

"TIME AND COST PRESSURES ARE BEGINNING TO FORCE TRAINING OUT OF THE CLASSROOM AND INTO THE FIELD."

# MEDIA CHALLENGES OF THE '80s

BY WILLARD THOMAS

While the cost of just about everything else is rising rapidly, the cost of electronic media communication is declining. Salaries and benefits are increasing at a rate exceeding 10 per cent per year. Paper and other materials are going up at a rate exceeding 15 per cent per year. Travel costs are skyrocketing at a rate of an astounding 40 per cent per year. However, the costs of electronic media communication are declining at a rate of almost 20 per cent annually.

The gap between the costs of traditional classroom-based training and the newer electronic media-based systems is widening at an accelerating rate. At the same time, the need for realistic training is also accelerating. The combined forces of technological complexity, runaway inflation and employee expectations are converging to force training into an integral role in organizational operations.

Training and professional development are receiving more atten-

tion in management planning. Management is beginning to realize that investment in training can lead to greater productivity and that efforts to minimize training can lead to disaster. For instance, part of the responsibility for the Three-Mile Island nuclear accident has been attributed to a lack of training. This and other costly incidents like the New York City blackout, the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, recent aircraft accidents and many other incidents have been traced to employees' inability to cope with complex technology.

As the pressures of technological complexity and inflation continue to grow, people will demand more and better training. The major challenge the Human Resource Development profession will face in the 1980s will be to reduce the time and cost of information presentation and validation, so that more time and money can be invested on realistic consulting, counseling and simulation exercises. Time and cost pressures are beginning to force training out of the classroom and into the field. This will cause change for trainers

who will need to become more than live, information sources. Trainers will need to manage resources and assume the role of internal consultants or counselors.

Electronic technology is one alternative to help provide standardized, individualized, validated, interactive training programs. During the 1980s the cost of this technology will continue to decline in real dollars, while the cost of traditional media like film, paper and people in a classroom will continue to rise.

## Video Development

Let's examine some of the developments during the 1970s. At the beginning of this decade, there were less than 100,000 videotape recorders and computers in the United States. There were probably less than 1,000 of each in private homes. A good color videotape recorder cost \$5,000 (\$15,000 in 1980 dollars) and a small computer cost \$300,000 (\$900,000 in 1980 dollars). Even a color television set cost \$600 (\$1,800 in 1980 dollars).

Contrast this with the 1980s when there will be over 1 million

VTRs and over 1/2 million computers. A VTR will cost \$1,000. A computer will cost \$3,000 and a color TV set will cost \$300. Over half of the VTRs and many of the computers will be in private homes. By the end of the 1980s the home video-computer system will be as common as microwave ovens. The cost will be about \$250 in 1970 dollars.

While the home TV set will remain much the same, every VTR in broadcast, industry and home will be as obsolete as the adding machine, because video will go digital. Messages can then be moved and processed by the same type of circuits that exist today in computers and electronic adding machines. Soon we can anticipate a low-cost pocket videorecorder-computer two-way wrist radio type unit.

However, the major impact of digital video is not the light weight or the low cost. It is the control that people will have over the system. Video will be accessible by keyboards and individualized input devices. People can begin making their own electronic pictures and graphics. They will gain control of television in much the same way that a typewriter allowed them to gain control of printing.

Certainly, a keyboard will not make a person a programmer any more than the typewriter would make all typists writers. However, the capability to use electronic visual media has tremendous potential for training applications. It will be possible to have a standardized, individualized, validated, interactive training program that will guide people, help people, and maintain records.

#### **Video Challenges for the Trainer**

If all of this sounds a bit blue sky, it is important to point out that all of the technology mentioned is already in production. However, anyone familiar with training knows that the techniques to use this evolving low-cost technology are nowhere near ready. In order to meet the accelerating demands for cost-effective communication and training during the 1980s, the

following challenges must be answered.

First, how do we make media information presentations as interesting as personal presentations? How do we make the Herb Cohens, the Dugan Lairds, the Forrest Belchers, the Gordon Lippitts and others as interesting and stimulating on media as in person?

Second, how do we present the great ideas of those who are not great speakers or interactionists so that they are appreciated?

Third, how do we give the trainer and the trainee a sense of media control instead of a feeling of subservience to the machine?

Fourth, how do we distinguish between information which is already stable enough so that it can be standardized and information which requires direct interaction with an expert?

Fifth, how do we compute the economics of training versus not training so that we can quantify the billion dollar mistake?

The solutions to these challenges

are not simple and are subject to emotional interpretations. However, the need to face these challenges and develop workable solutions *can* be met by the HRD professional. Progressive companies which have been affected by the changes in technology in the competitive marketplace are already leading the way. As the impact of the technology continues to expand and inflationary forces increase, the pressures to adapt will spread throughout industry. All of us will need to work together to develop innovative new ways to take advantage of the new technology making it both more accessible and more effective.

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