

"IT APPEARS THAT BEHAVIOR MODELING'S STRENGTHS WILL ENABLE IT TO BE A USEFUL INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY FOR MANY YEARS."

WILL BEHAVIOR MODELING SURVIVE THE '80s?

BY JAMES C. ROBINSON

During the ASTD Fourth Annual Training and Development Leadership Symposium, an experienced training director asked me, "Don't you think behavior modeling is only a fad that will be here today and gone tomorrow?" Of course, my immediate reaction was to say, "Well of course not. It's a sound learning technology that will be around for years."

Instead, I decided to restrain my reflexes and probe to find out what made this training director feel that behavior modeling may be only a fad, similar to so many others that have hit the training profession. In response to my queries, she expressed the following observations:

"It has the mystique of being new and different. Even though Mel Sorcher was experimenting with behavior modeling in General Electric in 1970, very few people were familiar with the process until Arnie Goldstein and Mel Sorcher published their book *Changing Supervisor Behavior* in

1974.¹ And most of the training community did not know about behavior modeling until the last half of the '70s.

"In addition, all the behavior modeling practitioners, including you, have emphasized that behavior modeling is different from other methods of learning. You've said that one of the reasons it is successful is because it is different. A characteristic of a fad is that it is new and different.

"In 1970, Mel Sorcher was beginning his work in General Electric with a few supervisors. In 1972, behavior modeling was being implemented in Agway Inc., AT&T and IBM. As late as 1975, when the first *package program* was put on the market, only a few thousand supervisors and managers a year were being trained using behavior-modeling technology. Now in 1980, over 500,000 supervisors, managers and employees of all kinds will be trained using behavior-modeling technology. Another characteristic of a fad is rapid growth. Certainly behavior-modeling falls into that category.

"My last concern is the band-

wagon effect I see taking place. It now seems that seminars on behavior modeling are being conducted at all the major conferences. There are more and more articles being written on it. Arnie Goldstein has even come out with a self-help paperback on behavior modeling.² A lot of training professionals are now being attracted to the technology and want to get on the bandwagon."

Her observations were keen, her arguments were forceful, and her concern was legitimate. So it seems appropriate to take stock of behavior modeling at the end of its first decade and assess whether it is a learning technology which will be utilized in years to come — or only a fad.

The Pros and Cons

Let's look at what seem to be behavior modeling's strengths:

Research base: It is one of the best-researched technologies in adult education. It is the most thoroughly researched supervisory and manager development technology. Mel Sorcher's research in General Electric indicated that su-

pervisors trained in behavior-modeling technology could be more effective in retaining newly hired employees.³ Other research at General Electric indicated that supervisors trained in behavior modeling managed their work groups more effectively when "general business conditions were very bad."⁴ Research at AT&T⁵ and Lukens Steel⁶ showed that trained supervisors are much more effective in handling employee situations after behavior-modeling training. Other research studies have been conducted at Agway Inc.,⁷ IBM,⁸ Girard Bank,⁹ Medical Group Management Association,¹⁰ Central Telephone Utilities,¹¹ Wachovia Corp.,¹² Rhodesian National Railways,¹³ and Norden Laboratories.¹⁴ So behavior-modeling has been heavily researched and these studies indicate it is an effective method of improving interactive skills.

Sound learning theory: Arnie Goldstein and Mel Sorcher¹⁵ utilized sound-learning theory when they developed the early behavior-modeling programs. Because this legacy has influenced the current behavior-modeling practitioners, most of the current behavior-modeling programs are based upon sound learning theory. Fortunately, there are only a relatively small number of programs in which the cosmetic influences overshadow sound-learning theory.

Managers use the newly-learned skills: One of the greatest assets of behavior-modeling is that people who learn the skills use them. Literally thousands of testimonials from people trained in behavior-modeling programs indicate they use the newly-learned skills on the job. In addition, the research at AT&T,¹⁶ Agway Inc.,¹⁷ Girard Bank,¹⁸ Wachovia Bank & Trust Co.,¹⁹ and Rhodesian National Railways²⁰ indicates that supervisors and managers utilize their newly-learned skills on the job. A survey of 3,134 supervisors trained in the Interaction Management System indicates that 91.6 per cent of them intend to use their new skills on the job.²¹ Even more dramatic is a survey of 770 of their managers trained in management-

reinforcement skills which indicates that 92.2 per cent of the managers intend to utilize newly-learned reinforcement skills with their subordinate supervisors.²² In short, people trained in well designed behavior-modeling programs do use those skills on the job.

After several years, organizations are still using behavior-modeling: An examination of those organizations that have utilized behavior-modeling technology for over five years indicates it is still being used in those organizations. Modeling is still being used at General Electric, AT&T, Agway Inc., IBM, Kaiser Aluminum Chemical, and Baltimore Gas & Electric. These organizations have utilized behavior-modeling long enough to evaluate it and have made the conscious decision to continue using it because of positive results.

Knowledgeable educators see it as effective: Behavior-modeling has been scrutinized by the knowledgeable educator in business, government and industry, and found an effective method of developing skills. Granted, some educators prefer not to use behavior-modeling because they believe the approach is too structured. However, even these educators concede that behavior-modeling is effective in skill and confidence development.

Its simplicity is a strength: One less apparent advantage of behavior-modeling is its simplicity.²³ In an era when learning experiences are becoming more involved and complex, behavior-modeling's straightforward approach has great appeal to the learner. This is clearly demonstrated in the study of 3,134 supervisors trained in Interaction Management in which 87 per cent of them responded "favorably" or "very favorably" to questions about the procedures used in the workshop.²⁴ Of the 770 managers surveyed about the management reinforcement workshop, 86.2 per cent of them responded "favorably" or "very favorably" to questions about the procedures used in the workshop.²⁵

So in the past 10 years, behavior-modeling has accomplished

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a great deal. Of course, along with these accomplishments, there are some shortcomings.

It is instructor-intensive: For behavior-modeling to be effective, small classes of usually six learners working with one instructor are required. For the learners to achieve satisfactory skill levels, the learning process must be managed by a competent instructor specially trained in a workshop specifically designed for behavior-modeling instructors. Furthermore, in the classroom, that instructor manages the learning process, involving only a handful of learners. So, the behavior-modeling learning experience is an instructor-intensive one.

Lack of cost benefit data: Not only is the instructor/learner ratio low, but the amount of classroom time is long compared with other training programs. For example, it may take 32 hours to develop interactive skills in a management area where management theory could be learned in four or five hours. So, the cost portion of the

cost/benefit formula is relatively high. However, most organizations using behavior-modeling believe the benefits derived from the experience far outweigh the costs. Unfortunately, there has been insufficient cost/benefit research published in the behavior-modeling field. While the absence of cost/benefit evaluation studies plaques the entire training and development community, its absence cannot be ignored in the behavior-modeling discipline.

There is little experience with some audiences: The vast majority of behavior-modeling literature deals with supervisory and managerial development. This is natural because this is where behavior-modeling got its start. We know behavior-modeling is being utilized in the areas of selling skills, patient care, interviewing, assessor training and customer contact skills. In all these cases, the testimonials indicate behavior-modeling is effective. However, there are significant gaps in the evaluation data now available about the effectiveness of behavior-modeling with these target audiences. In addition, there are other areas in which no data concerning the effectiveness of behavior-modeling is available. These include senior-management skills, interactions involving several people, peer interactions, and individual contributor interactions. There is a great need for more research in these areas before a decision can be made whether or not behavior-modeling technology would be effective with these groups.

Apparent conflict with andragogy: Behavior-modeling has the image of being a highly structured learning process in which the needs of the learner are often subordinate to the learning process. This is an image many of us in the behavior-modeling discipline have inadvertently conveyed. Unfortunately, behavior-modeling can be handled in a manner which gives little attention to the needs of the learner. However, behavior-modeling can also be handled in a way in which the needs of the learner are paramount and the learner does have control over the learning

process. By utilizing learners' inputs about their own needs, learner-designed situations for skill practices, maximizing learner feedback, and utilizing learning contracting, the behavior-modeling process is andragogical in nature. Overcoming the image that the process is more important than the learner presents a challenge to behavior-modeling practitioners. This will require that all of us in the behavior-modeling discipline make sure we are andragogical as we design and implement behavior-modeling programs.

So in examining the strengths and shortcomings of behavior-modeling after 10 years, I conclude that the process has major strengths and that its shortcomings require the attention of all persons in the discipline.

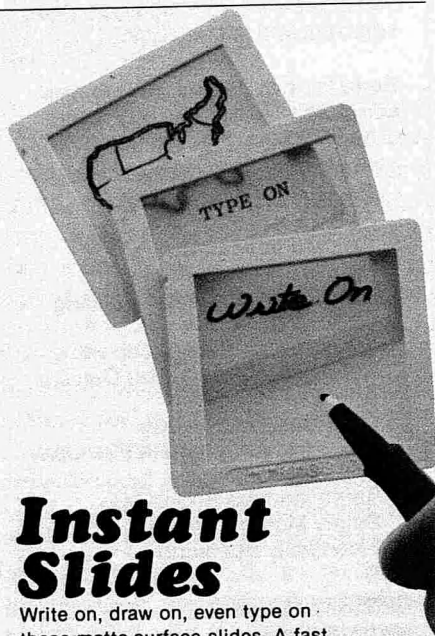
Is behavior-modeling, then, the latest fad? The answer is "it's in our hands." If we in the training community use it wisely and appropriately, behavior-modeling will serve us well and be a valuable learning technology for many years. If we use it inappropriately and ineffectively, behavior-modeling will develop a bandwagon image and this will be a major cause of its demise.

What Is Required of Training?

If it is in our hands then, what is required of us as training professionals to make sure we utilize the technology appropriately and effectively?

1. *Utilize behavior-modeling only when it is an appropriate learning experience:* Because behavior-modeling has high face validity with the learner, and because it is the "in technology" for the training community, we must be careful to thoroughly examine each situation before determining whether or not behavior-modeling is the correct solution to the problem. A thorough front-end analysis will become even more critical in the future. Training is becoming more costly. Behavior-modeling, with its low learner/instructor ratio, is costly. Therefore, it is imperative that front-end analysis be conducted to determine whether or not:

- a training solution is appropriate;



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- a skill deficiency exists;
- a behavior-modeling learning experience can be provided;
- the new skills will be reinforced on the job; and
- behavior-modeling training will be cost beneficial.

The challenge to the trained professional in the '80s will be to conduct thorough front-end analysis. This kind of analysis is within the control of the training professional and must be utilized if we are to ensure that behavior-modeling will be used where needed and when it can provide a positive payoff.

2. *Maintain an effective learning experience:* One of the greatest dangers to behavior-modeling is changing the basic and proven learning experience for cosmetic purposes. Behavior-modeling training must enable learners to develop sufficient skill and confidence so they will use the newly-learned skills in real world situations. Even in its comparatively young life, there have already been too many instances where behavior-modeling has been modified so that it does not provide all learners with opportunities to skill practice, receive feedback and build confidence through success experiences. All too often, we hear of situations in which only one of three learners has an opportunity to skill practice. All too often, we hear of situations in which the feedback process does not provide the learner with reinforcement of those things done well nor provides alternatives in those areas where further development is needed. All too often, we hear of situations in which the self-esteem and confidence of the learner are lowered because of mismanaged feedback. In the '80s, those of us in the behavior-modeling discipline must insist that the classroom instructor be well trained and constantly updated. We must also monitor the quality of education to assure that skill building takes place, feedback to the learner is well managed and learner confidence and self-esteem are increased.

3. *On-the-job reinforcement must occur:* We know that behav-

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ior-modeling greatly increases the learner's skills.²⁶ There is also substantial evidence to indicate that when those skills are not reinforced on the job they will eventually be extinguished.²⁷ Therefore, the 1980s will challenge us to assure that appropriate reinforcement is provided the learners once they return to the job. While this reinforcement can come from many places, there are two major areas that we as training professionals must emphasize. The first is that of the individual's immediate manager.²⁸ There is considerable evidence which indicates the immediate manager has three major roles which can have a significant impact upon the learner's use of the skills. The manager acts as (1) coach,²⁹ (2) reinforcer, and (3) positive model.

For example, the manager has a powerful impact on how supervisors utilize their new skills with their work groups. The manager must help the supervisors as they diagnose opportunities for use of their newly-learned skills. In this

process of diagnosing, the manager becomes a coach and provides the supervisors with help in planning their discussions with members of the workforce. This coaching involves both determining what should be accomplished in a discussion with a member of the work group and coaching the supervisor on how to utilize the newly-learned skills.

In addition to on-the-job coaching, the manager must also provide positive reinforcement to the learner when the learner uses the new skills. In other words, a manager must reinforce a subordinate supervisor when that subordinate supervisor uses the newly-learned skills on the job.

The third role of the manager is that of positive model. If the subordinate supervisor is expected to utilize the newly-learned skills, the manager must act on the job in a manner which supports the learning which took place in the supervisory classroom. The manager must set a good example.

Because the skills of coaching,

reinforcing and being a model are not innate in managers, the challenge in the '80s is to provide managers with the training they need to handle these three roles.

4. *Behavior modeling must be a well planned intervention:* One of the characteristics of the early behavior modeling implementations was that a specific need was identified by management before the behavior modeling program was implemented. In General Electric, management was concerned about the high turnover with its new hires.³⁰ In AT&T, management was concerned about supervisors' ability to supervise the new workforce.³¹ In Agway, management was concerned about their supervisors' ability to maintain a supportive and open work climate in its new semi-automated physical distribution centers.³² So in each case, behavior modeling was implemented to help solve a problem identified by management.

The danger in today's environment is that the training professional will implement behavior modeling in an organization without the full support of management. This has already happened in some organizations and the result is that their behavior-modeling programs have been discontinued. Therefore, in the '80s it is imperative that the training professional plan the behavior modeling intervention in a manner that enables management to see it as a solution to current problems. The training professional must work with management in a way which enables management to see the impact behavior modeling can have upon employee skills and performance. In addition, management must be attuned to its role as coaches, reinforcers, and positive models and the need for developing those skills. The training professional must also help management examine the reward system within the organization to make sure it encourages the use of the newly-learned skills.

Four Challenges in the '80s

So in reality, the determination as to whether or not behavior modeling is a fad is in the hands of the training community. We know the strengths and shortcomings of behavior modeling. We know the

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four areas which represent challenges for us in the '80s. If our handling of behavior modeling is appropriate and it is used for years to come, we will see several positive impacts in the '80s:

1. There will be broader applications of behavior modeling technology. It will be used, if appropriate and effective, with many audiences with which it has not yet been used. It's conceivable that senior managers may learn skills through behavior modeling. It will be interesting to see how behavior modeling can improve the effectiveness of government workers who must interface with the public. It will be interesting to see how behavior modeling will be utilized with the knowledge worker. It is intriguing to imagine the impact it could have if all people within the health care field, including doctors, developed patient care skills. Many more applications are possible.

2. The '80s will see behavior modeling used in more complex situations. The whole area of

multiple-person situations, in which various persons within a team have various roles, is yet to be adequately dealt with. In matrix management or in a project team, the project leader needs skills in the areas of role identification, goal negotiation, team building, conflict resolution, and systems designing. In addition, the team members need specific skills to enable them to operate as efficient team members. There are a multitude of complex training situations where behavior modeling may be appropriate.

3. In the '80s, there will be more emphasis on selecting the correct skill to use with the "other person" based upon the characteristics of that "other person." In the '70s, managers and supervisors were provided a set of skills which enabled them to be more effective with members of their work group. In the '80s, there will be a need for several sets of skills for supervisors and managers because of the diverse nature of the work group. It is logical to assume that those

different categories of workers identified by Yankelovich³³ will require that managers have several sets of skills. It is also logical to assume that the same set of managerial skills will not be equally effective with the "go-getters," the work-before-pleasure people, the habitual worker, the professional middle manager and "turned-off" segments of the workforce.

4. The '80s will also provide us with more innovative uses of behavior modeling learning technology. These innovations will be required as behavior modeling is applied to more complex situations and more diverse audiences. It will not be unusual to see behavior modeling technology interwoven into more complex learning experiences. It is logical to assume that by the end of the '80s, at least half of those individuals experiencing behavior-modeling learning will find it as a sub-set within a larger learning design which utilizes behavior modeling and the other effective instructional technologies to accomplish the learning objec-

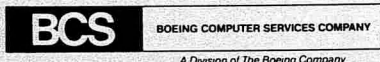
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tives. Behavior modeling will become one of many available instructional technologies which more often than not will be a part of a larger learning design. In fewer instances will it be the only or the major portion of the learning experience.

I wish I could have been this articulate at the Symposium when the training director asked, "Don't you really think that behavior modeling is only a fad that will be here today and gone tomorrow?"

It appears that behavior modeling has a lot going for it. It appears that its strengths will enable it to be a useful instructional technology for many years, and its shortcomings can be overcome by the training professional.

There is no doubt in my mind that behavior modeling will become a substantial learning experience in the '80s which will be utilized, where appropriate and when needed, in conjunction with other appropriate technologies. This integration will have a syner-

gistic effect and will make learning more efficient. The approach will also provide the training professional with an opportunity to demonstrate that the learning technologies of the '80s can have even more positive payoff and return on investment than the technologies of any other period of time.

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