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Reaching the adult learner: Teaching Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) to practicing technology managers

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Reaching the Adult Learner: Teaching Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) to Practicing Technology Managers.
Overview

- Research question
- Background
- Research process
- Challenges
- Findings
- Conclusions from findings
- Implications for further research

Anthony K. Achale
March 29, 2012
Research Question

What are the characteristics of an effective ITIL training course: that focuses on helping
- guide course designers
- trainers prepare trainees to pass the certification exam
- and use their new knowledge to implement ITIL in the workplace?

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A great deal has been written about adult learning in terms of approaches and strategies. However, very little has been published on best practices for teaching Information Technology Infrastructure Library® (ITIL) certification course to IT professionals. This dearth of research, along with five years of experience teaching the course sparked my interest in exploring the research question, “What are the characteristics of an effective ITIL training course that focuses on helping trainers prepare trainees to pass the certification exam and use their new knowledge to implement ITIL in the workplace?” Using a semi-structured interview method, I explore the research question with 15 graduates of the ITIL certification course. This research presents insights from those ITIL course participants on best practices for teaching ITIL to adult learners in the IT field.
Using a semi-structured interview method, effective teaching is examined through course participants’ eyes. An analysis of the results leads to identification of four key categories associated with adult learning theory and seven related themes.

Each category and its related theme(s) offer an insight into various facets of curriculum and teaching information technology industry professionals from the perspective of those interviewed.
Working with busy adults spread all over proved to be challenging. This was addressed through the use of technology.

Since I could not do face-to-face interviews, it was difficult to read facial expressions and interpret how participants felt during interviews.

Analysis of the interview data proved to be a challenge due to the amount of material gathered during the interviews. It was surprisingly large.

Limitations (or is this Challenges?)

These bullet points are too long. Basically, you’re noting challenges around these three areas:

• “Scheduling” (because working adults are pretty busy)
• “Phone interviews” (and there’s discussion in the methodological literature about how to deal with this),
• “Coding” (making sense of the unexpected wealth of data you gleaned through the interviews)
Used adult learn theory to analyze the data 4 categories and 7 themes emerged related to:

- course design
- course delivery
- application of course content
# Categories, Themes and Related Adult Learner Theories

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>THEME</th>
<th>ADULT LEARNING THEORY</th>
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| Understanding the Audience | Working with and Teaching Adult Learners  
|                   | Managing Students’ Experiences | - Value what adults bring to learning  
|                   |                            | - Learn when transformed by the experience  
|                   |                            | - Learn when content is relevant   |
| Preparing for the Audience | Meeting Participants’ Expectations  
|                   | Organizing the Content       | - Learning is task-oriented  
|                   |                            | - Need to know the reason(s) for learning   |
| Teaching the Audience | Timing the Program  
|                   | Applying Teaching Skills     | - Feel responsible for their own learning   |
| Connecting with the Audience | Building Relationships | - Adult learners respond to external motivating factors (i.e. job promotion, salary increase, etc.)  
|                   |                            | - Become ready to learn when they see a direct benefit |

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Themes that emerged from the interviews were interpreted as characteristics for effective course instruction.

**Characteristics of Effective Course Instructors**

**MEANING**

Know your students
Become aware of learners' experiences and backgrounds, and the role they play in teaching and learning
Demonstrate respect
Ability of the instructor to demonstrate to students an appreciation them as professional colleagues
Cultivate efficient relationships
Ability of the instructor to create a positive relationship with participants
Self-confidence
Instructor must show confident in his/ her knowledge of course content
Go with the flow
Understand that planned class curricula may need to be dropped and replaced if the topic takes an unexpected turn or the students are not
connecting with it

Make learning relevant
Effective instruction requires that instructor makes material relevant to students’ learning needs

Make learning fun and engaging
The instructor should use various tools (e.g., group work, stories, anecdotes, personal sharing, exercises) to engage students in the learning process and make it enjoyable
Effective trainers know the subject and recognize the knowledge students bring as important to the course. They know the shared characteristics students bring (such as their age, family and professional responsibilities).

Similarly, the key to effectiveness in ITIL course design lies in making sure it is tailored towards working adults; course objectives address real issues and be student-centered, use real world experience in lesson plans, include collaboration, and be flexible enough to accommodate the busy life style of the working adults.
Implications for Further Study

Several opportunities for research emerge from this study. A key area of research relates to how a shared learning community is created during an ITIL course, despite the limited amount of time participants spend together. What shared norms or values promote learning? Once identified, what is their relative importance and how does this change in different situations, subject areas, or types of individuals involved? If composition of the group changes (e.g., to mainstream college age students 18 to 24 years old, or business managers), how are the varying norms and values blended?

A second area of interest relates to the environment in which this research has been conducted. Could the research and the results be transferred to a longer course, or a formal postsecondary institution, with participants not in a business community (i.e. semester based learning environment). For example, what are the characteristics of effective ITIL course if taught within a traditional college or university academic calendar? What are the characteristics of effective training for a non-technical course? How do those characteristics transfer from traditional academic classroom to a corporate environment?