

Talent Development 21 Data and Analytics

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Section 3.7 in the CPTD Certification program for ATD is Data & Analytics. Section A reads, “Skill in selecting and/or using data visualization techniques, for example flow charts, graphs, plots, word clouds, and heat maps.”

The old cliché that a picture is worth a thousand words is really true. This is especially true when a lot of data is involved.

Trying to explain the relationship between different concepts can be tricky in words, but the mind can quickly absorb a large amount of data immediately in a picture and draw a conclusion. This clarity of thought saves a lot of time in training, and it helps to keep people fresh.

Death by PowerPoint

Many trainers practice "Death by PowerPoint," where they show numerous slides with a lot of words and then read the words to the audience, sometimes turning their back on the audience to read the screen. People zone out quickly.

A real example

Let me share an example of a picture being more powerful than a word description. I compared the level of trust in an entire organization from data gathered at different levels in the organization.

I measured trust as perceived by the top leaders in the organization, the middle managers, the supervisors, and the lead operators.

First, I will try to describe my observations in words, then I will show that a quick glance at a chart makes the whole concept much easier to absorb.

I asked leaders at several levels in an organization to rate their company on how much trust there is. The rating was 1 = low trust and 10 = high trust.

I then noted that leaders at the top of the organization (senior leaders) rated trust much higher than lower levels. People at lower levels perceived less trust in the organization.

A strange anomaly

At the Supervisor and Group Leader levels, a curious “hole” in the data began to emerge in the area of 5-6.

I puzzled over this hole in the data for quite a while. I now believe that when confronted with the challenge to identify the level of trust on a scale of 1-10, most people immediately considered 5 or 6 to be "average" (whatever that meant to them).

Then they thought, "well, we are somewhat better or worse than average," so that gave rise to a cluster of votes lower than 5-6 and a cluster that were higher.

That word picture is pretty difficult to follow and remember, but a chart showing the same data is rather easy to interpret. The digits represent the number of people at each level that voted for a particular trust rating. Here is the diagram.

Level of trust in this organization

Level	Sr Leaders	Managers	Supervisors	Lead Operators
10	1	3	3	1
9	1	2	7	2
8		7	5	3
7		1	2	2
6				
5				
4			2	8
3			2	2
2			4	2
1			3	1

I hope you agree that this single diagram makes the complex situation much easier to understand and remember.

With the COVID 19 Pandemic of 2020, it is even more important to use visualization techniques. We are living in a hybrid world, with some people at the office and most people still working from home. Even if the vaccines are effective in controlling the virus in the future, most futurists predict we will never go back to a full in-person workforce.

There will likely always be a significant portion of people working from home or satellite locations. For these people, the ability to show concepts graphically will be increasingly important.

When you develop training programs, make sure to include visual aids that are easy to digest. Also, go easy on the number of words used to keep people from zoning out.

Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD, is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and author in the areas of leadership and trust. He is the author of four books: 1. The Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals (2003), 2. Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online (2006), 3. Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind (2009), and 4. Trust in Transition: Navigating Organizational Change (2014).

In addition, he has authored over 1000 articles and videos on various topics in leadership and trust. Bob has many years as a senior executive with a Fortune 500 Company and with non-profit organizations.