S-OJT™ in Brief

By Ronald L. Jacobs

How do people learn to do their jobs? Research shows that most individuals learn their jobs in the actual workplace, not in corporate classrooms or other off-the-job settings. But much of this learning is informal or unstructured, which often results in unpredictable training outcomes. Therefore, an increasing number of organizations have begun to use Structured on-the-job training (S-OJT), since it combines the consistency and reliability of formal classroom training programs and the relevance of learning in the actual work setting.

Challenge for Organizations

What makes a company successful? Good products? Most advanced technology? Best customer service? All of these are important for success. But, none of these are more important than the people who work in the company. Specifically, it's the knowledge and skills that people use to do their work. Unfortunately, the needs of organizations are constantly changing. The challenge for organizations is having the means to help employees update their knowledge and skills – or their **competence** – in the most efficient and effective ways possible.

What is Competence?

Competence is a person's relative ability to perform a task. Some people might be very good at a task – such as an expert. Someone else might be just beginning to learn how to perform the task, or a novice. Table 1 shows human competence categorized into a taxonomy ranging from a novice to that of a master.

Changes in Competence

Employee competence in organizations is subject to continuous change. Seven related situations occur that affect employee competence:

- New-hires: Full-time, Part-time, and Temporary
- Promotion
- Rotation and transfer
- Continuous improvement efforts
- Multi-skilling
- Technology
- New products or services
- Customer requirements

S-OJT and Competence

S-OJT is one of the best ways that companies can address their competence issues. But, S-OJT does not make employees into expert employees immediately. No training program can do that. S-OJT helps employees to work independently, faster and better.

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Master	The real expert among experts. This person sets standards for others.
Expert	One who can do both the routine and non-routine cases of the task.
Experienced Specialist	One who has performed the task repeatedly and can do it with ease.
Specialist	One who can reliably perform the task, but this person has limited experience.
Novice	One who is new to the task and lacks the ability to perform it.

Table 1. Levels of Human Competence

Meaning of S-OJT

Structured on-the-job training (S-OJT) was first introduced in the 1980s to help organizations respond to the challenges of the global economy.

S-OJT is defined as "The planned process of developing competence on units of work by having an experienced employee train a novice employee at the work setting or a location that closely resembles the work setting. Five key points in the definition are:

- **Experienced Employee** – A person who knows the task and has been qualified as an S-OJT trainer.

- **Novice Employee** – A person who lacks the knowledge and skills to perform a task, has the prerequisites, and is ready to learn.

- **Planned Process** – The trainer uses the S-OJT Steps to guide how to deliver the S-OJT Module. The module contains all the information required to conduct the training.

- **Task** – A specific unit of work within a job. A task is not everything that a person does, but just a small part.

- **Work setting** – This is the location of S-OJT, only if the training does not affect production or service delivery.
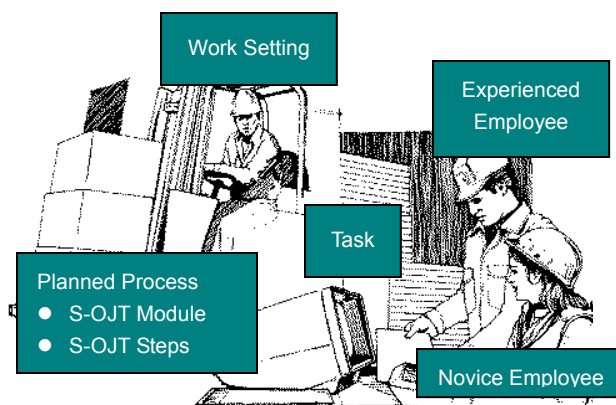
Meaning of Unstructured OJT

Unfortunately, most training that occurs at the work setting is unplanned, or *unstructured*. All of us have experienced unstructured OJT. Some people call unstructured OJT "Follow Joe training" or "Sit by Sally training." This means that the training will be done merely by watching someone else do it.

Unstructured OJT usually has the following features:

- Rarely achieves the desired training outcomes
- Often includes inaccurate or incomplete content
- Relies too much on individuals to communicate
- Trainers often use different methods each time
- Employees are uncertain whether it's appropriate to share
- Some employees fear to share their know-how

View S-OJT as a system

S-OJT differs from unstructured OJT in making use of a planned process. Carrying out the planned process with a system view helps ensure that the training will be efficient and effective. The system view of S-OJT has two major implications: First, S-OJT is a system in itself. Second, S-OJT should be developed and used systematically.

S-OJT system

As a system, the training inputs, training processes, and the training outputs can be identified. The system also recognizes that S-OJT occurs in an organizational setting.
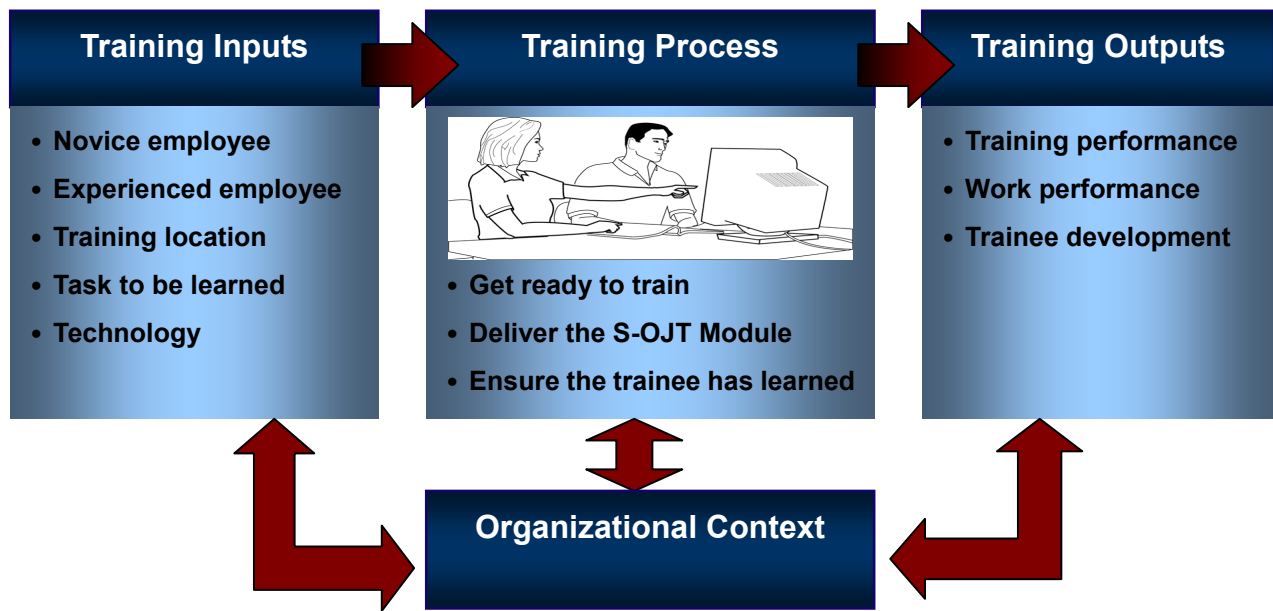
Training Inputs

- **Novice employee**
- **Experienced employee**
- **Training location**
- **Task to be learned**
- **Technology**

Training Process

- **Get ready to train**
- **Deliver the S-OJT Module**
- **Ensure the trainee has learned**

Training Outputs

- **Training performance**
- **Work performance**
- **Trainee development**

Organizational Context

Figure 1. The S-OJT system

S-OJT process

Figure 2 presents the second implication of the system view—an orderly process is needed for the design, delivery, and evaluation of S-OJT. In general, the six process steps shown are the ones that allow us to put together a system in the most effective and efficient ways possible.

The S-OJT process should be considered a subset of the larger performance improvement process. As such, S-OJT process should be used only after a through analysis of the gap between the current/ anticipated and the desired performance outcomes. As stated, S-OJT is appropriate only when the cause of the gap is caused by a lack of appropriate employee competence to perform as expected.
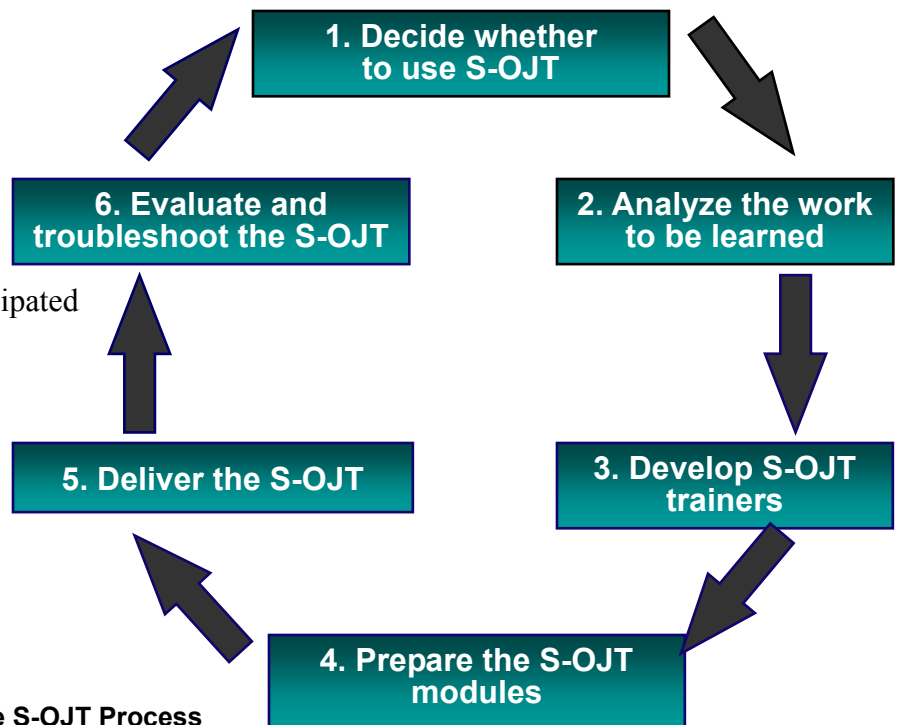

1. Decide whether to use S-OJT

2. Analyze the work to be learned

3. Develop S-OJT trainers

4. Prepare the S-OJT modules

5. Deliver the S-OJT

6. Evaluate and troubleshoot the S-OJT

Figure 2. The S-OJT Process

Benefit of S-OJT

S-OJT makes use of the principle that training is most effective when it occurs as close as possible to the work. Many companies use S-OJT alone or to complement other training approaches, such as classroom training.

The following outcomes have been reported:

- Reduced training times
- Lower training costs
- Improved quality rates
- Increased development opportunities for employees

A case study suggests that S-OJT provides approximately twice the financial benefits and five times the efficiency compared to unstructured OJT.
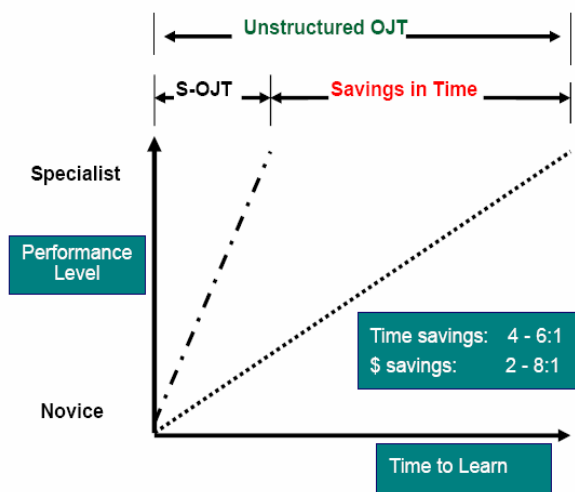
For more information:

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