



# Winning Hearts and Minds in Workplace Learning

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Q: How have you seen workplace learning programs balance the rational and emotional aspects of learning, and how does this contribute to employee engagement and knowledge retention?

A: It's a complex area, especially considering our bias towards the rational narrative in training.

For example, in compliance training we often see regulations that have strayed far from their original purpose, and something that started with a clear purpose becomes abstract and disconnected for learners. This can lead to half-hearted compliance or outright disregard by employees who don't see the relevance to their circumstances. If a regulation is perceived as irrelevant, employees might ignore it, which could sometimes lead to negative consequences.

This disconnection often exists because we fail to explain the 'why' behind actions, resulting in a conflict between the theoretical consequences (e.g. "bad things" will happen) and the employee's immediate reality (e.g they see no consequences of any kind). People struggle to relate to abstract, future consequences that don't impact them directly.

So, in the workplace, employees prioritize things that they perceive to have direct impact, visibility of change, and immediacy of consequences. Without an emotional context or relevance, it's challenging for employees to allocate their attention and care about the training content.

For instance, in financial advising, without a personal or ethical connection, decisions about investments can feel arbitrary and disconnected. Research by Antonio Damasio highlights that even seemingly rational decisions are underpinned by emotional contexts. When we don't provide this context or storytelling in training, we make it hard for employees to engage and prioritize the content. We need to address both the rational and emotional aspects—the 'elephant' and the 'rider' in the brain—to effectively engage employees.

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Q: Can you give an example of a learning experience that successfully incorporated the emotional side, delivering an impactful and visceral learning experience?

A: Yes, a colleague once described this manufacturing safety training example to me.

In this factory, the correct procedure for handling a blockage in the assembly line was to shut it down, remove the

blockage, and restart. This was a tedious process, so workers often chose to pull the blockage out while the assembly line was still running. To address this, the trainers created an exercise where participants had to perform everyday tasks like buttoning a shirt or pouring cereal with a plastic bag over one arm, simulating the loss of an arm.

This exercise made the consequences of not following safety protocols very real and tangible. It was a powerful way of making the risks of not following procedures feel immediate and personal, as opposed to just a theoretical possibility. This method of training goes beyond just telling or lecturing; it involves participants in a scenario that makes the dangers and consequences of their actions feel real and immediate.

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Q: What are your thoughts on how to make compliance training more engaging and relevant in office settings?

A: In office settings, where training often revolves around topics like sexual harassment prevention or financial regulations, making the content visceral can be more challenging. One effective approach is using real examples to demonstrate the impact of non-compliance.

For instance, discussing actual cases where executives faced legal consequences makes the training feel more immediate and relevant. It's also about structuring the training in a way that requires active problem-solving, such as presenting a situation and asking participants to determine if it violates regulations.

This approach creates a sense of immediacy and makes the training more engaging. Passive lecturing is less effective because it doesn't compel learners to engage or apply the information. To make the content resonate, it's important to present it in a way that feels immediately relevant and requires active participation.

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Q: What are your thoughts on the current approach to regulatory compliance training, where the focus is often just on training without ensuring understanding or practical application?

A: The current approach to regulatory compliance training is often ineffective because it emphasizes training without accountability for understanding or practical application.

This can result in people viewing it as a mere cost center, a checkbox to tick off without deriving any real benefit. Yet, there's a growing recognition that while compliance training is mandatory, it can

also be an opportunity to gain value.

Unfortunately, sometimes the training is irrelevant to the employee's role, leading to a situation where they are trained in knowledge they will never use. This approach can lead to employees devaluing all compliance training. When I interviewed Christian Hunt's (author of the book "Humanizing Rules") he described to me how irrelevant and poorly designed compliance training can essentially teach learners how to ignore our training.

Such training can convey the message that the content is trivial, thereby undermining its importance. The challenge is to avoid creating a culture where training is ignored and to ensure that assessments and content are relevant and engaging, changing the perception that compliance training is just an arbitrary requirement.

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**Q: Have you observed that there are more people in the field of e-learning who specialize in design and development rather than in analysis and evaluation?**

A: Yes, that seems to be the case. The nature of e-learning projects allows them to be built without much analysis and evaluation, although obviously that's not ideal. The non-negotiable parts of an e-learning project are design and development. Many people might not spend adequate time on design and instead focus on converting existing

materials like PowerPoint slides into e-learning content. The lack of feedback on the efficacy of training efforts in the field often shifts the focus towards efficient production rather than effective solutions. There's a noticeable emphasis on rapid authoring tools and methods to do things faster and more efficiently, rather than more effectively. The marketing language from vendors often reflects this priority. As a result, improvements tend to be concentrated on faster, cheaper design and development, neglecting analysis and evaluation.

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**Q: How does the lack of attention to analysis and evaluation in the ADDIE model impact the development of effective e-learning solutions?**

A: The lack of attention to analysis and evaluation in the ADDIE model is a fundamental issue in the field. I think part of the problem is a disconnect between what is found during analysis and the solutions proposed in design. As instructional designers, we are given very little guidance for how to translate information from analysis into good design strategies — you are just supposed to "know" what to do for design. For instance, understanding that a target audience has background knowledge but lacks enthusiasm for compliance should inform the design of the training. There's often a gap in translating these insights into effective learning strategies.

The challenge is providing tools and methods that can bridge this gap, enabling the translation of findings from analysis into actionable design strategies. For example, if the content is overwhelming, the design could focus on formulating mental models, practice activities, and exposing learners to case examples. If the need is procedural, the solution might involve practice with feedback mechanisms. If the need is tacit expertise, then the focus should be on exposure to case examples. The key is understanding how to take what is learned in analysis and apply it effectively in design, which is an area that often lacks sufficient guidance and tools in the current practice.

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Q: For those in e-learning focused on design and development who are concerned about future-proofing their careers against advancing technology, what skills in analysis and evaluation would you recommend they build up?

A: This is a hard question right now, because we are in so much flux. My best guess to future-proof careers in the face of advancing technology is that those in the e-learning field who have focused on design and development should develop skills in accurately diagnosing the challenge or problem.

This involves understanding why certain behaviors or outcomes aren't happening despite training efforts. It's important to investigate the real reasons behind the lack of desired behaviors. For instance, it might be that the benefits of an action aren't

apparent, the system is difficult to use, or efforts don't seem to yield useful results. By accurately diagnosing these issues, you can create more effective interventions.

Developing these diagnostic skills makes you more valuable to an organization, as you're able to link training efforts directly to solving business or organizational problems. It's about drawing a clear line between the training provided and its impact on resolving specific issues.

While it's hard to predict exactly what jobs will remain post-advancement of AI technologies, enhancing these analytical skills is a strategic move for those in the e-learning field. It's about shifting the focus from just creating content to understanding and addressing the underlying challenges that prevent the effective application of that content.

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Q: What are your thoughts on the role of AI in content creation, content transformation, and analysis in the field of e-learning?

A: My thoughts on AI in the e-learning field are mixed. On one hand, I'm not enthusiastic about AI-driven content creation because it raises issues around sourcing and originality. I can't trace back AI-generated content to its original research or sources, which is problematic. I'm cautious about AI's role in generating new educational content, like textbooks, due to the inability to source and verify the material.

I find the use of AI for content transformation very intriguing. For example, AI can be used to convert a large body of complex content into more digestible formats like job aids or bullet point summaries. It could also simplify content to suit different literacy levels or audiences. This transformation process still requires human oversight to read and refine the output, but it's a valuable application of AI.

AI also has potential in analysis. It could analyze thousands of customer service reports or employee engagement surveys to summarize pain points or learning needs. This application could be more efficient and effective than current methods for directing training efforts.

Another exciting possibility is using AI for providing feedback in e-learning environments, especially for open-ended responses. Traditional e-learning often relies on recognition-based assessments, like multiple-choice questions, but AI could enable more nuanced feedback on user-generated responses. This approach could significantly enhance the learning experience, allowing for more complex and realistic training scenarios. The trustworthiness and accuracy of AI in this context are still concerns that need to be addressed.

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Q: What are your views on the current trend of focusing on skills development

in training, rather than broader capabilities or degree programs?

A: My view on the focus on skills development is that it's a nuanced area. As a field, we're not particularly adept at skills development. A question to consider is whether a certain ability can reasonably be termed a skill—is it something that requires practice to get good at? If practice is essential, it's likely a skill.

We often lack clear guidelines or heuristics on how many times something needs to be practiced to develop proficiency. There's also the issue of skill transferability. It's one thing to teach a skill in a specific context and feel confident it can be executed there; it's quite another to assume it will transfer to a different context. Teaching a skill in varied contexts can increase the likelihood of transferability, but this requires deliberate design decisions and isn't often practiced.

Furthermore, there's skepticism about the effectiveness of certain 'meta-skills' training, like team-building exercises, in terms of their applicability to real-world work scenarios. The effectiveness of such training in genuinely enhancing skills that transfer to the workplace is not always clear or proven.

In summary, while the trend of focusing on skills is useful, it gets very complicated in terms of understanding and implementing effective skills development and ensuring



transferability to diverse contexts. The field needs more sophisticated approaches to truly develop and apply skills effectively.

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**Q: What advice would you give to individuals who are starting or building their consultancy practice in the field of learning and development?**

A: Reflecting on my experience, there are several pieces of advice I'd offer to those building their consultancy practice.

First, understand that there's never a moment where you're officially 'anointed' as an expert. You have to decide for yourself when you're ready to present at conferences, write articles, or publish content. The key is to start and learn from the experience.

Building a network of peers and connections is important to your career. Fortunately, in the learning and development field, many professionals are naturally inclined to help because they've often transitioned into training roles through helping others. It's important to leverage this aspect of the community for support and guidance.

Another recommendation is to share your knowledge and ideas with your community. I'm not saying that you should give everything away, but that kind of sharing can often pay off more than guarding your expertise.

My favorite piece of advice that I got early on was to not give away for free what you primarily sell. For instance, if your main service is offering classes, consider giving away free blog posts, webinars, or articles instead, but not the classes themselves.

Lastly, the field is continually evolving, especially in the current economy, so staying adaptable and responsive to the changing needs is vital. Building your network, sharing your knowledge, and being mindful of what you offer for free versus what you sell are strategies for successfully growing a consultancy in learning and development.

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**Q: If you could go back in time and give yourself career advice, what would you tell your younger self?**

A: Looking back, I would advise my younger self to recognize earlier the types of work that energizes me versus work that drains my energy. I spent a significant amount of time in project management before realizing that I didn't enjoy it. I could do it, but it was always a grind.

I think career development should be about identifying and leaning into your 'superpowers'—the skills or tasks that energize you, even if they are challenging or uncomfortable. If you're constantly feeling exhausted in a negative way, it's a sign that you're not doing the right kind of work.

It's also important to understand that career advancement doesn't necessarily mean moving into management. Some people thrive in managerial roles, enjoying tasks like organizing, supporting others, and developing a team. Others might excel in different areas and should focus on roles that align with their strengths and interests.

The idea is to find work that feels like a 'good tired' at the end of the day, rather than something that consistently depletes your energy. This approach is about aligning your career path with what truly suits you, rather than what you feel obligated to do for advancement or societal expectations.

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Q: Is there any final piece of advice or insight you would like to share?

A: Yes, a piece of advice I'd like to emphasize is the importance of creating a feedback loop, both for learners and for your own instructional efforts.

Particularly in digital learning environments, it's challenging to receive direct feedback, such as learner reactions or confusion, which are more apparent in traditional classroom settings. Therefore, it's important to find ways to gather feedback about the effectiveness and impact of your courses.

This could involve talking to learners post-course, observing how they navigate through a digital course, or analyzing certain metrics and measures. Such feedback is vital for continuous

improvement and avoiding the repetition of ineffective methods. The goal is to receive actionable insights that inform how to refine and enhance your instructional strategies, ensuring better outcomes for learners and more effective learning experiences overall.