



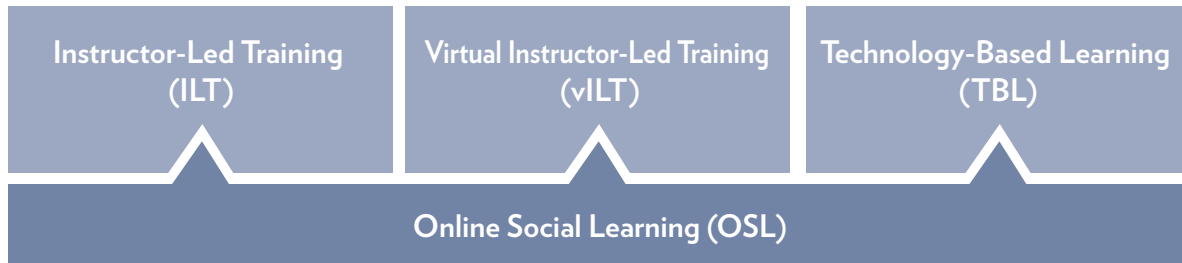
Virtual Instructor-Led
Training:

A Modality
Comes of Age



Developing the 21st
century workforce™

Training in the 21st century can feel like a family reunion of high and low technologies—from anywhere-mobile-access to mango-scented marker pens. Fortunately, these sometimes squabbling relatives sort neatly into four big-bucket learning modalities:



Like four siblings, these modalities all have their unique virtues and hang-ups. So each offers both appeal and challenge for soft-skills training, whether in leadership, sales, or customer service.

The eldest sibling is instructor-led training (ILT), still a proven fit for interpersonal skills. Why not learn to interact with other people by interacting with other people? Yet drawbacks dim the appeal of ILT, notably the need for learners to be away from their work and the cost of travel for far-flung associates.

The second eldest, technology-based learning (TBL)—whether “traditional eLearning” or trendy mobile learning—avoids those particular problems. Still, TBL completion rates are historically dismal for isolated people disinclined to fill their spare time with training.

The youngest and darling of the family is online social learning (OSL)—unstructured, associate-driven, and peer-to-peer. Sadly, though, whatever motivates tweeting doesn’t always motivate work-related OSL, which seems to function best as a supporting rather than a central learning modality.

Virtual instructor-led training (vILT) may be a classic middle child, slow to gain traction but now coming into its own. While vILT has been around for at least 15 years, today’s anemic budgets, need for speed, new technology, and improved learning design make vILT increasingly attractive. Leaders, learners, and facilitators recognize that vILT avoids many of the drawbacks of other modalities. At the same time, it offers:

- A live instructor
- Real-time learner interaction
- The basic apparatus of a classroom (minus the scented markers)
- Typically shorter sessions than ILT
- Learners who remain at their desks

But what exactly is “virtual instructor-led training,” and does it really have no hang-ups at all?

Virtual Training Vindicated

If you attended grammar school, you know what “instructor-led training” is. You know it occurs in a classroom, and its format can vary widely, from straight lecture to engaging activities and discussion. Effective corporate ILT is of the latter type, with structured learning activities and discussion ideally guided by a facilitator fluent in adult-learning theory.

When you add the “v” to “ILT,” you get a very similar experience online. Learners and facilitator, all in different locations, connect to each other with their own computers and interact real-time on a “virtual training platform.” A typical platform offers these basic features:

- Live conversation (similar to a conference call either by integrated audio or voice-over IP)
- Chat (with text made visible to some or all)
- Polling (learners respond to questions or raise their digital “hands”)
- Whiteboard (everyone can key in text or draw on a shared screen)
- Digital slides (i.e., PowerPoint™)
- Streaming media (pre-recorded video or audio clips)
- File sharing (documents downloaded and printed by learners)
- Breakout rooms (where small groups dialog separately, inaudible to others)

Well-designed, -delivered, and -implemented vILT is highly interactive learning with everyone in separate locations. It’s worth noting that vILT is not a webinar (a one-way speaker and every listener in a separate location). It’s not distance learning (a one-way speaker in one location and a group in a separate location). And it’s not eLearning (a lone learner at a computer).

Like any other modality, vILT can be effective—or not. The first step in offering effective vILT is to be aware of certain limitations:

- Unlike ILT, vILT rarely includes direct visual contact, affecting some learners’ motivation to speak up. Lack of visual contact also makes it more difficult for a facilitator to read group dynamics.¹
- While learners routinely tolerate ILT lasting several hours, the attention span for vILT tends to be shorter. So, combined with the lack of visual contact, learners may multi-task, thereby undercutting the value of training.
- Classroom learners, especially over several sessions, often begin to form a bond with their fellow participants. The physical separation of virtual learners can inhibit the sense of being a cohesive group learning together.²
- vILT is not immune to technological challenges, either the technology itself or the technical proficiency of learners.

So, like its siblings, vILT is no perfect child. To overcome these limitations and realize the enormous benefits of this learning modality, it’s wise to aim for the following 15 critical success factors.

¹ While most platforms now employ webcams for visual contact, this technology brings its own issues for group comfort and dynamics.

² An online social learning platform where virtual learners share information and advice about vILT skills and concepts can help mitigate this problem.

vILT Success Factors

Plan for sustainment

1. All effective training follows a coherent learning process. For example, AchieveGlobal's "Learning Formula" guides learners through a set of experiences: commit to learning, assess current skills, acquire knowledge, and develop and apply new skills. Given the compressed format of vILT, it may be challenging to move through this full progression in a brief event. Instead, use a range of components before and after a session to move learners through the full process.
2. Since there is little time to get buy-in during a vILT session, learners must hit the ground running. Arrange pre-session conversations between learners and their managers to set expectations, build commitment, and eliminate the need for context-setting at the outset of a vILT session.
3. As with any learning solution, support post-session conversations between learners and managers, as well as guided skill application to help learners integrate new skills into daily activities.

Keep it engaging

4. To reduce the temptation to multi-task, design courses so virtual learners interact at least every three minutes with the platform, with each other, or with the facilitator.
5. Leverage the full set of virtual platform features — not for their own sake, but to support clear learning outcomes.
6. Use compelling visuals (versus text-heavy PowerPoint™). Include story-telling and video or audio, rather than resorting to straight lecture. Use chats, whiteboards, and polls to support continuous learner interactivity.
7. To help keep people engaged despite the distractions of their own work space, give virtual learners a break at least every 60-90 minutes.
8. vILT is not a webinar that delivers one-way information, sometimes to hundreds. Limit group size to 12-20 learners to promote the level of interaction needed to master complex interpersonal skills.
9. Drive live participation. Listening to a recorded virtual session offers little or no learning value. Since person-to-person interaction is the heart of vILT, ask learners who miss a session to attend a parallel session or complete parallel TBL.
10. Use a producer to help vILT facilitators focus on guiding activities and keeping learners engaged. A producer makes sure the platform runs smoothly and troubleshoots technical issues for individual learners, e.g. online connectivity or unfamiliarity with a platform feature.

Devote appropriate time and resources

11. Although travel is usually unnecessary for vILT, pay close attention to other crucial details, such as scheduling, cohort assignments, technology set-up, equipment requirements, materials distribution, and communications.
12. While an individual vILT session may be shorter than an “equivalent” ILT session, overall training time may be equal when you include “before” and “after” activities. Choose vILT for its value in closing a performance gap for a specific audience, not purely to save time.
13. Minimize technology issues by coordinating and testing with the IT department well in advance of the training. Items to cover include bandwidth implications for streaming video, ability to support multiple users logging in from one location, firewall challenges, voice-over IP capabilities, headset usage, and more.
14. When rolling out a complex series of connected vILT sessions, allow 2-7 days between sessions to give learners time to reflect and apply new skills, as well as complete inter-session assignments.
15. Virtual trainers need skills that not all can master, e.g. engaging unseen learners, using platform tools, avoiding “dead air,” modulating voice tone, typing quickly, and speaking and texting at the same time. Give trainers any additional development they may need.

Like other maturing middle children—now young adults—vILT is ready for a central place in the family of learning modalities. If you keep the above success factors in mind, virtual instructor-led training can become a true partner in preparing associates to achieve individual, team, and organizational goals.

About AchieveGlobal

In the 21st century, the level of human skills will determine organization success. AchieveGlobal provides exceptional development in interpersonal business skills, giving companies the workforce they need for business results. Located in over 40 countries, we offer multi-language, learning-based solutions — globally, regionally, and locally.

We understand the competition you face. Your success depends on people who have the skills to handle the challenges beyond the reach of technology. We're experts in developing these skills, and it's these skills that turn your strategies into business success in the 21st century.

These are things technology can't do. Think. Learn. Solve problems. Listen. Motivate. Explain. People with these skills have a bright future in the 21st century. AchieveGlobal prepares you for that world.



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