Activity-Based Training Design

Transforming the Learning of Knowledge

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ACTIVITY-BASED SOLUTIONS

All of the activity-based methods described in this book originally started out as individual solutions to individual problems. For example:

- Info Hunt (Activity 4) was developed as a way of getting some long and complex policy information across to people, not in order that they should be able to remember every detail, but in order to make them aware of the scope and content of it, and where to find the detailed information when needed in the future.
- NDE Cards and Traffic Lights (Activities 8 and 9) were developed as a way of making the delivery of a session on questioning skills more active and engaging.
- The Evaluation Game was developed to provide something useful and enjoyable to do whilst the trainers provided one-to-one feedback to the participants.

Only afterwards was it discovered that the principles behind the individual solutions for particular sessions, could be applied to other sessions as well. The hierarchy element of Washing Line (Activity 12) could be used for establishing the relative difficulties of different types of change, as well as different types of assertiveness. Names, definitions and examples could be applied to many more things than just types of question.

It is my hope therefore that you will be able to examine some of the training sessions which you deliver and apply some of the activity-based methods to them. I will stick my neck out here and say that there is not one straight ‘input’ session on any topic that cannot be transformed into a more interesting activity. When you get used to working with activity-based methods, you may well find that when you look at an ‘input’ session in a training module, an appropriate activity just jumps straight out at you!
You may also find that you will be constantly looking for new ‘problems’ on which to apply an activity-based solution. This of course leads to the possibility of inventing more and more activity-based methods. I have devised a few, but there must be many more just waiting to be developed!

INTRODUCING ACTIVITY-BASED TRAINING

There are a few issues that you may face when trying to introduce activity-based training. These relate to introducing it to an organization, and then introducing it to groups of learners.

Introducing to the organization

You may need to negotiate with any decision-makers about introducing activity-based training methods within the organization. The benefits should be easily identified. If you get the go-ahead you can then consider how you can introduce it. One way is to do it gradually over a period of time and identify suitable sessions to transform as you go along. Alternatively you can introduce it in one go for a particular course and transform most of the sessions before launching it as a new event. One or two pilot sessions would be worth considering as you can then see how the participants react to the new approach. Much will also depend on how much time you have to design and produce the materials.
Introducing to learners

One of the major concerns about introducing activity-based methods is that the learners will not accept them. This is especially true of the more game-like activities. When trying out a new activity, I was always anxious that it would be judged as being too trivial or childish. At first I was surprised that no such comments were made, but now I can honestly say that the only reactions I have had have been positive. Various methods have been used with various groups both at home and abroad, at different job grades and levels, and there have been no complaints at all about trivialization or childishness.

Perhaps it could be put down to the fact that, on the whole, people are people, and people on the whole prefer to be relaxed and have fun while they are learning. No one has ever said anything like ‘Actually I much prefer it when the trainer talks us through a large number of PowerPoint slides’!

Having said this, there are some things that you can do to help introduce the methods to learners so that they do not come as too great a shock. Some of these things are:

- Mention at the start of the event that some new methods are going to be used, and they have been designed to combine serious learning with serious fun.
- If you usually set some learning ‘ground rules’ at the start of an event, include a ground rule of something like: ‘Be open to new ways of learning’.
- If you are using an activity-based method for the first time, say so. Tell the learners that they are going to be the first people to experience the new approach, and that you would appreciate their feedback at the end.
- After you have run the activity, you could also tell the group how it used to be delivered, and get their views on what they think others would prefer in the future.
• Make other elements of the training relaxed and light-hearted too (for example, using illustrations and animations in any PowerPoint slides, and use colour and illustrations in any pre-course documentation or invitations that are sent out).

Once again I can only reiterate what I said at the beginning of the book, that the use of these methods has, in my experience, made the learning process quicker and more effective than the traditional ways of disseminating knowledge. The activity-based methods are simply just more fun – not only for the learners, but for the trainers too.