NATURE AND IMPORTANCE OF STRATEGY SELECTION


Although the terms method, technique, approach, and strategy have often used interchangeably, there are important differences among them. To clarify these terms, the definitions discussed below are offered.

**Instructional Strategy.** An instructional strategy is a combination of teaching methods and techniques designed to accomplish an instructional job. It includes mediating devices and media when used, and a system for organizing instructors and trainees.

**Instructional Method.** An instructional method is the basic approach to instruction. It may be a lecture, demonstration, conference, simulation, performance, programmed instruction, study assignment, tutoring, or a combination of two more of these basic approaches. Methods may be catalogued under three headings:

1. **Primary.** An approach that is objectively judged to be the most effective and efficient means of attaining an instructional objective.

2. **Supporting.** An approach that is objectively judged to be an essential complement to a primary method; that is, it must be used in conjunction with the primary method to ensure the attainment of the instructional goal.

3. **Alternative.** An approach that may be used as a substitute for the primary or supporting method when circumstances do not permit the use of the optimum method.

**Instructional Technique.** An instructional technique is a means of instruction that complements a method; for example, questioning, handling student responses, and using visual and auditory aids.

**System of Organization.** A system of organization is a means of grouping instructors and/or trainees for instruction; for example, random grouping, team teaching, and team learning.

**Mediating Device.** A mediating device is a specialized piece of equipment, or a system, specifically designed to assist in the presentation of instruction; for example, teaching machines, classroom trainee response systems, computer-based instructional systems, and television systems (including video recording and layback facilities).
Media. Media include printed or duplicated materials and graphics, projected, still or motion photographic materials, video and sound recordings, CDs, the Intra- and Internet and three-dimensional aids and devices.

IMPORTANCE OF STRATEGY SELECTION

Except for the selection of training objectives, proper selection of strategy and supporting media will do more to promote efficiency and effectiveness of instruction than any other measure. This fact has largely been overlooked in training and education. All too often the selection of strategy has been dictated by expediency rather than by need. Strategy must be selected through systematic, objective means if inefficiency in attaining objectives or, worse, failure to achieve objectives is to be avoided. Two requirements must be met by the strategy selected:

Compatibility. There is no single best method of teaching that applies to all learning situations or instructional objectives. The systems designer must choose the strategy that is most compatible with the objectives of the instruction, the nature of the training organization, the facilities and equipment available, the background and level of the trainees, and the abilities of the instructional staff.

Variation of Methods. The accomplished instructor has developed skill in using a great variety of methods and techniques. For each objective to be reached, the instructor should select the specific methods that will best carry trainees to the goal. The instructor who is limited in methods often tries to reach an objective by using inappropriate techniques. The results are lack of trainee interest and attention, inefficient learning, and failure to achieve the instructional goals. Too many instructors use only one or two methods. Many instructors lecture most of the time. With the great variety of interesting and effective ways of helping trainees learn that have recently been developed, the instructor should develop a repertoire of approaches.

FACTORS IN STRATEGY SELECTION

Every instructional strategy has certain advantages and limitations. It is essential that careful consideration be given to these advantages and limitations to ensure that the strategy selected for a specific instructional job is the one that will be most effective and efficient. Strategy decisions must be based on careful analysis of the training situation from several standpoints: instructional objectives; course content; trainee population; instructors; instructional space, facilities, equipment, and materials; time; and costs. Each of these factors is discussed here.

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

The overriding consideration in the selection of a strategy is the objective of instruction, that is, what the trainee will be required to do at the end of a stage of training or on the job. If the objectives of a specific block of instruction deal with
job knowledges as supporting elements for the development of terminal behaviors, the strategy selected may be different from the method chosen to develop job performance skills.

Objectives must also be examined to determine whether the instructional job is:

- to introduce a subject
- to provide remedial assistance
- to accelerate, enrich, or build academic skills
- to teach manual or manipulative skill
- to build concepts
- to teach operation and functioning of equipment
- to develop teamwork
- to stimulate interest
- to improve reasoning problem-solving ability
- to accomplish anyone of a host of other objectives that are appropriate for formal training.

COURSE CONTENT

The nature of the content itself must be considered in selecting an instructional strategy. The stability of the content, whether it is verbal or manipulative, and its difficulty determine to a great extent the strategy that is most appropriate.

TRAINEE POPULATION

The size, educational level, prior training, aptitudes, maturity, and reading, writing, and speaking ability of the trainee group, as well as the teaching location, must be considered in selecting a strategy. For example, optimum conditions for the application of specific methods demand establishment of maximum and minim class sizes. Where class size exceeds or falls short of the established figure, an alternative method may be necessary.

INSTRUCTORS

The number, quality, and competencies of available instructors are important factors to consider in selecting a strategy. For example, in a given situation, if technically qualified instructors are not available in sufficient numbers to handle the trainee input, the use of programmed materials, rather than a more appropriate combination of demonstration and practical exercise, may be dictated.

INSTRUCTIONAL SPACE, FACILITIES, EQUIPMENT, AND MATERIALS

Each instructional strategy requires the use of specific types of facilities, equipment, and materials. If the required facilities are not available, an alternative method may be dictated. For example, if it has been determined those computers would be the most effective medium for the presentation of a block of instruction, but the computers are not available, an alternative approach will be required.
TIME

The time available for a particular block of instruction also governs the strategy selected. Conference, performance, and special participative methods demand larger allotments of time than do the lecture and demonstration methods. If time is extremely limited, an alternative to the most effective method may be required.

COSTS

The matter of costs is of paramount importance in any training program. Criteria related to costs are not separate and distinct from other factors. Obviously, time, facilities, personnel, and the like, have price tags, but two items are important enough to warrant separate consideration. First, the cost of a strategy must be reasonable when measured against teaching effectiveness. Other factors being equal, if the expected gains in learning effectiveness of a particular strategy do not offset any additional costs incurred by the use of that strategy, a less costly, even if slightly less effective, instructional strategy may be dictated. Second, savings in time, personnel, or facilities must justify the investment in the strategy. Here, the point is that an acceptable relationship between investment in the strategy and savings in other areas must exist. In sum, the cost of the strategy, regardless of its effectiveness, must under normal circumstances be offset by savings in other aspects of the training program.