

talking point

CPD & learning design

by Alan Nelson



Professional Associations put a lot of effort into developing their policies for CPD and the procedures they put in place for monitoring members' activities, but less attention is paid to what makes learning effective for busy professionals. This is a complex area, but at the risk of oversimplification, there seems to be three main factors involved: the objectives of the course, the nature of the content and the profile of the learners.

The objectives of the course

Objectives may range from compliance at one end (all accountants must for regulatory reasons be aware of their responsibilities under anti-money laundering legislation), to enlightenment at the other (physicists should be better managers).

Feedback we get from users of suggests that when working online, learners seeking enlightenment want control over what they do and how. They don't like being told where to start or being forced to click repeatedly on a next button.

By contrast, on compliance projects, when we have asked learners how they would like to learn, they have answered, *"Not at all if it were up to us!"* They want clear directions and a single, simple route through the material, so that they can get it over with as quickly as possible. They want to know where to start and when they have finished.

Where does CPD fit into this? Although there is a mandatory aspect to the completion of CPD as a whole, there is rarely any compulsion about what topics each professional opts for. Treating them as adults who want to make their own decisions is important.

The nature of the content

Discussion about content too frequently focuses exclusively on the

knowledge that the learner is intended to gather. But the outcome of most learning is a combination of change in the learners' Attitudes, Skills and Knowledge (ASK). Different learning activities are appropriate for different balances of ASK and so two courses may look and feel very different if the desired outcomes vary.

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The profile of the learners

The final piece in the jigsaw is the profile of the learners.

Are they used to learning in this way? Those that are will be comfortable with more complex and potentially engaging structures. For those that aren't, we keep it very simple. What is their motivation for learning? My experience in professional publishing taught me that the most successful books were those that appealed to people's fear or greed. *"Will I appear negligent if I don't know about this?"*

"Will I be able to offer new services and make more money if I develop this new string to my bow?"

Understanding people's motivation is crucial to delivering what they are expecting.

Summary

So that's the oversimplified, crash course in learning design. Most important to remember is that one size doesn't fit all; what works in one situation may not be the answer elsewhere but by thinking carefully about objectives, content and learners, it is possible to design a really effective professional learning experience.

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