

/TREND/

Pumping Neurons

New software may help strengthen mental muscles.

By Eva Kaplan-Leiserson

IF YOU STARE at a computer screen for hours a day, you might feel like your brain is turning to mush. But new software may actually reverse that process and improve mental agility, memory, focus, and more.

Computer applications that claim to boost brain power aren't new. Programs that assert they improve memory, reading ability or speed, and other mental abilities have been on the market for years. But recently released software demonstrates that the technologies are getting more sophisticated and are based on more-rigorous research. Here are three programs that may prove useful for you or your learners.

MyBrainTrainer. Billed as "the world's first virtual mental gymnasium," the program is accessible online for a minimal fee. You can take the BrainMaster Challenge, a sequence of seven exercises that gives you a "whole-brain workout" (includes work on psychomotor reflexes, perceptual reflexes, cognitive quickness, decision making, perceptual acuity, memory capacity, and memory agility). You can also choose to work through a 21-day basic training course or complete application-specific brain training (for particular focuses such as executive decision making, learning and comprehension, test taking, and more). Other site resources include trial-by-trial analyses, the ability to compare your scores with others', discussion boards, and more.

The company says the mental challenges, called elementary cognitive tasks, stimulate neurons to fire more rapidly, increase blood flow to specific

regions of the brain, and increase the number of neural receptors and connections within your brain.

A study by the Delos Institute, a research facility associated with the University of Texas and Open International University, found that MyBrainTrainer improved cognitive efficiency and speed, increased IQ, and decreased anxiety.

[MORE/www.mybraintrainer.com](http://www.mybraintrainer.com)

Play Attention. This software is designed to improve focus and concentration for adults and children with attention deficit disorders. Workers with such conditions may experience problems with organization, task completion, and focus, and the software's developers, Unique Logic and Technology, say Play Attention can help.



Users wear a head piece resembling a bicycle helmet, which holds three sensors to measure brain waves. Then they play a series of simple games—for example, Glider, which asks them to push a bird to the top of the screen using their mental focus. As they pay attention to the bird, it rises. As they lose focus, it falls. The company recommends two 30- to 40-minute sessions a week and says that after 40 to 60 hours (or about a month and a half of use) users should

see permanent changes in their time-on-task, focus, reading comprehension, and so forth.

The solution's technology has been used for about 25 years to train pilots in the United States Air Force and National Aeronautical Space Administration, the company says. The principle behind it is "neuroplasticity," the brain's ability to form new neural pathways during the learning process. "[Attention Deficit Disorder] and [Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder] can be overcome or at least managed with correct training," says the company's press materials.

[MORE/www.playattention.com](http://www.playattention.com)

Brain Health Training Program. You'll have to forgive this software's lack of a catchy name, because it's still in development. The Posit Science Corporation, co-founded by University of California neuroscience professor Michael Merzenich, is creating the application that turns exercises to stimulate various brain functions into computer games with animated coaches.

According to a *San Francisco Chronicle* article, the program promises to help reverse aging symptoms such as memory loss, declining vision and hearing, and reduced motor control. It also takes advantage of the concept of neuroplasticity.

More than three dozen brain scientists from around the world are working with Posit to develop the technology, and the company is collaborating with various academic and government-sponsored centers to run studies.

Residents at a San Francisco retirement home are currently testing the software. According to the *Chronicle* arti-



The Play Attention helmet captures users' brain waves.

cle, Posit plans to release the first module, which focuses on hearing, by the end of 2005. Additional modules will target eyesight, problem solving and multi-tasking, motor control, and balance and mobility. The company says some free trials will be available.

MORE/www.sfgate.com, search on "Calisthenics for Aging Brains"

MORE/www.positscience.com/faqs.html

Fast Fact

Training and development is one of the top 20 fastest-growing professional jobs, according to a recent *Fortune* magazine article entitled "Hot Careers for the Next 10 Years." Growth is estimated at 22.3 percent, from Bureau of Labor Statistics projections.

COOL TOOL MORE

/HOW TO/

Leave Work Behind

Are you thinking of putting off or cutting short your summer vacation because of job responsibilities? Or are you going on a trip but planning to complete tasks while you're away? You're not alone. Sixty percent of respondents to a survey by office supply company Quill said they have cancelled, postponed, or shortened a vacation due to their workload. Forty percent have taken work along with them on vacation.

Londa Della, Quill office protocol advisor, offers the following suggestions on making a clean break from the office.

Prepare early. Make vacation plans far enough in advance that you can manage deadlines and brief someone to cover crucial tasks while you're away.

Communicate. Use the auto-reply feature in your email program and update your outgoing phone message to let people know when you'll be away and who to contact in your place.

Leave an itinerary. Give someone your phone number and agenda so you can be contacted in an emergency.

Clear off your desk. Designate a bin for incoming paperwork to avoid out-of-control piles on your return.

Hire temporary help. Bringing in a temp can help ease your workload when you return. Ask someone you trust to supervise him or her while you're gone.

Create a file guide. Outline your filing system and how to find things. Include your methods for filing, processing, and follow-up.

Have fun and relax. A vacation can improve your health, lift your spirits, and enhance your creativity. In short, a vacation can make you a better employee.

jobs

/E-NEWS/

New Internet Domain Will Aid in Job Recruiting and Hiring

TOP-LEVEL DOMAINS. You may not know the term, but you see them every day: .com, .org, .edu, and so forth. They're the endings of the Internet addresses you navigate to with your web browser. And now there's a new one: .jobs. That domain will enable companies to designate a webpage specifically for their job listings. (For example, XYZ Corporation could list its jobs at www.xyz.jobs.)

The Society for Human Resource Management is one of several organizations that will be working together to create and manage the domain. According to SHRM, HR professionals believe the Internet offers the highest quality job applicants of all media, and it provides the best recruiting return-on-investment.

The new domain will make it easier for candidates to find and apply for jobs and let companies fill positions more quickly. After registration and other procedures are established, the first .jobs websites could appear in late summer or early fall 2005.

SOURCE/Society for Human Resource Management

/SMART LINK/

HOW-TO GUIDE FOR BUSINESS-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS
This helpful guide to partnering with schools is provided by The Council for Corporate & School Partnerships. Handy worksheets are included

MORE/www.corpschoolpartners.org/guide.shtml

/NEWS FLASH/

U.S. Census Data Reveals Pay Differences, Some Surprises

Recently released U.S. Census Bureau data shows differences in pay according to education level and ethnicity. Some of the data follows expected patterns—for example, four-year college graduates earn almost double the pay of workers with just high school diplomas (an average of \$51,000 versus \$28,000 a year).

Other data is more surprising. According to the Census Bureau, African-American and Asian women outearned their Caucasian colleagues in 2003, the year the earnings data was collected. Caucasian women with bachelor's degrees brought home an average of almost \$37,800; African-American women with a comparable education were paid \$41,000; and Asian women made almost \$43,700. Hispanic women earned \$37,600.

The data for men follows past trends. Caucasian men with bachelor's degrees earned an average of more than \$66,000 a year, while African-American, Hispanic, and Asian college graduates earned less (\$45,000, \$49,000, and \$52,000, respectively).

MORE www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/education/cps2004.html

SOURCE *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and the Robert W. Baird & Co ClassNotes newsletter

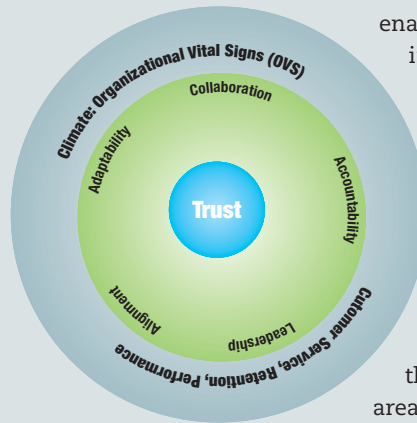
/SURVEY SAYS/

Organizational Climate Helps Predict Performance

KEY RELATIONSHIP FACTORS predict more than half of the difference between low and high performers, finds a new research study by the Institute for Organizational Performance. Trust alone predicts 46 percent of the difference.

Organizational Vital Signs, an assessment tool developed by emotional intelligence experts, examines six factors: accountability, collaboration, leadership, alignment, adaptability, and trust. Those climate factors were tested to determine how they affect performance, measured as a combination of customer service, job performance or productivity, and retention.

The study generated two key findings, according to Joshua Freedman, director of the study and the institute. “First, there is a measurable and strong link between how your people feel and how they perform. Second, different groups in your organization have dramatically different drivers of performance, and you’ll miss [an] opportunity if you stick to conventional ways of tracking these groups.”



Relationships drive performance. Statistical analysis enabled researchers to determine how specific elements of the climate predict performance in each area. In customer service, for example, 47 percent of the difference between low and high scores is predicted by the factors of accountability, collaboration, and alignment. But 43 percent of retention is predicted by leadership, alignment, and collaboration.

One implication, says Freedman, is that “relationships can no longer be a ‘soft’ area that gets a passing nod. Building strong relationships is a core leadership competency.”

Different groups have different drivers. For example, for the group that is least satisfied with the organizational climate overall, collaboration predicts almost 30 percent of customer service. However, collaboration only accounts for 3 percent among those people who are satisfied—the most important factor for that group is alignment (feeling connected with the organization’s mission). Therefore, the study shows that training and development tailored to a group’s satisfaction level can be more effective.

The almost 400 people in the study ranged in age from their 20s to their 60s and in position from entry-level workers to CEOs. They worked in education, industry, government, and service. A little more than half of the respondents were from the United States; others came from Europe, Canada, Asia, Latin America, and Africa.

Neither gender, age, nationality, nor industry sector significantly change the results.

MORE www.eqperformance.com

INSTITUTE FOR
ORGANIZATIONAL
PERFORMANCE

The Institute for Organizational Performance is a division of Six Seconds EQ Network

/GLOBAL 360/

Training Expenditures Growing in Australia and New Zealand

EDUCATION BUDGETS will rise in the next year, say more than half of the 1,200 companies surveyed by human resources firm Chandler Macleod Group. Currently, three-quarters of the organizations in Australia and New Zealand spend more than 1 percent of their payrolls on training and education. Says Chandler Macleod General Manager John Harland, "Employee education and training is now a major business priority, and organizations are clearly putting their money where their mouth is."

The survey also found that the companies believe education and training help recruit workers. Harland explains that skills shortages, low unemployment, and booming economies are putting employees in the driver's seat.

"That means organizations urgently need to implement strategies to avoid the high costs associated with staff turnover," he notes. "We have found training and further education to be one of the most effective tools for employee retention."

SOURCE/Fairfax New Zealand Limited

GOTO/Research and "Mind the (Talent) Gap,"
April T+D

/REALITY CHECK/

Top Ten Things That Keep HR Up at Night

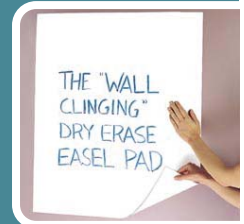
1. Health-care costs
2. Leadership development
3. Performance management
4. Retention
5. Strategic HR
6. Succession planning
7. Benchmarking and metrics
8. Future employee shortage
9. Best practices in recruitment
10. Effective use of technology

SOURCE/HR.com

/COOL TOOL/

Instant, Portable Whiteboard

These plastic sheets cling to most surfaces by static electricity, needing no tape or tacks. Write on them with dry-erase markers and then wipe them clean, or use permanent markers to save your notes. The pad of 35 pages fits standard easels, and the sheets roll up so you can take them anywhere.



MORE/www.cleansweepsupply.com/pages/item-red24391.html

/IN PRACTICE/

What's Your Style?

GOT STYLE? Of course you do. According to Elaine Biech, author of the new book *Training for Dummies*, each trainer brings to a session his or her unique style based on four dimensions: content, process, task, and people. In that model, content and process lie at opposite ends of a horizontal continuum, while task and people oppose each other on the vertical spectrum.

Content and process. Trainers who are more content-focused will put a higher priority on ensuring that all of the course information is passed on to participants. Trainers who are more process-focused highly value the flow of a training program and work to ensure that it runs smoothly. Most people fall not at one end or another but somewhere along the spectrum.

Task and people. Similarly, trainers' styles fall somewhere between the task and people ends of the vertical continuum. The task dimension refers to all of the steps necessary to manage the learning (for example, keeping records, creating a schedule, and setting up a training room). The people dimension focuses on meeting the needs of participants, perhaps at the expense of a schedule.

Biech emphasizes that all four components are necessary for successful sessions and that each trainer should incorporate some combination of the four into his or her personal style.

Laying the two continuums on top of each other results in a grid with four general categories of style preferences: presenting, guiding, coaching, and facilitating. None is better than the other, and each includes both strengths and weaknesses. The four style preferences, as outlined in *Training for Dummies*, are listed below.

Presenting. When a trainer's preferences are toward the content end of the horizontal scale and the task end of the vertical



cal scale, he or she

- delivers interesting presentations
 - enjoys being in front of a group
 - is a positive center of influence
 - is organized and in control
 - is comfortable delivering information
 - is engaging and quick-thinking.
- But, he or she
- may not enable learners' self-discovery
 - may have a problem with ego
 - may be manipulative or dominating
 - may be too structured.

Guiding. This style category combines the process end of the horizontal scale with the task end of the vertical scale. With this preference, a trainer

- states expectations and boundaries
- respects participants' active role in learning
- preempts difficult participants with ground rules to hold them accountable
- delivers a systematic presentation with a logical approach.

But he or she

- may be less flexible during presentations or sessions
- may not be aware of lagging interest or other dynamics
- has less ability to "wing it" when mechanicals malfunction.

Coaching. A trainer with this style preference combines the content end of the

horizontal scale with the people end of the vertical scale. He or she

- supports the individual
 - motivates and encourages
 - heads participants in the right direction
 - offers sincere enthusiasm and positive attitude
 - easily encourages participation
 - provides reinforcement.
- But he or she
- may not bring closure to topics or sections
 - may not be strong on content details
 - may lack respect or credibility
 - may become the resource rather than what is taught.

Facilitating. In this category, a trainer combines the process end of the horizontal scale with the people end of the vertical scale. He or she

- encourages active participation
 - is a good listener
 - tries to be on an equal level with participants
 - promotes interaction
 - draws on and validates experiences.
- But he or she
- may be less focused on content and too focused on discussion
 - may have a short attention span
 - may not be good with logistics
 - may lose control or track of time.

Biech encourages people to take time to ponder their preferences and to what degree they're balanced in the dimensions, reviewing their own strengths and weaknesses.

"No one style is 'better' than another," she says. "There's no need to try to change your style. It is simply who you are. Ideally, you should be able to move along the continuum depending on the situation you find yourself in. Master that flexibility, and you'll be able to write your own ticket as a trainer."

MORE/ www.http://store.astd.org/product.asp?prodid=3145&deptid=

/IN MEMORIAM/

Benjamin B. Tregoe

A STRONG PROPONENT of “basic beliefs” as a dynamic force for guiding organizational behavior, Benjamin Tregoe died on April 20 after a long battle with non-Hodgkins lymphoma. He was 77.

“Dr. Tregoe was an innovative pioneer,” said Bruce Keener, CEO and president of global consulting and training firm Kepner-Tregoe. “[He] was passionately committed to improving the critical-thinking capabilities of managers and workers in organizations around the world.”

In 1993, Tregoe realized a long-held dream when he established the not-for-profit Tregoe Education Forum to develop the problem-solving and decision-making skills of middle and high school students.

Tregoe was born in San Francisco in 1927. After serving in the U.S. Marine Corps, he received his bachelor’s degree from Whittier College and a Ph.D. in sociology from Harvard University. He also received an honorary LL.D. from Whittier College.



“Dr. Tregoe was passionately committed to improving the critical-thinking capabilities of managers and workers.”

In 1958, based on extensive field research, Tregoe and his partner Charles H. Kepner formulated a systematic thinking process for problem solving and decision making. At the time, those activities were typically considered to be a function of instinct and “gut feel.”

Kepner-Tregoe pushed the envelope of management education. The company was the first to develop a train-the-trainer model, which transferred skills to trainers who, in turn, imparted them to co-workers. That approach, along with process consulting, remains standard practice in the field of organization development.

Tregoe co-authored the management classic *The Rational Manager* as well as *The New Rational Manager: An Updated Edition for a New World*, *Top Management Strategy: What It Is and How to Make It Work*, *Vision in Action: Putting a Winning Strategy to Work*, *The Culture of Success: Building a Sustained Competitive Advantage by Living Your Corporate Beliefs*, and *Analytic Processes for School Leaders*.

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