, it should be noted that instances existed when class members complained of lacking time and adequate instructions to complete these training activities. At other times, trainees were easily distracted from training tasks,

expressed boredom, and joked around with one another off topic while the trainer was presenting material or during small group activities. Further, the process employed often did not support the content communicated by the trainer.

Despite the numerous training techniques employed by CL, its content lacked accuracy and clarity. For example, the training curriculum was focused on leadership skills, but few training activities required trainees to demonstrate leadership. Presuming that trainees could and would transfer cognitive information into behavior in a different setting without directives or debriefing is an inferential leap. Moreover, whatever learning class members acquired from the curriculum's process was offset by the problematic content. For this reason, *process* is placed as a subordinate dimension to *content* within the Substantive Perspective (see Figure 2).

Trainer. CL training was conducted by numerous trainers. As evaluators, we rarely considered the likability of trainers for the purposes of our formal evaluations of training in situ. However, because training participants across these case studies regularly expressed valenced evaluations of the trainer, we undertook an evaluation of CL by affective response to the trainer. Not surprisingly, our own retrospective evaluations of trainer likability ranged by personal preference and given trainer. Great variability was expected because likability is an affective response and largely subjective. Interestingly, meta-analyses of training research tend to discount a relationship between affective responses to the training and learning outcomes (e.g., Alliger, Tannenbaum, Bennett, Traver, & Shotland, 1997; Alvarez, Salas, & Garofano, 2004). However, affective reactions within the training literature tend to be operationalized as reactions to the usefulness, transferability, utility, and relevance of training and not the trainer per se (Alvarez et al.).

Trainees consistently offered their evaluation of training based upon their affective response to the trainer as a person. The difference between trainees' affective responses to *training* and trainees' affective responses to the *trainer* may explain the discrepancy between what we observed and what the training literature tends to conclude. Trainer likability was included within the Substantive Perspective because of training participants' consistent emphasis on this issue. However, because of the inconclusive influence affective response has been shown to have on learning outcomes within the training literature, the trainer dimension is subordinated to both *content* and *process*.

Discussion

Across these four case studies, discrepancies were apparent between the evaluations of training participants and our own as evaluators observing the training practices. Differences often were not slight, but nearly opposite; when we held favorable impressions of a particular session, trainees' surveys and interview responses suggested they were quite disappointed. Intrigued by this disparity, we examined the reason(s) for these divergent perspectives inductively.

Regarding our research question, how do trainees and professional evaluators construct evaluations of training quality? We found that training participants and evaluators viewed the three dimensions of training content, process, and trainer differently. As a result, each group

constructed evaluations of training practice quality according to their own prioritization of and preferences for these dimensions.

Despite hearing the same training messages, our interpretations—and thus our evaluations—of those messages differed based on a variety of contextual factors (e.g., past experience, attitudes, familiarity with the information, personality characteristics). Furthermore, from a communication theory perspective, it is reasonable that these two audiences would derive different meanings from the same message (Anderson, 1996a). Communication is a dynamic process; changing the speaker, message, or audience will change meanings—these changes can be slight or profound. For example, during one CL session, a trainer explained that group decision making can be improved by nominal group techniques in which group members brainstorm individually, then refine their ideas with the group. Next, the trainer asked small groups to practice, initiating the technique with individuals working alone. We, as third-party evaluators, deemed the lecture and activity to be extremely useful and accurate. Trainees, on the other hand, rarely recalled the lecture and activity during subsequent interviews. When they were reminded of the session, many reported the lecture and activity were boring because they reduced trainees' chances to socialize with others. Thus, both relevant audiences interpreted—that is, assigned meaning to—the same training practice differently.

As this example illustrates, two evaluation perspectives were necessary to address the different audiences' perspectives on content, process, and trainer. The Involvement and Substantive Perspectives of the Paired Evaluation Training Practice (PETP) model were inductively generated from analyses of four training program case studies. Instead of basing training evaluations solely upon outcomes as advocated by Kirkpatrick (1998) and Tannenbaum et al. (1993), we recommend researchers and practitioners begin by evaluating training practice by including the evaluation of process, *as well as* outcomes. Combining throughput-based evaluation with output-based evaluation will help overcome the *black box* dilemma of training research.

The Substantive and Involvement Perspectives of the Paired Evaluation Training Practice Model demonstrate why the relationships identified in Tannenbaum et al.'s (1993) model are not straightforward. Contrasting our observations of the training programs with trainees' evaluations of the training programs illuminated the ways in which two perspectives of the same content, process, and trainer(s) can differ. We posit that both evaluative frames exist simultaneously, and that trainers must recognize both perspectives. One perspective does not supersede the other, as each is logical and rational to their respective parties. The contesting perspectives also provide an explanation for how training reactions are linked to learning—a relationship that was theorized (i.e., Kirkpatrick 1976) and rejected (Tannenbaum et al., 1993).

The two simultaneous perspectives of the model could also aid researchers in exploring which training methods, processes, and techniques will be most productive given a specific training situation and its objectives. Moreover, in addition to post-training evaluation, using the PETP model to evaluate multiple day training during its delivery may help trainers identify deficiencies or problems and then intervene with training participants or change content or delivery style to achieve more effective outcomes. Ultimately, trainers should be encouraged to first adopt the Substantive Perspective for self-evaluations, as it requires them to use an *other-*

rather than *self*-orientation. This prioritization allows trainers to view the three dimensions in a more objective manner as an outside evaluator would.

Practically, we call for dialogue about ways in which to align training participants' seemingly natural model of training evaluation that focuses on trainer likability (Involvement Perspective) with more rigorous models of training evaluation that focus on content and process (Substantive Perspective). Further, the PETP model should be coupled with learning measures (e.g., Kraiger et al., 1993) to determine the relationships between the perspectives and learning outcomes in the short, intermediate, and long-term.

Conclusion

Training evaluation is a task too seldom undertaken, and these models provide an accessible method to help reverse that trend. Additionally, it is important to recognize that even poor training (as assessed by either participant or evaluator based on content, process, trainer, or any combination of these three) can result in some type of increase in job skill. Even if a participant does not genuinely enjoy the training process, she may still gain knowledge (i.e., content). Likewise, a trainer who offends training participants with foul language and an abrasive personality may still be successful in providing a coherent training program (i.e., process). But we suspect that the *best* training is that in which both trainees and evaluators, rate the three interdependent, communicative dimensions in positive ways. From this position, one could speculate that a training program evaluated in such a way would have greater potential for achieving learning goals and affecting the translation of learning into action.

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The Paired Evaluation of Training Practice Model (PETP)

Figure 1

Involvement Perspective of Training Practice Evaluation (Trainees' Perspectives)

Trainer	Unlikable		Unlikable		Likable			
Process	Ineffective		Effective		Ineffective		Effective	
Content	Weak	Strong	Weak	Strong	Weak	Strong	Weak	Strong
Training Quality:	Low		Moderate		High			

Figure 2

Substantive Perspective of Training Practice Evaluation (Evaluators' Perspectives)

Content	Weak				Strong		Strong	
Process	Ineffective		Effective		Ineffective		Effective	
Trainer	Unlikable	Likable	Unlikable	Likable	Unlikable	Likable	Unlikable	Likable
Training Quality:	Low				Moderate		High	