The New Look of Behavior Modeling

When unveiled 20 years ago,

behavior modeling was predicted

to do wonders for training. It has.

And, now, an enhanced version

is keeping up with our

changing times.

BY ALICE PESCURIC AND WILLIAM C. BYHAM

I**F YOU ARE BEING PRESSURED** to make training yield greater results and to improve your organization's performance through training interventions, behavior-modeling-based training with some new and exciting enhancements is still the best methodology for building skills and producing lasting behavior change. But first, a bit of background.

Twenty years ago in these pages we (James Robinson and current author Byham) wrote about a bold new training concept that we believed could measurably improve supervisory performance in the day-to-day skills necessary for leading people (see page 30 for an excerpted version). This approach was behavior modeling. When it was marketed for the first time back in the 1970s, we predicted in the then-*Training & Development Journal* that it could do wonders for organizations and their learners. Well, it has!

Over the past 20 years, our company has trained more than three million people to use behavior modeling. In fact, training practitioners

around the world still use this training approach as the basis for many human resource solutions.

So the next question is, how well does a 20-year-old methodology hold up today? The workplace is changing constantly, so it's no surprise that the way people want and need to learn is changing, too. Does this mean that behavior modeling won't work? No. Behavior modeling in training is still the best way to develop skills and change behavior. With enhancements to a basic five-step process, you can respond to pressing organizational needs and changing learner requirements and continue to use the behavior modeling methodology to improve the performance of your organization's workforce. This article will focus on changes in the workplace and the way we're responding by enhancing the behavior modeling process.

Behavior modeling over the years

First, though, let's look a little more closely at how behavior modeling has

been applied in training over the years to help organizations close performance gaps. The traditional behavior modeling training design presents five critical components to ensure effective learning.

▶ Content overview. The facilitator identifies the skills to be learned and presents factual content about the topic.

▶ Positive model video. Learners see the skills demonstrated, generally on video.

▶ Skill practice. Learners practice using and applying the skills in a one-on-one exercise.

▶ Feedback. Participants receive feedback on how well they used the skills.

▶ Application on the job. Learners discuss how they will apply the skills in the workplace.

Until the widespread introduction of behavior modeling in 1974, training interventions relied on lectures and theory. The idea of minimizing theory in training and, instead, concentrating on a learning structure that included situation-specific behaviors a person

could learn and apply, presented quite a leap in the approach to training.

So, what makes behavior modeling so effective as a learning design, and why do we need to ensure that this methodology remains strong today? There are a number of reasons that help to explain our success with this methodology over the years:

▶ The learning addresses the important issues facing leaders—the first audience for this type of training 20 years ago. Training in improving poor work habits or using effective disciplinary action, for example, is the kind of hands-on, relevant guidance learners have appreciated.

▶ People like its step-by-step approach to dealing with situations. They also appreciate the positive model, which gives learners a visual demonstration of the skills being used and a target to shoot for.

▶ The safe haven of classroom practice eases people's fears and eliminates the risk of trying new skills for the first time on the job.

Other elements also have contributed to the success of behavior modeling. Stringent instructor certification requirements ensure appropriate delivery of behavior modeling. It's generally recommended that learners be trained in small groups, usually limited to 16 people, allowing each participant to practice the skills every session and to allow them to obtain in-depth coaching and feedback. And the importance of management support throughout the organization commonly is built into implementation plans.

As this approach has been applied over and over, the success of behavior modeling has been documented. It shows increases in learner competence and behavior change affecting bottom-line results. Our own research substantiates this. (See "Return on Investment" on page 28.)

What's changing

Change is like a row of dominos: Once a move is initiated, other pieces fall accordingly. In business this means that when an organization begins to change to stay competitive, the workplace and the workers must

New training designs need to include a variety of roles and contexts

change to meet the resulting challenges. Let's explore some of these changes.

Today's organization is flatter and less hierarchical. Employees take on more responsibilities as their organizations try to do more with less. As a result, people have more demands on their time. The "do more with less" credo applies to training as well as other parts of the organization. With time, money, and resources preciously guarded, it's no wonder that organizations demand solutions that offer

return on the organization's investment as well as that of learners'. Through it all, of course, the workplace operates in a world that's fluid and changing. That's why we need to focus on building and developing skills—not rote responses—that can be internalized and applied flexibly as changing situations dictate.

As for learners themselves, who they are and how they learn has changed. They come to training with varying educational levels and skill sets, and they're identified more by roles than job functions or titles. For example, more and more people are taking on leadership roles and positions. When we wrote about behavior modeling in 1976, it was aimed mostly at the supervisory level. Because organizations are flatter, an audience now might include team members as well as team leaders and higher-level managers. Often, especially with more virtual work groups and team structures, learners are people who have to influence others to do something even though they have no position power at all. Instead of concentrating on narrow topics and managerial levels, new training designs need to include a variety of roles and contexts from which people can approach the skills to be learned. The emphasis should be on developing the appropriate competencies for the roles and contexts in which learners will be using the skills.

The way people want to learn is changing, too. They are no longer sat-

Major Modeling Process Components*	Option 1: Classroom-based Delivery	Option 2: Classroom and Self-study	Option 3: Self-study and Classroom	Option 4: Non-classroom-based Delivery
Content and Analysis/Positive Model	Classroom	Classroom	Self-study	Self-study
Practice and Feedback	Classroom	Self-study	Classroom	Self-study

*Application activities are built in throughout.

isfied to come to class, listen, learn, and go out and apply the training. They now want to have the option of learning on their own time and in their own way. They want to explore content, expect to be challenged, and demand a high level of involvement in the learning process. They want things tailored to their own needs, pace, and learning style. They are used to being entertained by television and movies, and they expect training to do the same.

Another important element is the rapid change in technology. It gives us many more choices in how we deliver training. Advances such as CD-ROM and teleconferencing create opportunities to learn at home, at the workstation, in the learning lab, or in classrooms. These advances can augment or replace current training offerings.

To enable you to develop and deliver training that boosts your organization's performance, you should be considering how to incorporate flexibility in design, a wider range of delivery options, and enhanced learning alternatives. So how is behavior modeling meeting these challenges? Below we describe enhancements relative to the components of behavior modeling.

Overview of the content. The learning design must offer different ways to hold learners' attention and meet varying needs for depth of content.

To illustrate this, we will use our organization as an example. We used to approach the basic components of behavior modeling (cognitive information, positive model, skill practice, feedback, and application) in a linear fashion, applied repeatedly regardless of topic. This process provided all the content up front and then employed repetition to build the knowledge and skill of the learner.

In our learning design today, we can take a very different tack to meet varying learner needs and hold people's attention, enabling them to absorb and retain more knowledge and skills. Behavior modeling 20 years ago was like throwing learners a 12-inch snowball (all the content they need to learn). They might catch it, or they might not. If they did hold onto it, it might not stay in one piece for

MORE BANG FOR THE BUCK

The following delivery combinations offer the maximum efficiency and effectiveness for a behavior modeling implementation.

Option 1: Classroom-based delivery

All the components of the behavior modeling process are delivered in a classroom format.
▶ Helps learners new to the behavior modeling process gain a solid understanding of the process and content, especially the ability to give effective feedback.
▶ Offers learners the benefit of group discussion.
▶ Enables facilitator to check learners' understanding and proficiency of skills.
▶ Lets facilitator intervene during the skill practice to fine-tune or correct the use of a skill.
▶ Allows the skills being learned to be positioned in the context of broader organizational needs and objectives.
▶ Builds teamwork across organizational departments/units.

Option 2: Classroom and self-study

In this option, the cognitive learning, positive model, and application care are conducted in class, fol-lowed by on-the-job skill practice with a coach or study group.
▶ Saves classroom time.
▶ Offers same benefits as in option 1 regarding group discussion and positioning organizational issues and objectives.
▶ Works best when learners have a good understanding of the process, the ability to give effective feedback, and the commitment to personal development (that is, they will practice).
▶ Requires manager or peer support to help with and reinforce the practice process.

Option 3: Self-study and classroom

Here, the cognitive learning, positive model, and application components are completed through self-study, and skill practice occurs in a classroom format.
▶ Provides an option when classroom time is at a premium.
▶ Requires communication within the training to reinforce how the skill area being learned meets organizational requirements.
▶ Relies on good work standards (that is, participants will do the pre-work).
▶ Lets learners work at their own learning pace and in their own time to master the content and analyze the key behaviors required.
▶ Allows classroom time to be used for focusing on skill practicing under the guidance of the facilitator and also ensures the practice will take place.

Option 4: Non-classroom-based delivery

All components of the behavior modeling process are completed through self-study and on-the-job skill practicing.
▶ Proves very useful for refresher training.
▶ Offers valuable option for just-in-time training for an individual based on business needs (for instance, dealing with an upcoming change or handling conflict).
▶ Works best when some classroom training has been completed, or learners have worked with a trained coach or facilitator to ensure understanding of key content and process.
▶ Works well for follow-up training, especially when there's a limited amount of time to get through classroom topics (for instance, three units will be completed in class, and any remaining are the responsibility of the learner).
▶ Provides an alternative that might better meet organization time or geographic constraints.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Behavior modeling produces results. Our organization, Development Dimensions International, recently assembled a research compendium describing behavior modeling's effectiveness over the past two decades (*Interaction Management® Research Compendium*, 1995). This learning design has demonstrated positive results at all four levels of training evaluations: participant reaction, learning, application to the job, and organizational performance change.

Behavior modeling has been proven effective in all industries, from finance to manufacturing to health care, and at all educational levels. For instance, we studied the results of MBA students who were evaluated in a comprehensive assessment center after they were trained via behavior modeling in 10 learning units focused on leadership skills. The students scored consistently higher than students who did not receive the behavior modeling training.

Research by Paul Taylor of the University of Waikato in New Zealand shows that behavior modeling has proven effective in a variety of international locations as well. Taylor's meta analysis of 97 behavior modeling studies from a variety of sources worldwide found a relationship with on-the-job behavior in 96 studies and the lack of relationship in only one (Taylor, 1994).

very long. Today's approach is more like tossing a 3-inch snowball (some content) that they can easily catch and letting them add snow (additional skill and knowledge) to it a little at a time. Eventually they build a 12-inch snowball and benefit from the experience that went along with building it.

Here are some examples of how to incrementally build content and skill:

▶ Start with a basic overview of the content, followed with immediate application. Then add more content throughout the training to increase the learning challenge.

▶ Use multiple positive learning models to show more than one type of situation in which to use the skills, and increase the difficulty of those situations to present more challenges.

▶ Add further content, challenging situations, and application opportunities between skill practice situations to increase the level and difficulty of subsequent skill practice.

Interspersing content information in chunks throughout the training holds the attention of the learner, increasing retention and skill building. This approach helps learners discover ideas and skills on their own and focuses people on the ways they can apply their learning to their own situations. Today's more sophisticated learners want more rationale, realism,

> ■ *Interspersing content information throughout the training holds the attention of the learner, increasing retention and skill building* ■

and content to help them apply a skill to a variety of different situations.

It's important to go beyond lecture and small group discussion to include engaging simulations and substantive case studies.

While simulations have been a frequently used method of training, they have not normally been part of most behavior modeling programs. Because simulations get the learner's attention through self-discovery, integrating simulations into the content component of behavior modeling is an important feature.

The fact is, some content can't be taught; it needs to be experienced or felt. Simulations and experiential learning can help people *feel* the content, such as what it's like to be empowered or to be in the midst of change. Simulations encourage par-

ticipants to become aware of their own feelings about and reaction to these issues so they will be better able to apply the learning. For instance, after experiencing how they themselves respond to change, people can better help others deal with change. Engaging learners' emotions and feelings in this way has proved extremely effective in increasing their understanding and interest, as well as in spurring them to develop these new skills.

The positive model. Positive model videos can be presented in a new context and play a larger role in building skill.

Step two of traditional behavior modeling presented a positive model video immediately after reviewing the content to be learned. Learners viewed the video and discussed the skills they saw applied. One alternative is to present the video differently—as an in-depth case study.

Here's how this approach works. The learners are given a written case study to analyze—for example, a leader who needs to talk to an employee about a performance problem. They review the background information and as a group discuss how best to apply the information or skills they learned in the content overview. This group discussion gives the instructor a chance to ensure accurate understanding of the skills to be learned. After the group members are satisfied that they are well-prepared for the discussion (i.e., can effectively apply the skills and have a good plan in mind), they view the positive model video which provides an answer to the case. (The video itself is presented as just one way of handling the discussion, but not the only way.)

This case study method gives learners a chance to practice applying newly learned information to the analysis. It spurs learners to explore opportunities, choose preferred alternatives, and raise issues that affect potential results. The benefit of this case study approach is exploration, practice, and application of the skills very early in the learning sequence. Participants are more actively involved in the learning and the video is more engaging. This adds up to increased retention and faster learning.

Participants are also better prepared to plan their skill practice because they have had a chance to practice preparation as part of the case study. Of course, this approach to the positive model video requires more time in the analysis phase, but it results in faster skill practices with greater learning.

Skill practice, feedback, and application. We must provide participants with more opportunities for self-diagnosis and self-directed learning.

A variety of tools can be developed and incorporated into behavior modeling so that participants can target their developmental areas and enjoy a richer learning experience. These tools include self-assessment of current competence, feedback from others (including 360° assessments), and patterned interviews to gather data on current job performance issues. By gathering this information in advance, participants can focus their learning and skill practice time on the areas most important to their individual development.

For example, let's say a learner wants to develop some key interpersonal skills, perhaps maintaining another person's self-esteem, using empathy, or learning to disclose effectively. If the pre-class learning shows that this person is excellent at showing empathy but needs to develop skills in disclosing personal feelings, the person can direct his or her learning, practice, and feedback sessions to meet that particular need. The ability to focus the learning pays big dividends in learner involvement, skill acquisition, skill transfer, and return on time devoted to learning. Incorporating these new approaches into your behavior modeling training also provides a method for learners to be accountable for directing their own education and improving their own job performance.

The skill practice remains the crux of behavior modeling training, but we need to develop more options for carrying it out.

A good portion of behavior modeling training—providing the content, reviewing and analyzing the positive
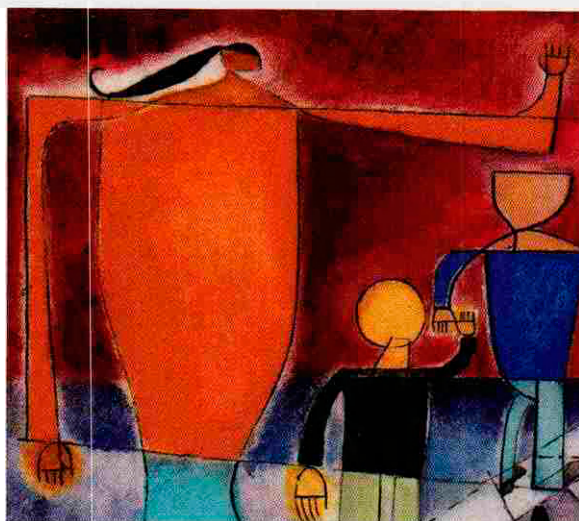
> ■■ *Behavior modeling can employ a variety of tools so participants can enjoy a richer learning experience* ■

model, and conducting application activities—can be handled outside the traditional classroom thanks to advances in technology. For instance, we can now incorporate video-based and CD-ROM-based self-study vehicles for acquiring content information, analyzing a case study, and viewing and analyzing the positive model. The video and CD-ROM interactive simulations can prepare people for a variety of situations—such as handling employee responses of defensiveness, compliance, and withdrawing before they actually practice skills. The use of self-study can reduce classroom time, provide great just-in-time refreshers and skill building, and prepare individuals for the real skill builder—live skill practice.

While technology allows much of the training to occur outside the traditional classroom, no electronic medium can fully replace the complex dynamics of a human interaction. We believe skill development and skill transfer still are best developed and enhanced by participating in a live

skill practice process. We recommend that inexperienced learners participate in at least one or two units in the traditional classroom so they can have the strong anchor of a trained facilitator/instructor to answer questions, provide feedback, and coach them on the process. Learners then can move to other delivery options tailored to their learning style, time demands, and organizational desires.

Regardless of the option chosen, three ingredients are critical to the success of any skill practice: sound preparation, a live interaction, and feedback by a trained observer. A variety of ways and settings exist to accomplish the skill practice:
▶ traditional classroom or workshop environment
▶ on-the-job study groups
▶ one-on-one skill practice with a trained, on-the-job coach
▶ practice audiotapes critiqued by a trained coach or facilitator
▶ a conference call between the learner, skill practice partner, and coach.

Behavior modeling is most effectively applied when used to teach a set of core skills that can be used in a number of situations covered in individual learning modules. The core skills are the key learning focus. We have found that most learners require at least five skill practice opportunities across various modules to be able to apply the skills on the job. For many it might take more. The new skill practice options should allow learners to conduct a sufficient amount of skill practice.

Obviously, all skill practicing options presented here enhance the flexibility of the delivery method, how skills are developed, and the use of classroom time. These alternatives can be configured to match organizational and learner needs. (See "More Bang for the Buck" on page 27.)

What's next?
Looking ahead, we already know that technology-supported delivery methods will be the norm. CD-ROM, distance learning for interactive skills,

self-directed learning options, and increased learner responsibility for skill acquisition are becoming a reality now. Down the road are opportunities for virtual reality simulations, as well as desktop electronic support systems to augment and support the training process. We also see a need for more peer coaching and support as the manager's time becomes more precious.

As you have seen, the workplace and the people who work in it are constantly changing. So, too, must behavior modeling. With these enhancements to your behavior modeling

process, you can minimize or expand classroom time, provide basic or expanded content, and have a learning process that is both flexible and effective for learners, whether they are senior managers or front line employees. You can also ensure that people are learning processes that they can apply in complex and changing environments and that workers can handle more diverse and dynamic interactions required for success. ■

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Interaction Modeling: A Supervisory Training Concept

Interaction Modeling
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CAN TRAINING MEASURABLY improve supervisory skills in such areas as increasing productivity, reducing employee absenteeism, handling discrimination complaints, and overcoming resistance to change?

Although many managers would be skeptical, a number of leading companies are attempting to change supervisory behavior in these critical areas as well as others, and there is research today to show the effectiveness of several of the training programs.

These training programs use a new training concept called *interaction modeling*, which is quite different from traditional supervisory training programs. No theory is taught; instead, for each situation, practical steps are provided. Positive models of behavior are presented and on-the-job application is stressed.

Interaction modeling programs differ according to individual needs and objectives of using organizations, but most have the following elements:
> The subject matter is targeted to *real*

In February 1976, Training and Development Journal

unveiled the then bold, new supervisory training concept

called interaction modeling—a forerunner of behavior

modeling. Here's a condensed version of the original.

BY WILLIAM BYHAM AND JAMES ROBINSON

needs of the group by identifying, prior to training, the difficult human interaction situations confronted by the supervisors to be trained, e.g., improving work habits, utilizing effective disciplinary action, delegating responsibilities, orienting new employees, and so forth.
> Six supervisors are trained at once.
> The training is structured so that one difficult human interaction situation is learned at a time.
> A step-by-step approach for handling each difficult interaction situation is provided.
> A positive model using the step-by-step approach shows learners how

each difficult situation can be handled.
> Practice in handling the difficult situations is provided each learner.
> Confidence is developed as supervisors discover they are developing skills to handle difficult situations which previously they had not been able to handle effectively.
> A receptive and supportive on-the-job environment is built so that the trained supervisors do in fact use their skills on the job.

Learning by mistakes

In spite of its popularity, there are a number of reasons why allowing