

# TRAINING CLERICAL HELP

*a systems approach helps  
overcome entry and  
upgrading typing shortages  
at Consolidated Insurance Co.*

Typists, along with the other clerical skilled personnel needed by business, are in ever shorter supply. Application of a systems approach has helped to alleviate and in some instances even solve the acute problems arising from these shortages. This method, with its consideration of all the factors involved and its provisions for feedback and adjustment, has led to the use of a new instructional technique and the employment and upgrading of personnel previously thought unqualified.

Combining modern programmed audio-visual instruction with tutorial support has proven successful in developing typists qualified to meet job requirements in several different organizations; organizations with different needs and with job candidates of varied backgrounds.

## THE PROBLEM

Changes in jobs, resulting from use of computers; changes in population; changes in school curriculums; changes in the self-image of school graduates and changes in their aspirations and goals, as well as the changes in the way business handles and processes its paper work all have affected the supply of trained clerical workers. No one concerned with filling personnel requirements has to look at the "Want Ads" in his newspapers or speak to employment agencies to know this. A glance at his "jobs open" sheet or his "turnover" report is more than enough.

An analysis focused on the shortage of qualified typists shows those basic conditions below as well as a number of others. Among those specifically reported are:

A lack of job applicants.

Applicants with skill levels below job requirements.

Poor basic education.

Unrealistic job expectations by applicants.

Inaccurate position descriptions.

Requests for over-qualified workers.

Obviously, these originate with both the job applicants and the company, and

eliminating one or two of the conditions would not necessarily relieve the shortage.

A systems method, however, can solve this complex problem.

## A SYSTEMS APPROACH

The heart of a systems approach to any problem is in its ordered, careful consideration of all aspects. It tries to consider not only the obvious, but also to notice and weigh the seemingly minor points, and to consider the interaction of the various things that surround and are part of the problem. For typing, the elements shown in Figure 1 were considered.

*Problem Identification:* A careful description of the problem as it was assumed to be.

*Staffing Needs:* An estimate of the number of trained typists needed for the next year. It was as realistic as possible and took note of normal turnover, attrition, growth and planned changes.

*Hiring Standards:* Jobs were reviewed to see what really had to be known to do the work. Unrealistic standards were screening out many suitable candidates. Specifying high school graduates for jobs needing only reading with a normal vocabulary and simple addition and subtraction was an example of an overly high job specification.

*Employee Inventory:* A list of present employees who thought they would like typing jobs. It turned up people interested in lateral changes as well as upgrading, uncovered job qualifications and skills not in the personnel files and resulted in an unexpected reservoir of talent on which to draw.

*Testing for Training Needs:* Candidates for typing jobs were tested to find out exactly what had to be taught in order to turn out a typist able to meet revised new hire standards.

*Planning Training Programs:* Because of its complexity, this was a sub-system. Needs revealed by the testing became the objectives for the training program. Different methods of instruction were

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Figure 1. A Systems Approach For Developing Clerical Skills.

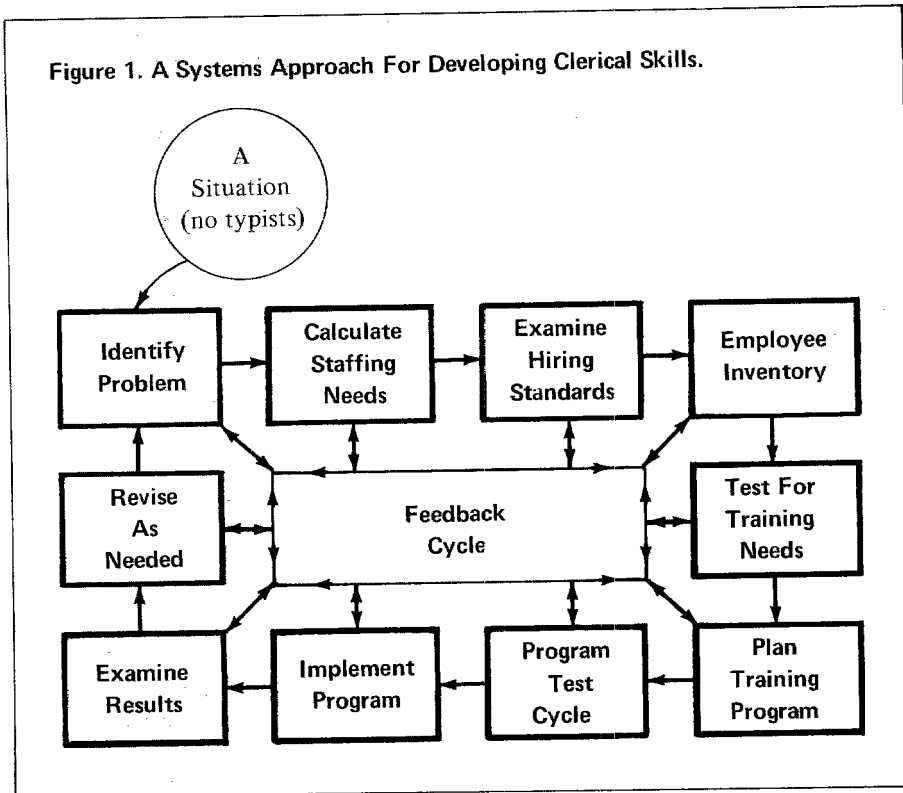
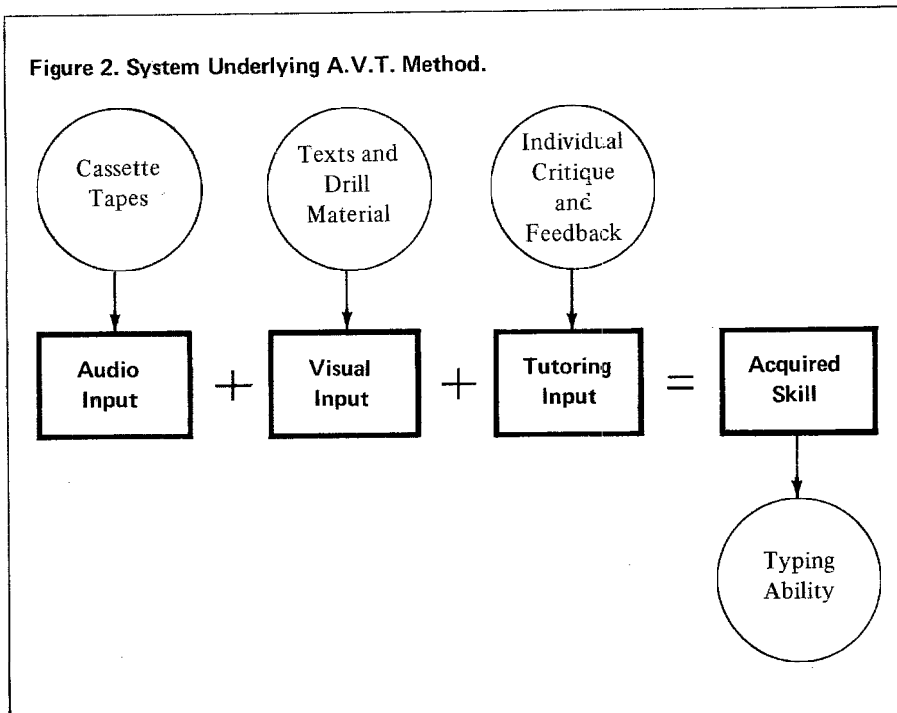


Figure 2. System Underlying A.V.T. Method.



examined and considered. Logistics included provision for space, educational materials, equipment, etc., for the teaching method selected. Cost estimates were made, instructors were se-

lected and trained, students were chosen.

*Program Test Cycle:* A pilot program showed needed changes. Adjustments were made and the cycle of test and

change repeated.

*Program Implemented:* This included provision for controls to show adjustments and corrections needed, as they occurred.

*Results Examined:* A continuous examination of results compared with program goals was made.

*Revision:* Feedback of information at each step in the system was made to the proper element. Each cycle showed new ways to improve – the program was never static.

*Typing Program:* Following through the steps of the systems approach resulted in adopting a new in-company method of typing instruction. Audio tapes, visual printed instructional and practice materials, combined with strong tutorial support, resulted in a teaching technique that efficiently developed typing skill. (See Figure 2) The new parameters came from the planned use of three instructional methods so they mutually reinforced each other to produce stimuli, get responses and provide feedback to the students. Its name shortened to "The A.V.T. Method" (for Audio-Visual-Tutorial), the method provides these additional advantages:

1. Available materials enable a staff member to supervise, guide and tutor trainees in learning and developing a marketable skill that will meet typing production standards.

- Sets of cassette tapes form the basis of instruction.
- Published visual materials, special exercises and drills, as well as company forms, enrich the program.

2. Instruction can be given at any time, day or night, to best suit the convenience of instructor and trainees.

3. Courses vary in length with the rate of progress of the individual. They are not necessarily 40 to 80 or 150 hours long. They might be shorter for some trainees, longer for others.

- Through the use of audio-visual media and techniques, instruction is on an individual basis. There is

no need for lectures or demonstrations to a large group.

- Each trainee works at an individual learning station with her own equipment and materials. (See Figure 3.) She progresses at her own rate.

4. With this A.V.T. System for teaching typewriting, members of a group can have various typing skills and backgrounds. They may be beginners with no previous typing instruction, or they may have had two years of instruction, but have failed to acquire or to maintain the necessary skill. Traditional systems of teaching typing have never been and never will be effective in coping with these individual differences.

5. Trainees approve of the system and prefer it over the traditional method. Test scores indicate they learn more than in regular classes and their typing on the job is better both in speed and accuracy. Typical comments of the trainees are: "I can learn at my own rate." "It's more like an office than a classroom." "Much less pressure than a regular classroom."

6. The expense of providing an A.V.T. System for typing is nominal —

- Learning stations are set up with tables, typewriters, chairs and cassette tape recorders.
- The teaching materials are available from publishers of standard typing instructional materials.
- The cassette tapes range in price from \$125 to \$200 a set and the accompanying texts and drill materials cost about \$10 for each set.
- Each set of tapes provides instruction for several trainees at a time because of the varying levels of skills.
- The tapes can be used over and over again for subsequent trainees and will last indefinitely with careful handling and proper use.

7. The instructor can be a staff member — professional training is not needed.

- The tapes and supplementary materials have been prepared by professionals in the field. With orientation to their use and appropriate training on the "how to's" of building a typing skill, a staff member can successfully handle this course.

- The instructor, of course, must be interested in the employee's development and provide encouragement and guidance. However, if she is satisfied with mediocrity, it will not work.

- The instructor, who is a staff member, can be most helpful, too, in assisting in the proper placement of a trainee on completion of the training. Not only because she has

had an opportunity to observe personal qualifications as well as skill development, but also because she may be familiar with company job needs and skill requirements.

## RESULTS

The A.V.T. System has produced typists who have proven satisfactory on the job in widely different employment situations. Insurance companies, manufacturing concerns, banks and hospitals have used the method with success. Almost without exception, supervisors have been delighted with the speed and accuracy of the trainees and pleased with their continuing development on the job.



Figure 3. LEARNING STATION — the audio-visual elements of a learning station are typewriter, cassette tape player and text material. These are strongly supported by instructor tutoring.

The number of trainees who fail to reach the degree of skill necessary to meet job requirements is very low. Those failures and dropouts that have occurred have largely been caused by conditions unrelated to the training process.

Depending upon the level of entering skill and on the individual aptitude of the trainee, advancement to the point of job placement was completed in 40 to 150 hours of instruction.

### CONCLUSIONS

A systems approach to clerical shortages can result in new approaches to staffing problems. By systematic analysis of all aspects of an operation, new sources for employees can be opened up, job specifications made more realistic, over-hir-

ing eliminated and new, more efficient training methods devised. Better job placement, upward mobility and improved employee morale are among the serendipitous effects.

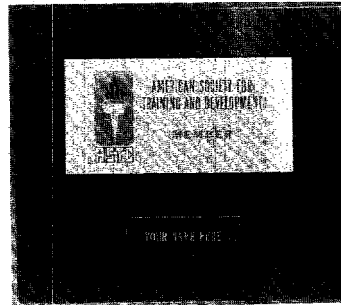
The Audio-Visual-Tutorial System is a highly effective way of teaching typing skills. The addition of an instructor to supplement and to support the programmed audio-visual materials provides needed unbiased error correction. While self-instruction and programmed instruction techniques contain error correcting feedback, it is not specific enough for a person learning a muscular habit-forming skill such as typing. Trainees cannot see nor do they know enough to recognize bad form and skill-limiting habits as they begin to develop them. An instructor can see their faults and assign corrective drills. She is the

link that completes the learning cycle.

The instructor also broadens the training that can be given. Most audio-visual or programmed typing courses are limited to teaching the keyboard and some elementary rules of format. With the instructor, company forms can be used and job-related information taught, considerably enhancing the value of the instruction.

The combination of a systems approach and an A.V.T. System of instruction as described here were applied to the problem of a shortage of typists. The technique should be equally effective dealing with other clerical disciplines; stenography, keypunch and calculating machines, for example. It is our opinion that these are just a beginning of the method's possibilities.

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