



# Practicing Active Learning

in Small-Cap High-Technology Corporations

John Hannes- Sennah Design

Kathleen K. Woods- LeCroy Corporation



# Introduction

**John Hannes**, *Corporate Executive Consultant*

- Product Development
- Marketing
- Leadership
- Strategic Planning
- Creativity

**Kathy Kesting Woods**, *Marketing & Communications Professional*

- Strategic Marketing Communication
- Corporate Branding
- Conceptual Thinking
- Content Development
- Project Management



# The Concept of RLE<sup>2</sup>

## Rapid Learning Event/Experience (RLE<sup>2</sup>)

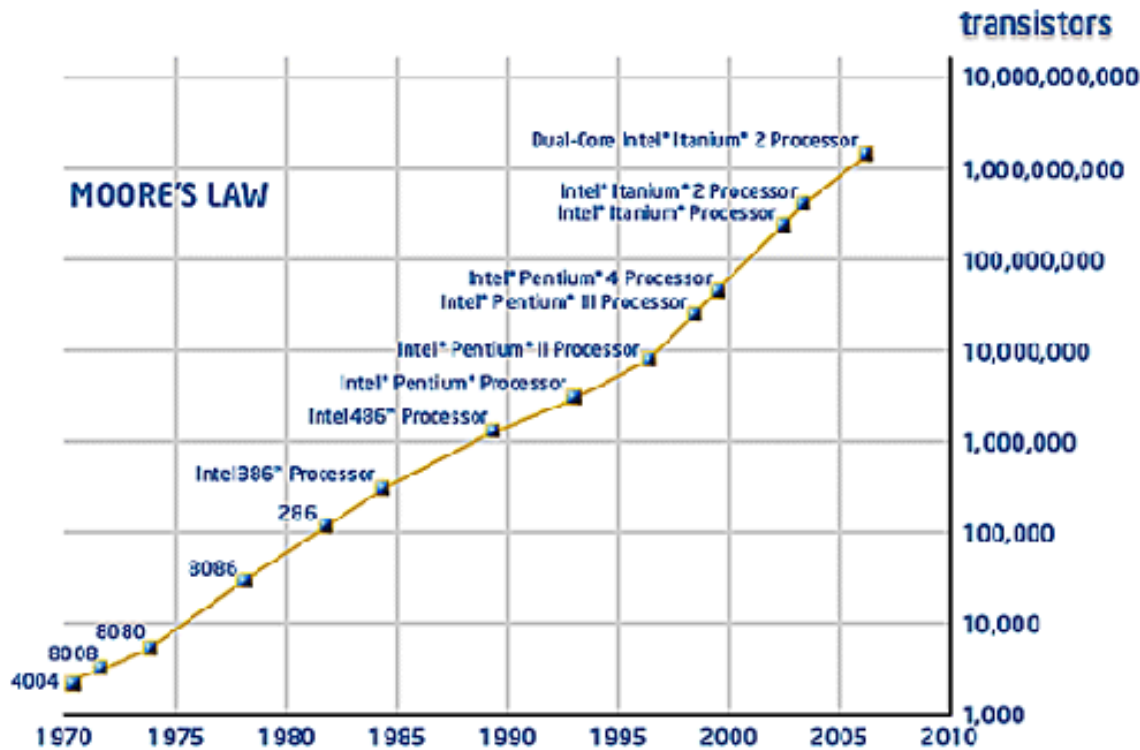
- Complex Subject Matter
- Intensified Pace
- Symbolic and Social Elements
- High Retention Rate
- High Propagation Rate

## RLE<sup>2</sup>: 5 Components

- Idea and Theme
- Courses and Course Development
- Event Design
- Execution
- Measurement and Feedback



# Moore's Law

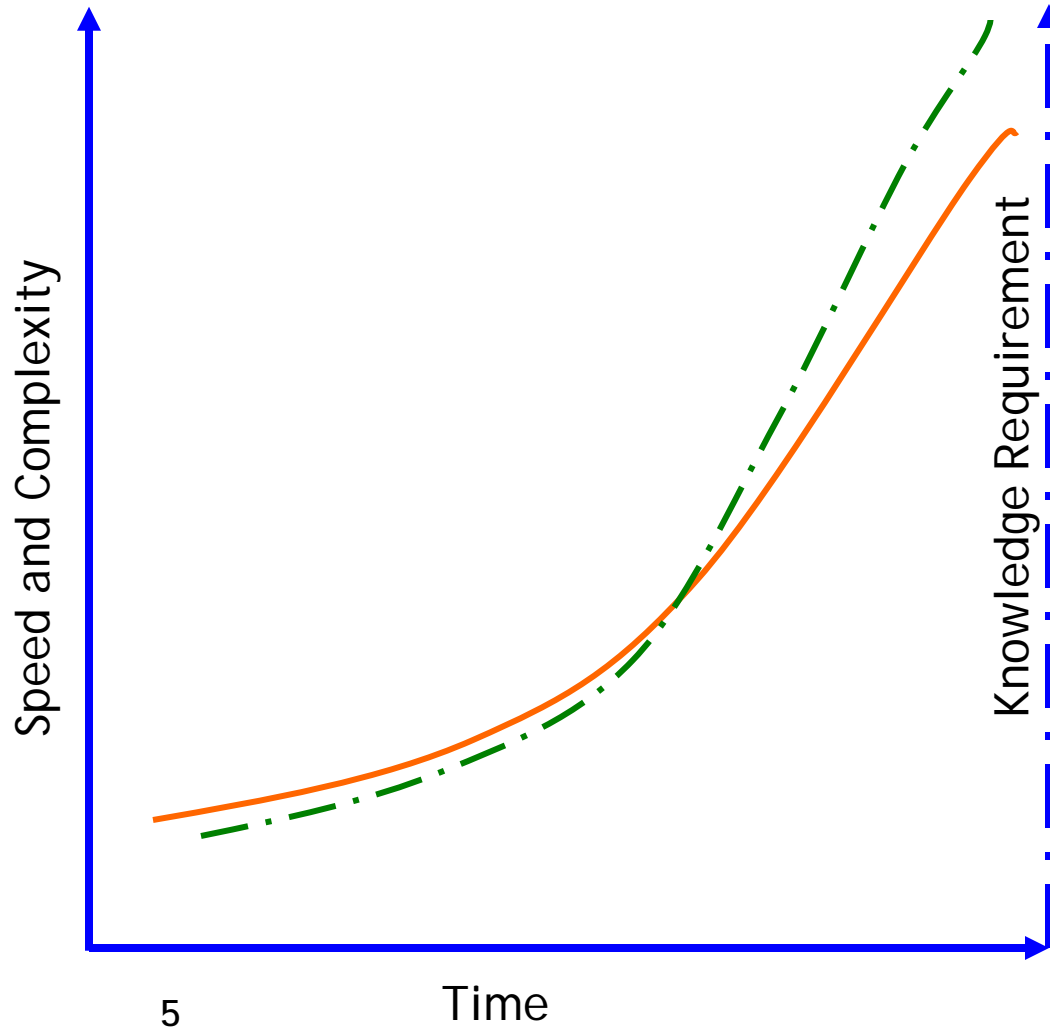


## Moore's Law

In 1965, Intel co-founder Gordon Moore predicted that the number of transistors on a chip would double about every two years. Since then, Moore's Law has fueled a technology revolution as Intel has exponentially increased the number of transistors integrated into its processors for greater performance and energy efficiency.



# The Problem

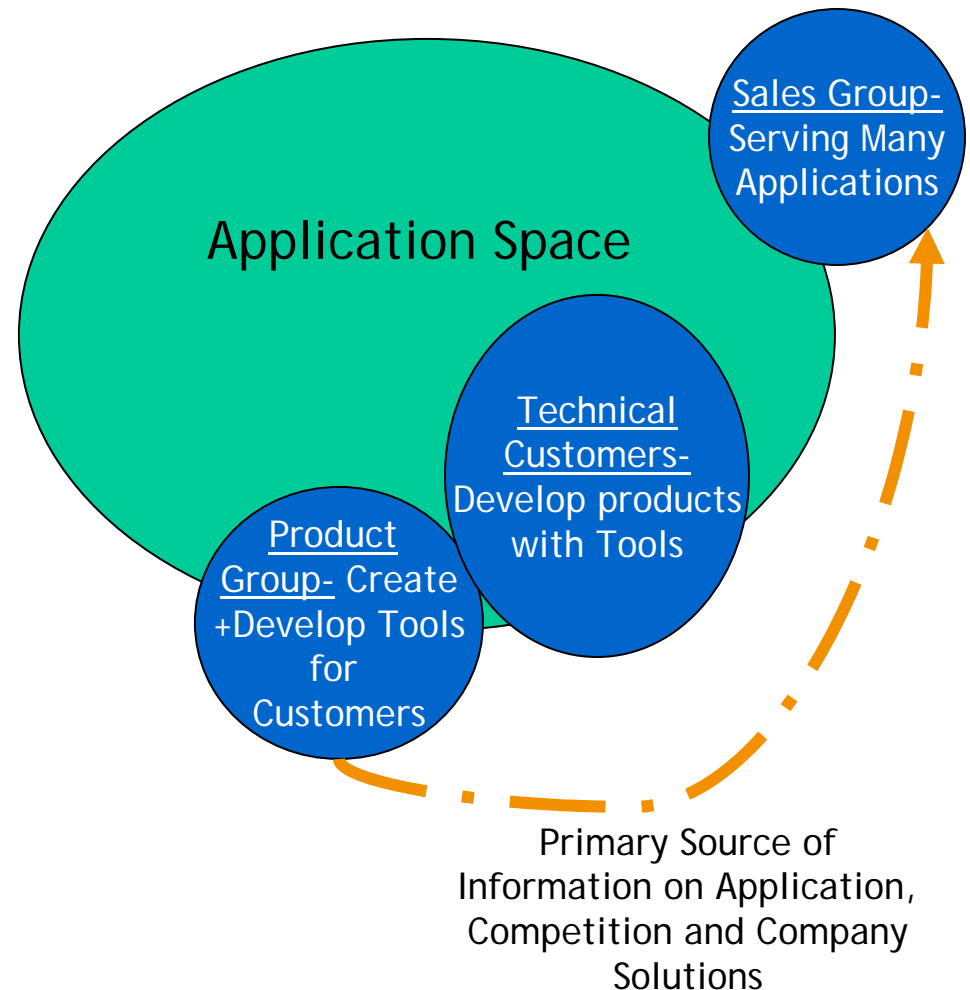


- Small Cap Technology invest heavily in new Technologies and Product Design
- As Technical Applications rapidly increase in complexity The Sales Group has an exponentially growing need to apply diverse sets of application knowledge



# Problem: Maximize Flow through the Communication Chain

- The Product Group designs and develops tools for customers who work in a specific application
- Sales is the primary interface from the Product Group to the Customer
- Competitors seek to establish similar product solutions for the Application Space
- Differentiated solutions must be effectively communicated by the Sales Group to the Technical Customer





# Problem: Sticky Training

- Subject matter retention, or 'stickiness'
  - Research shows that group cohesiveness enhances retention and embodiment of new ideas
- Two seminal theories on the topic relate to a Rapid Learning Experience/Event (RLE<sup>2</sup>)
  - Organizational Sensemaking, *Karl Weick*
  - Symbolic Convergence Theory, *Ernest Bormann*

*Websites and References listed at the end of this presentation*



# Organizational Sensemaking

- A collective interpretation of events advances the goals of the organizations
- This process is classic *Organizational Sensemaking* (Karl Weick)
- 7 Characteristics of Organizational Sensemaking:
  - Grounded in identity construction
  - Retrospective
  - Enactive of sensible environments
  - Social
  - Ongoing
  - Focused on and extracted by cues
  - Driven by plausibility rather than accuracy



# Symbolic Convergence

- Symbolic convergence theory is based on shared fantasy-chains, or stories
  - Fantasy themes are the connected similarities between narratives
    - One person tells a story
    - Another picks it up
    - Soon all relate shared-theme experiences
  - Productivity is enhanced by the bonds that form when groups share experiences that are outside the realm of what they specific tasks



# Five Step Development Process

1. Team, idea, theme
  - **Grounded in identity construction:**  
Choose a story or myth that the group will want to be identified with, the example we're using today utilizes Greek gods.
2. Parallel Course Development
  - **Enactive of sensible environments**  
Make an effort to have the entire event logically consistent internally. In other words, don't use Greek gods and American Sports figures
3. Event Design
  - **Social**  
Structure the event so that there are a number of opportunities for interaction within the group and with the symbols
4. Execution
  - **Focused on and extracted by cues**  
The symbols and myths provide cues to retaining the technical material.
  - **Driven by plausibility rather than accuracy**  
We use this guide to a specific advantage in the Rapid Learning Experience. The technology must be accurate, but the myth, the story or the fantasy-chain can help provide the plausibility through analogy.
5. Measure and Feedback
  - **Ongoing**  
Follow-up must be built into the plan from the start to propagate the learning throughout the corporation



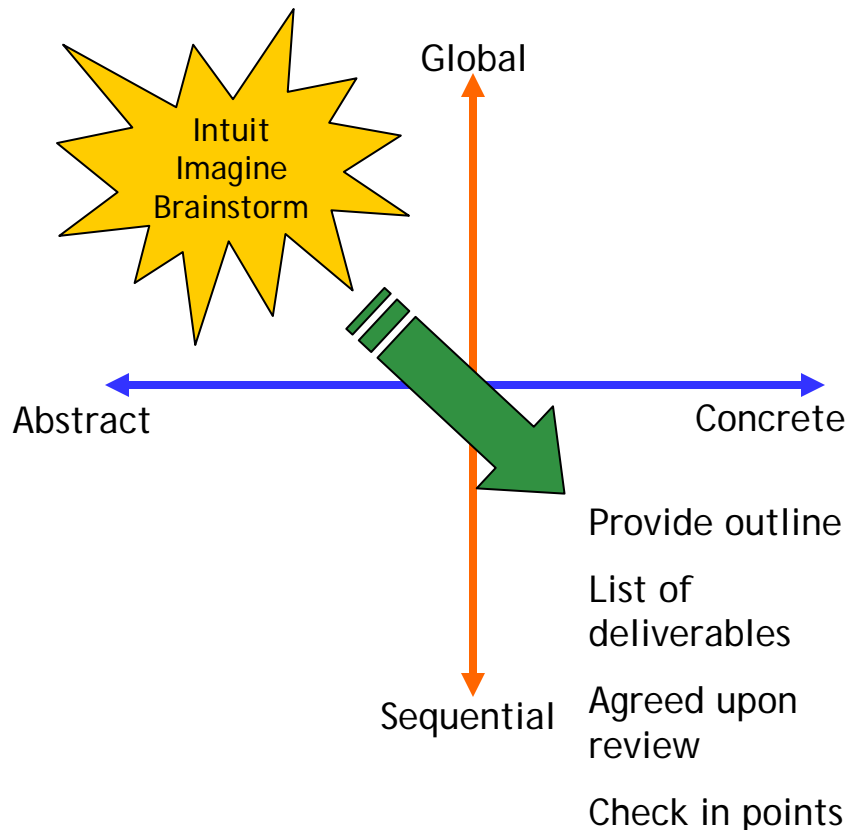
# Step One: Team, idea, theme

- Identifying team that wants to put this on
  - Contributors - Product Marketing & Engineering
  - Manager and Executive buy-in
  - Product generation, order generation, and order fulfillment

## Theme

- Build on image potential
- Assess relevance

# Designing the Overarching Theme



- Identify Abstract thinkers during theme creation
- Provide clear agreements and list of deliverables to implementers



# Comparing 2 Possible Themes

## The 5 key qualities:

- List Oriented
- Links abstract with measurable
- Helped support a common structure by content providers
- Allowed primary (event) symbol and secondary (individual) symbol

## Theme 1: The Art of War

- Where is the battle? Is it technology, customers or competition?
- Difficult to quantify
- Huge topic
- Difficult to identify 'one' key well known image
- Failed Tests on Simple Communication



# Comparing 2 Possible Themes

## The 5 key qualities:

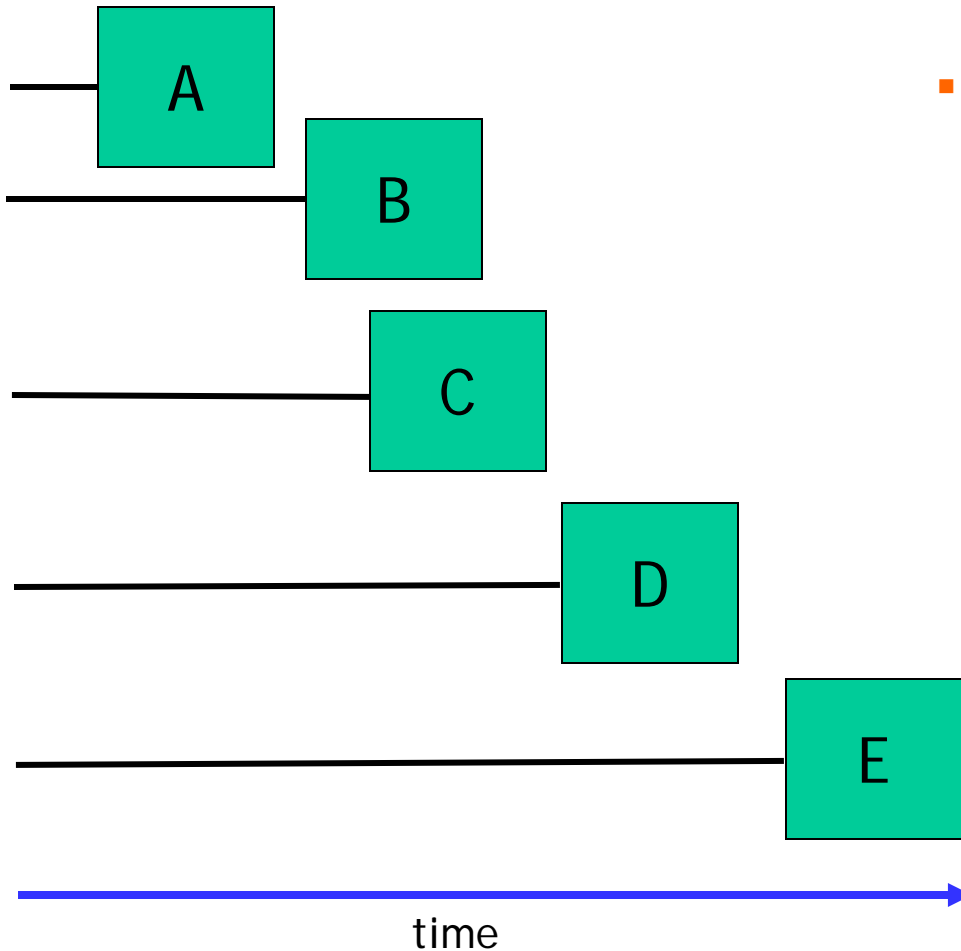
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## Theme 2: Pentathlon

- Always about 5
- Again, always about 5 and the myth of ancient Olympics had symbolic qualities of achievement
- Subject Matter Experts synthesized to the top 5 most important messages
- Warrior and olympic rings are understood by everyone
- Pentathlon was the group symbol and the warrior was the individual activity



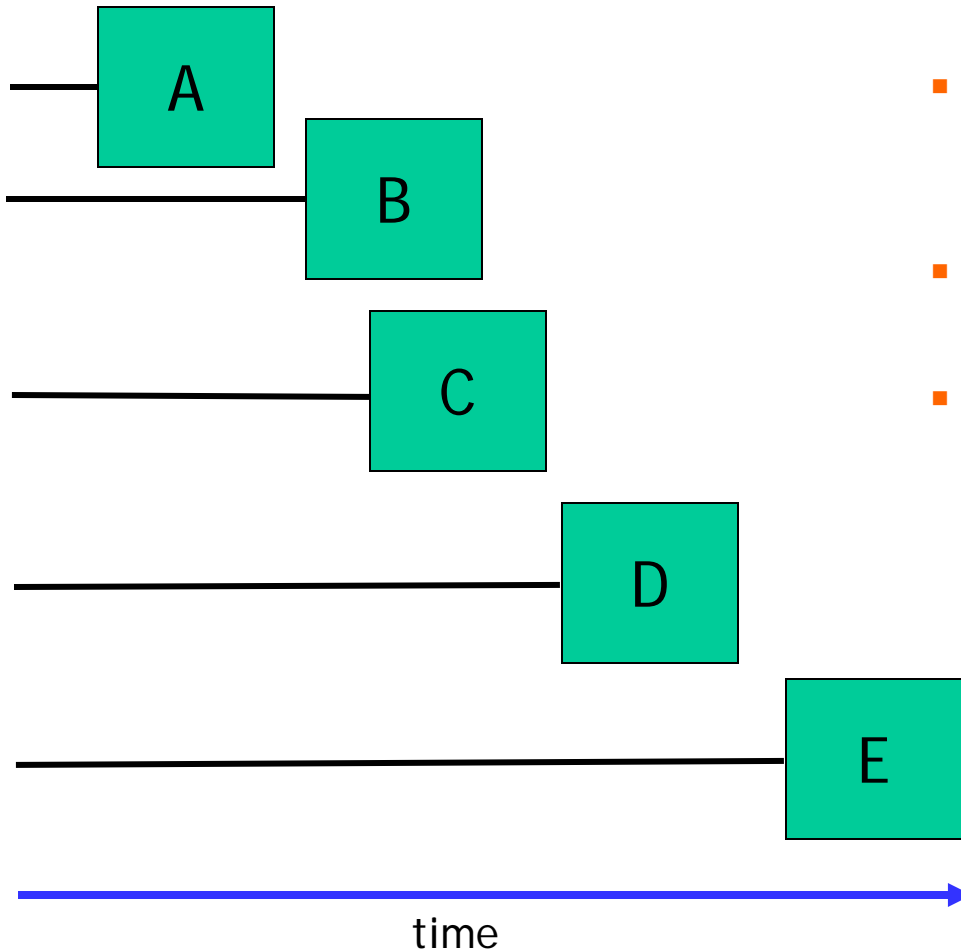
## Step Two: Parallel v. Sequential training



- A through E are unique product areas; each with a different customer requirements, product solutions and product manager

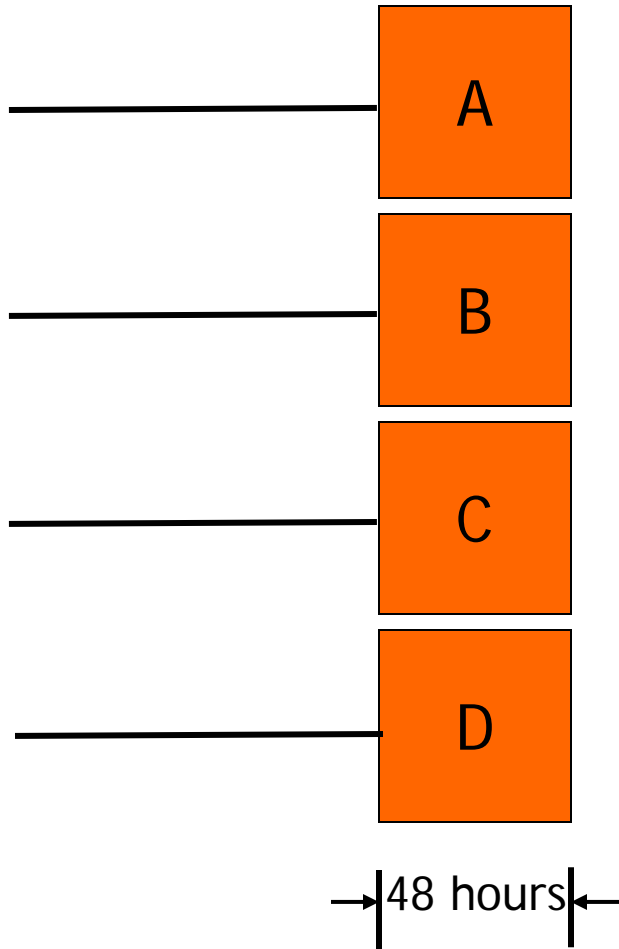


# Sequential Training: Independent Events



- Typically the product or application manager prepares the training
- Difficult to provide consistency between courses
- Upon completion there is no uniform method to assess understanding or predict effectiveness in a selling environment

# Parallel Learning Event



## Rapid Learning Event

- Fixed time, short duration event
- Materials use Common format
- Focus internal resources to prepare and rehearse; encourage material reuse
- Limit the depth on any one topic (available at serial trainings)
- Participant's only focus



# Sequential vs. Parallel

- Sequential is the typical. Depth is good.
- The number of topics to train, the diverse length of service and the geographical market differences supported a parallel learning activity
- Our work focused on product, market, competition. Advanced selling skills were not addressed

	Sequential	Parallel
New Product Introduction (1-2 days)	X	
Initial Training (typically 2 - 4 weeks)	X	
Mixed length of Service (1 yr - 20 yr)		X
Multiple small products introduced		X
Overall refreshing and updating of skills		X
Morale lifting	X	X



# Step Three: Event Design

- Course schedule and Distribution
  - Invitation letter
  - Prework
  - Course Descriptions and Selection (student w/mgr)
    - All Attend, Foundation, Advanced
  - Self Assessment
  - Setting Personal Objectives
- Constructing Social Elements
  - Opening Ceremony
  - Team Strategy Meetings
  - Food
  - Working Dinner
- Constructing Social Elements (con't)
  - Scavenger Hunt
  - Award Ceremony - individual and team recognition
  - Athletes Aftercare letter, team photo and t-shirt
- Develop Incentives
  - Team Strategy Meetings
  - Score Keeping
  - Scoring Rubric
  - Significant Prizes and



# Review and Optimize Components for Cohesiveness and Relevance

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## Step Five:

# Measurement and Feedback

## Measurement and Feedback

- Technical written tests for each course
- Demonstration skills evaluation coaching
- Social Contests
  - Photo scavenger hunt
  - Kinesthetic sculpture
- No engineer left behind program
- Award ceremony, team incentives
- Survey after award ceremony



# Questions and Answers

Q: Where can I get the presentation?

A: NJOD or leave us your email or business card and we'll send it to you along with additional supporting material

Q: Where can I find further information regarding supporting theories?

A: Start on the web with these

- <http://www.sennahdesign.blogspot.com> - John Hannes' blog
- <http://www.vayne.com/bormann.us.htm>  
this is simplistic, but gets you right into it.
- <http://www.comm.umn.edu/bormann.html>  
this is a memorial to Ernest Bormann at the University of Minnesota
- <http://www.bus.umich.edu/Academics/Departments/MO/Faculty/Bio.asp?id=000119782>  
Karl Weick's Curriculum Vitae