Introduction

To quote Director Bayne, "effective training must begin with the end in mind." Over the past seven years, the Wyoming Law Enforcement Academy has researched and experimented with a wide variety of training concepts to achieve that end. To us, the "end" means establishing the appropriate content, delivery methods, and evaluation methods to provide the best opportunity for law enforcement students to succeed in the profession once they complete their training. We use the term "training methods" or "training methodology" to encapsulate the areas of content, delivery methods, and evaluation methods specific to an adult learner.

As a training organization mandated by W.S. §9-1-633 through W.S. §9-1-635 to provide basic, advanced, and outreach law enforcement training, the Wyoming Law Enforcement Academy (WLEA) is obligated to ensure the training provided is of the highest quality and serves the appropriate purposes. The first question is, what precisely is that purpose? Law enforcement training itself is a means to an end. Determining the end or purpose of training is key to selecting the appropriate means or methodology. In this discussion, we will focus on basic training.

Constructing WLEA's basic training courses is multi-faceted, involving several stakeholders; however, to be legally defensible, we must constantly analyze our training outcomes and whether those outcomes satisfy the corresponding Job Task Analysis mandates. One of the most significant revelations in our research was comparing job tasks from the Job Task Analysis with the learning objectives. Our Peace Officer basic course had 811 learning objectives. The standard for 85% of those objectives was knowledge-based (identify, recognize, demonstrate, etc.) By contrast, there are approximately 310 job tasks identified as "basic," every one of which is performance-based. With only a few exceptions, the job tasks are either outcomes or unspecified processes qualified with a result. WLEA was heavily reliant on information and process-driven training methods, which revealed a legitimate need to explore other methodologies.

Another long-standing indication of the need to explore change was found in agencies' perception of a new officer's level of functionality upon completing basic training. Over the years, it has not been uncommon for new officers to tell us they were told by first-line supervisors and field training officers to "get through the Academy and then come home, and we will teach you how to do it right." While the statement may seem offensive, in many cases, it expressed a valid need. Agencies observed an inadequate level of basic functionality in their new officers that required a significant amount of application exposure.

Based on these and other observations, we began exploring scientific principles of learning and performance, which led to the design, development, and implementation of training approaches and methodologies, resulting in longer retention and a higher level of functional performance.

Training Method Philosophy

Five components encompass the WLEA Training Method Philosophy. They are; vocationally premised, evidence-driven, learner-centered, outcome-based, and concept-oriented. Each of these five components works in conjunction with each other to provide the necessary parameters to produce law enforcement training that promotes high levels of functionality.

Vocational Premise

Vocationally premised training focuses on the ability to apply as opposed to simply knowing. While this may seem intuitive, many law enforcement topics have academic and abstract aspects, while others are more application and technique-based. We ensure that the content, delivery methods, and evaluation methods are all vetted and then integrated, focusing on outcomes and applying knowledge instead of simply determining "what is the most important."

Evidence Driven

Evidence-driven training utilizes scientific conclusions and principles as well as researched applications. There are vast treasure troves of validated scientific information available regarding both cognitive and psychomotor learning. We have combined these scientific conclusions and principles with both internally and externally researched applications to produce our delivery and evaluation methods.

Learner-Centered

Learner-centered training focuses exclusively on the needs of the student concerning the learning. Traditional law enforcement training methodologies are more instructor-centered, usually due to demands to be faster, easier, and more financially feasible. We have designed the training methodologies as much as possible to allow the students to be more involved in and responsible for their learning. The design mimics the reality in their actual jobs to be self-sufficient, resourceful in finding answers and operating autonomously.

Outcome-Based

Outcome-based training focuses on and requires the learner to develop and implement creative processes within established standards. Many traditional law enforcement training methodologies, particularly in basic training, tend to be much more process-oriented again due to demands to be shorter, easier, and more financially feasible. We have designed delivery methods to demand creative process development and evaluation methods that measure the outcomes of those processes.

Concept Oriented

Concept-oriented training is one of two philosophies when dealing with variability in the performance (work) environment. In our research and experience, basic learners struggle to conceptualize several applications they have learned. However, they tend to quickly learn and even create their own applications if they learn the concept first. In combination with creative process development, this provides the environment necessary for functional problem-solving. We have designed the content and delivery methods to begin with concepts and, as much as possible, allow the students to discover the application through experiential learning guided by a developed and experienced instructor who is committed to learner-centered outcomes.