HOW TO REBOOT TRAINING FOR 2020 AND BEYOND

PAUL MATTHEWS

PEOPLE ALCHEMY

How to Reboot Training for 2020 and Beyond

THE WORLD HAS CHANGED. I KNOW that, you know that, so I won't belabour the point.

COVID-19 has forced us all to think differently, to re-evaluate what we, as learning professionals, need to do to serve the organisations we work for. There will be very few of us who are not making significant changes to the way we deliver learning and development, and in particular, training.

This Guide steps you through a process to figure out what those changes to training need to be.

During the months since the Coronavirus was declared a pandemic, I have spoken with a lot of Learning & Development professionals and read accounts of the things that they have been doing. The activity has been amazing, not just in L&D but in the way that companies are rapidly changing their operating models. Collectively, we have a lot to be proud of.

I have noticed that in many ways, people are transiting through the Kübler-Ross Grief Curve. Some are much further through than others. In hindsight, I went through the curve myself as I came to terms with what I had lost as a result of COVID-19, and the steps I would need to take going forward. Perhaps you can relate to this or you have seen this in friends.

In my opinion, the best short term responses came from those in L&D

who asked themselves a simple question along the lines of "What do WE need to do to help our people do what THEY need to do in the circumstances they are in TODAY?" Given so much of what we are dealing with as a result of COVID-19 is new, it is most unlikely that anything that we were doing way back in January 2020 is a valid response to this question. Are you still delivering anything now that was considered business as usual back in January?

"What do WE need to do to help our people do what THEY need to do in the circumstances they are in TODAY?"

In times of significant change, it is so easy to yearn for what was, and to try and deal with the new reality without succumbing to it. It is a natural response to utilise as best we can the tools we already have, partly for familiarity, but also because it is quicker, simpler, and easier. The upshot of this is that the initial reaction of so many trainers to lockdown was to start transitioning their face-to-face training courses into a virtual classroom. They focussed on what platform to use and how to tweak the design of their existing courses to allow them to be delivered online. In effect, they 'webinised' their training course. Indeed, some have even just posted videos of classroom sessions online! For those who have applied a quick fix and ticked the 'deliver online' box for a training course, my concern is that this temporary solution delivered in urgency continues without a proper evaluation of the results it is achieving in terms of performance improvement. There are very few cases where this initial sticking plaster response will stand up over time.

Some organisations were already using virtual classrooms and blended online learning approaches, and this experience stood them in good stead as they responded to the new needs of their employees. Other organisations have been pushed into online delivery without this experience. They were not in a state of readiness to transfer their learning online, even if it was in their longer-term L&D strategy. COVID-19 didn't introduce online learning, but it did make online learning an imperative.

In all the conversations I have had over the last few months, one thing has become abundantly clear; L&D will not be returning to what it was before COVID-19, and there is not one person I've spoken with who believes otherwise. There have been huge changes in the short term, and many of these changes are likely to linger. The world has changed, we have changed, and there is a lot more change coming as organisations adapt to a world we cohabit with this new virus. We need to find a balance between what worked before and what will be needed in the next normal, and we need to do this at speed. There are many ways to deliver training and a myriad of possible blends. Think of these as different species adapting to a new environment. Which ones will succumb to the forces of natural selection? The consensus amongst people I have spoken with is that face-to-face training will return but at greatly reduced levels, probably much less than 50%, and then will continue to decline as it is found wanting in comparison to the alternatives we are busy creating now through necessity. Except for niche solutions, face-to-face training will lose the battle for survival of the fittest.

As I write this, the pandemic is still accelerating in parts of the world and the customers we serve know that, much as they might prefer it, we can't currently deliver face-to-face training, and we may not be able to do so without social distancing for some considerable time. Our customers are expecting training to change and any resistance to online delivery that may have been present has been swept aside. This gives us an incredible window of opportunity to make changes we have been wanting to make for years – changes that were blocked by cultural and management inertia. There is indeed a silver lining in this COVID cloud. It's been said, "Never let a good crisis go to waste." So how can we benefit from the current lack of resistance to change arising from this crisis?

Take a step back

IN MY OPINION THERE ARE A COUPLE OF ways we can respond. We can continue delivering largely what we have done in the past, albeit within a range of new constraints, or we can take a step back and consider things more strategically. What would we do if we could 'reboot' L&D, and more specifically, training? There can hardly be an organisation that has not made fundamental changes to their operating model. Are you going to take this opportunity to change your way of working as well?

In my opinion there are a couple of ways we can respond. We can continue delivering largely what we have done in the past, albeit within a range of new constraints, or we can take a step back and consider things more strategically.

Consider this question: "What is the purpose of training?"

Stop now and reflect – what would your answer be?

Often the initial answers that people give are about learning, knowledge, new skills, compliance etc. Then the answers start to change as people reflect on the desired end result from training. They usually begin to home in on a purpose for training that is about helping people develop so they can be better at delivering what they do on behalf of their employer. They arrive at something like “The purpose of training is to improve competence and thereby change the way people do things, so they perform better and consistently get better results at work”.

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In essence, unless the training is fulfilling some compliance requirement, it all comes back to behaviour change. We train people because we want them to change their behaviour, therefore our driving question becomes “How can we deliver behaviour change?”

And now, given COVID-19, we have to modify that question: “How can we deliver behaviour change remotely?”

“How can we deliver behaviour change remotely?”

Notice how different this question is from the one that many are using right now which is, “How can we deliver this training course online?”

Which question, and therefore which approach do you think will bring us closer to serving our organisations with what they need?

Stephen R. Covey famously said, “Begin with the end in mind” which suggests we should take a step back and carefully consider the purpose of each training course we are offering. For example, nobody cares much (except perhaps the trainer) what someone learnt on a management course, but they do care how effective that person is as a manager after the course. Effective management is the end in mind. Think of other training topics and consider how important memorised knowledge is versus effective workplace behaviours. Of course, you can’t really separate knowledge and behaviours in this way, but it’s an interesting thought experiment.

Here is another thought experiment. Imagine that you learned a model on a training course about how to relate to other people. It was one of those four quadrant models, perhaps with colours; you know the ones. You saw the sense in it, and you saw how you could use it at work, so you did. Your behaviour changed and you got better results, so the training was a success! Or was it? Six months later, someone asks you the details of the model, and you can't remember. You aren't even sure what the colours were, but the behaviour changes you made have become habitual. You don't even have to think about them anymore. In other words, you have forgotten what you learned during training, but your new behaviour has been sustained. Did the training course work?

If a set of behaviours is our endpoint, we first need to define that set of behaviours, and then structure a journey for the learner so they can cross the gap that exists between their current behaviours and the desired behaviours. I use the metaphor of a journey here because behaviour change seldom happens instantaneously, and rarely happens in isolation. A number of factors need to come together over time to generate a new behaviour and embed it so that it is sustained.

What are those factors, and how do we 'deliver' them to a learner so their behaviour changes in the way that we want it to?

Define success

STEVE JOBS SAID, "A LOT OF TIMES, PEOPLE don't know what they want until you show it to them. That's why I never rely on marketing research. Our task is to read things that are not yet on the page." COVID-19 forced us into new ways of working and showed us many new things that we now realise we want; the pages are being written. Henry Ford said something along similar lines, "If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses…".

When your customers are saying things like "move this training online", or "convert this training into elearning", or "make the horse go faster", take a step back and move the focus onto the desired endpoint. Don't just take the order without question or examination of what your customer actually needs. What they want and what they need may be different, and it is your job as a supplier with integrity to find out. You need to ask questions to zero in on what would constitute success for the operational manager, and I can guarantee that success to them won't be "25 people logged into the elearning module" or "25 people attended the virtual training sessions".

Many have termed this process performance consultancy, but really, it is

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only common sense to start with the end in mind. The managers want to meet their business outcomes, whatever those are, and that means the people in their teams need to step up and perform effectively. They need to do things a certain way to execute the operational strategy. At its simplest, you need to ask these three questions:

What do you want people to start doing after training?

What do you want people to stop doing after training?

What do you want people to continue or accelerate doing after training?

Think of this as a 'behavioural needs analysis' that culminates in a list of behaviours which you want people to start, stop or continue. These desired behavioural outcomes need to be specific, and observable so we can see if we have been successful. Here are some examples…

- Routinely prepare an agenda for meetings and ensure all invited attendees have the agenda and supporting documents at least 24 hours prior to the meeting.
- Add at least 20 invoices to the accounting system in 30 minutes without error.
- Conduct one-to-one meetings with all team members weekly.

Your definition of success might be one behaviour, or a list of several that are related. Agree with the operational manager that if the behaviours are achieved, they will get the performance results they want. You need to establish a clear line of sight between the desired behaviours and the desired operational outcomes. The manager needs to sign off on the behavioural outcomes because they are closer to the operational workflow and they should know what will work, and what won't. Besides, the operational outcomes are the responsibility of the manager. If you want to learn more about a practical performance diagnostics approach, I suggest that you read my book *"Capability at Work"*.

Until you have defined success in terms of a list of desired behaviours, and performance standards to measure those behaviours, keep going. Ask

"What does the employee have to DO to be successful?"

the question, "What does the employee have to DO to be successful?" Talk to the other stakeholders and get clarity on what everyone involved wants to happen after the training and what behaviours will support that outcome. Establish the causal link between the proposed behavioural changes and the operational outcomes. You now have a definition of success that you can use to measure your progress. Ask the question, "How will we know when the employee is doing what we want them to do?" After all, training value is only achieved when people use their new learning on the job and therefore perform better.

You have a starting point, which is the current situation, and an end point that you are seeking to achieve. Only now should you start thinking about how you will travel the journey between your start and end points. Any journey planning you do before you have a defined destination is based on assumptions which can be wrong, and if based on old pre-pandemic thinking, are likely to be wrong. Given the amount of change that has happened, and is still happening due to the virus, we need to go back to first principles and be incredibly careful when listening to our gut or indulging our instinctive responses. Remember, our gut has been trained by years of pre-COVID experience.

The journey

LOOK AT EACH BEHAVIOUR ON YOUR LIST in turn and decide what journey someone would need to go on to achieve adequate proficiency in that behaviour in their work context. One obvious way to do this is to ask people who have already made the journey.

- How and why did the journey start and how long did it take?
- What was their starting point in terms of prior knowledge, skills and behaviour?
- What did they need to practice and how did they go about their practice?
- What did they need to know in order to start and continue their practice?
- What motivation did they need? That is, why did they think it was worth doing?
- Who helped them and what form did that help take?
- What was around them in their environment at the time that helped or hindered them?
- What would they advise someone else who wanted the same skills and behavioural abilities?

Another way to gather ideas is to ask people who want to make the journey what they think would enable them to make it right through to the end. Also, look back at previous initiatives that have successfully delivered the new behaviour and figure out what it was about them that worked. You are looking for evidenced behaviour change, and then unpicking what happened. It's important to get really critical about your evidence. If someone improves their report writing skills; was it really the course they went on, or a colleague who coached them? If someone took 10 steps on their journey, were all the steps necessary or were some irrelevant and others were critical and made all the difference?

Look for the common factors so you can construct an ideal journey for someone to achieve proficiency in the new behaviour. Given your ideal journey, what should be in the package you need to deliver to them to enable them to start and complete a successful journey?

L&D is already good at creating content in many different forms, from elearning to videos to workshops. What we are not so good at is what has to be wrapped around that content and delivered in the same package to ensure that the learning within the content is transferred into the desired new behaviours during the journey. To get this right, I would highly recommend the work of Dr Ina Weinbauer-Heidel and her 12 Levers of Transfer Effectiveness. The levers focus on three areas – the mindset of the trainee, the design of the program, and the workplace environment. They are adapted with her permission in the table below.

For successful learning transfer, and therefore successful behaviour change, you need to be paying attention to ALL these levers. One thing you will quickly realise when you look at the table is that some of the levers are outside your direct control. You will need help to pull them which means you will need to develop collaborative relationships with those who can pull the levers. In effect, some of what you need to deliver in your package for the journey has to be drop shipped from other suppliers.

The 12 Levers of Transfer Effectiveness

Levers for Trainees

(in the end, transfer is the trainee's decision)

1. Transfer Motivation – Yes, I want it!

Trainees say	"Yes, I want this!"
Definition	Transfer motivation is defined as the desire to implement what has been learned.
Guiding question	How can you ensure that trainees have a strong desire to put into practice what they have learned?

2. Self-Efficacy – Yes, I Can!

Trainees say	"Yes, I can!"
Definition	Self-efficacy describes the extent to which someone is convinced he or she can master acquired skills in practice.
Guiding question	How can you ensure that, after training, participants will believe in their ability to apply and master the skills they have acquired?

3. Transfer Volition – Achieving Transfer Success with Willpower

Trainees say	"Yes, I'll stay on the ball and follow through!"
Definition	Transfer volition is the trainees' willingness to dedicate their attention and energy to the implementation of transfer, even when there are obstacles and difficulties.
Guiding question	How can you help trainees develop the ability and willingness to persistently work on implementing their transfer plan?

Levers for Training Design

(design for transfer, not for applause at the end of the training)

4. Clarity of Expectations – Making Goals Transparent

Trainees say	"I know what I'm supposed to learn, and I want to learn it!"
Definition	Clarity of expectations is the extent to which trainees already know, before the training, what they can expect before, during, and after the training.
Guiding question	How can you make sure that trainees know what to expect before the training and what is expected from them as a result of the training?

5. Content Relevance – Learning What is Needed

Trainees say	"The content is practical and relevant to me!"
Definition	Content relevance is the extent to which trainees experience the training content as well-matched with the tasks and requirements of their work.
Guiding question	How do you ensure that trainees perceive the training content as relevant and important for their own day-to-day work?

6. Active Practice – Learning by Doing

Trainees say	"I have already experienced, practised, and tried it during training!"
Definition	Active practice in training is the extent to which training design provides opportunities to experience and practise new behaviours that are desirable in the work context.
Guiding question	How can you ensure that the action that is aspired to in practice is experienced, tried out, and practised as realistically as possible during training?

7. Transfer Planning – Step by Step to Implementation Success

Trainees say	"I know what I am going to do, step by step, after training!"
Definition	Transfer planning describes the extent to which the transfer is prepared in training.
Guiding question	How can you ensure that trainees prepare in detail while still in training to implement what they learn?

Levers for the Organisation

(the workplace can "untrain" people faster than we can train them)

8. Opportunities for Application – Everyday Work is Full of Possibilities

Trainees say	"It's possible for me to apply what I've learned to situations in my day-to-day work."
Definition	Opportunities for application reflect the extent to which the necessary situations and resources for application are available in the workplace.
Guiding question	How can you ensure that participants have the opportunity, permission, and assignments, plus the necessary resources to apply what they have learned?

9. Personal Transfer Capacity – We (Don't) Have the Time

Trainees say	"My working day allows me to take time to apply what I have learned."
Definition	Personal transfer capacity is the extent to which trainees have the capacity – in terms of time and workload – to successfully apply newly-learned skills.
Guiding question	How can you help ensure that trainees have enough time and capacity to apply what they have learned to their daily work?

10. Support from Supervisors – the Boss and Transfer Success

Trainees say	"My supervisor demands and encourages implementation."
Definition	Supervisor support is the extent to which trainees' supervisors actively demand, monitor, support and reinforce transfer.
Guiding question	How can you ensure that supervisors support, promote and demand the application of what trainees have learned?

11. Support from Peers – Other People's Influence

Trainees say	"My colleagues are backing me on implementing what I have learned."
Definition	Support from peers is the extent to which colleagues help trainees with transfer.
Guiding question	What can you do to encourage trainees' colleagues to welcome transfer and support it?

12. Transfer Expectations in the Organisation – Transfer Results as a New Finish Line

Trainees say	"People in the organisation notice when I (don't) apply what I have learned."
Definition	Transfer expectations in the organisation are the extent to which trainees expect positive consequences from applying what they've learned or the absence of negative consequences as a result of non-application.
Guiding question	How can you ensure that trainees' application (or not) of what they've learned is urgent, attracts attention in the organisation and has positive (or negative) consequences?

Adapted from a model by Dr Ina Weinbauer-Heidel (www.transfereffectiveness.com)

The delivery process

FOR MOST BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE OUTcomes you will find the package you design using the approach above will be a blend of many components; it will have content such as elearning or videos, contributions from a trainer, on-the-job practice with feedback, opportunities for discussion and collaboration, and significant manager involvement. It won't be a once and done event, virtual or otherwise; and it certainly won't be an old-style training course that has been 'webinised'.

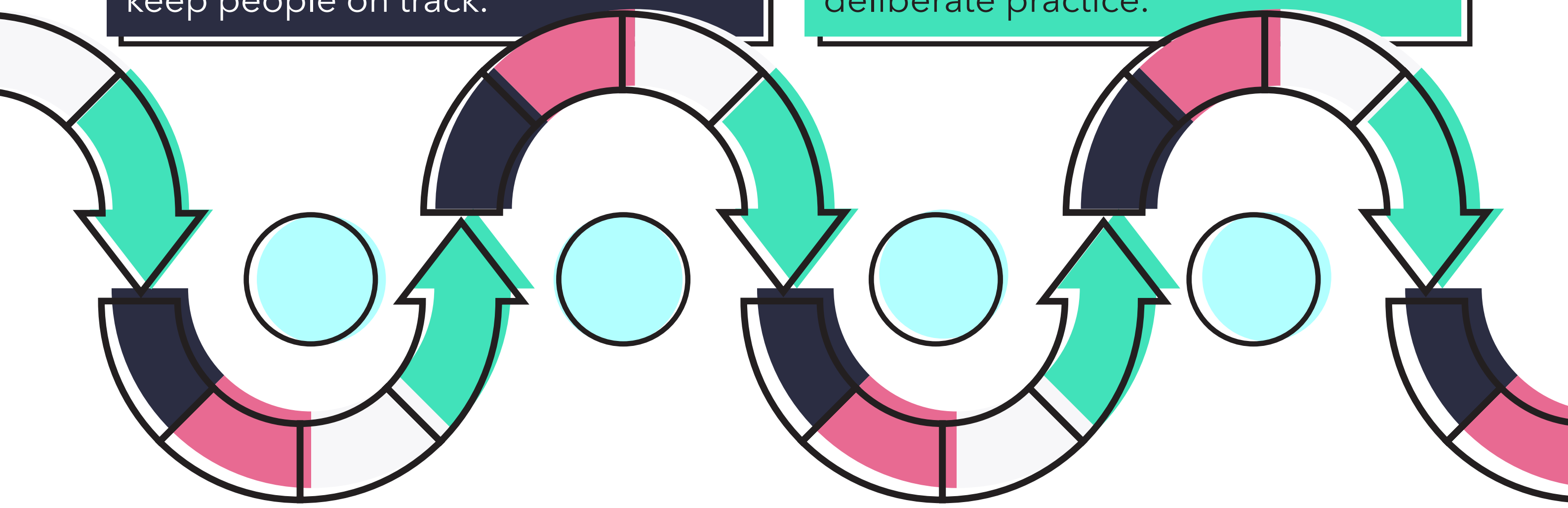
The inevitable outcome from your design process will be a programme consisting of activities that learners need to do over a period of time and alongside their normal day-to-day work activities. In effect, you are setting up an activities workflow within their day-to-day job where learners will step through a sequence of activities, and in doing so, they will successfully achieve the workflow outcome which is the change in behaviour. Here is an example of a workflow you can use or modify for your delivery process. It is based on a regular cycle which has the following components…

1. Huddle
This is a 60 – 90 minute get together online where a facilitator helps a small cohort of learners review their activities during the previous week and sets up the activities for the next week. Think of this as a tutorial to help keep people on track.

2. Study
The learners go through the recommended content, or content they have found through research, to the extent that they need it in order to participate in the practice activities. Think of this as utilising the flipped classroom model.

3. Practice
The learners participate in 'deliberate practice' which refers to a special type of practice that is purposeful and systematic. While regular practice might include mindless repetitions, deliberate practice requires focused attention and is conducted with the specific goal of improving performance.

4. Feedback
The learners receive constructive feedback on their activities from a manager or peer, or from a measure they have put in place like a stopwatch, counter or selfie video. Feedback is a critical component of deliberate practice.



Learning cycles

A WEEKLY CYCLE WORKS WELL. A WEEK IS enough time for learners to do the activities and not so long that the programme loses momentum. It fits with the weekly operational rhythm that is common in most organisations and is therefore less disruptive. It also works well to set a consistent time, for example, the huddle is always at 15:00 on a Wednesday; this sets expectations for colleagues for when the learner is unavailable for other duties. Another advantage of a regular weekly cycle is that it promotes a culture of regular learning. Learning, and interacting with a manager and peers about learning, becomes an integral part of work rather than something separate that is done 'over there' in a classroom, virtual or real.

The number of cycles will depend on how much time all the activities on the programme will take an average learner to complete, divided by the amount of time they can dedicate to doing those activities each week. Building skills with practice, and repeating activities frequently enough to start creating habits does take time, so avoid the temptation to rush a programme. 'Little and often' is a better mantra than 'get it over with'. We want learners to digest new ideas, experiment with them, and then develop their skills and apply them as behaviours in their work; your programme will fail without giving them time to do this.

'Little and often' is a better mantra than 'get it over with'.

When you are designing your learning cycles, look for a natural chronological build order for the skills. How do the skills you want to see in your learners build on each other over time, and when do you need to cycle back to repeat the practice of a skill to reinforce it at a higher level, or practice two skills together? Sometimes it is better to practice a single skill in isolation, and other times it is better to practice several skills together in the way they might be required in the real work context. Mix it up. Think of practising elements of a golf swing, then bringing them together, or elements of a sales conversation, then bringing them together. Also, look to get a sense of balance across the cycles. Design them so that both the activity load and the cognitive load are similar across cycles. We are not used to doing this in a physical classroom. In traditional training, we often just crammed in as much as possible over the days we had them in their seats. Chunking and load balancing is a new thing we have to learn to do.

It is essential that you get agreement from line managers for your new cyclic approach, and you should reinforce this with the support of a senior executive sponsor. Talk through the logic of your design process with them and encourage their participation in the design. You need their buy in because any resistance from them will kill your programme. Arguably, since so much of the programme is happening on their watch, you need their support more than you ever did. They need to be comfortable that the programme design will not impact productivity more than they are prepared to put up with in relation to the potential gains they see from the programme. There must be an ROI from their perspective. What are they investing and what are they getting in return? You need to articulate this and sell it to them.

Huddle

THE HUDDLE IS WHERE YOUR LEARNERS get together online to share ideas and insights, and any issues they have with the practice activities or programme content. The facilitator is there to guide the discussion, acknowledge the thoughts and feelings of the learners, address concerns, and highlight positive takeaways from the learning intervals. It is also an opportunity for the facilitator to provide course correction if people are getting off track. Frequent course correction is far better than telling someone they missed the target when they get to the end.

Keep the number of learners in a huddle session to 10 or less. Any more than 10 and it becomes difficult to have a free-flowing conversation where all your learners get the chance to contribute. You could invite along a line manager, or perhaps a subject matter expert, to all or part of each huddle session to give their perspective and answer questions. A well-run huddle will have a lot of great information so people should be taking notes, and should set aside 15 minutes after it finishes to reflect on what they have learned and how they will apply it during their upcoming practice activities. In fact, that reflection after a huddle should be one of the mandated pathway activities.

By the way, you don't have to call it a 'huddle', but branding is important. Be careful what you do call the session as the name will set expectations and maybe drag along legacy baggage. What do you think of when I say webinar, or virtual classroom, or distance learning? I wouldn't use those or similar words where people will have a preconceived idea of what the session will be like.

It will be tempting for the instructors among us to put the huddle on a pedestal. You need to resist this temptation because the huddle is not 'better' than other activities in the learning workflow. Instructor presence in a synchronous session is not a prerequisite for behaviour change. Think of group time with an instructor as expensive time, so use it only where it provides clear benefits that are worth the expense and cannot be achieved more 'cheaply' by other means.

This eBook is not a 'how-to' on facilitating a virtual session. There are people far more skilled than I in online facilitation and I would recommend getting help with how to run a session that generates engagement. A skilled classroom trainer who runs an online session for the first time is like an athlete being busted back to being a toddler. It is uncomfortable and feels very unstable because anything can go wrong, and it will. There is a lot to learn and you can't rely on the unconscious competence you developed in the physical classroom. You are thrown back to conscious incompetence, and you need practice. A good face-2-face instructor can be very boring online when they can't interact with learners in the way they are used to, and their honed ability to improvise interactions in the classroom no longer works for them.

The interactions are important. It's easy to underestimate the power of group learning, sharing ideas, learning from the experience of others, and getting feedback from peers. The huddle adds a human dimension, networking, ideas synergy, free flowing dialogue, emotion, and a sense of belonging. It also adds a regular check-in point so that people will feel some sense of social pressure to be ready with any 'homework' they have been tasked with. Nobody wants to be last. You can certainly run a programme without synchronous cohort activities like a huddle, but given the benefits of sharing while people build new behaviours, think twice before you do.

Study

WHAT DOES THE LEARNER NEED TO KNOW in order to do what they need to do? Write a list. Now step back. It is almost certain your list is far longer than it needs to be. Our natural inclination, and that of our subject matter experts, is that more knowledge is better. After all, what harm can it do?

Think back to the last workshop, webinar, or training course you attended. How much of what was presented do you remember? Chances are, you only remember the bits that you have subsequently used, or a story that resonated with you at the time. What other bits of information do you remember and why those bits?

Let's start a new list. Given the skill you want people to practice, what would you put on your list as the bare minimum required for someone to start practising the skill at a basic level? As your learners go through the programme and start practicing the skill at a higher level, how much more will they need to know as they progress? Next, consider at what point along the programme timeline that knowledge will be required to support the skill practice?

Notice how different this approach is to the normal way you would approach the design of a traditional face-to-face training course as you move away from event-based thinking towards a timeline approach.

It's also worth considering what your learners know already and how you can guide them to what they actually need that is new to them. Your goal is not to push them to go through all the content you have available for the programme; your goal is to help them change their behaviour. They learn in order to do. The study part of each cycle is only there to support the doing. Think about your content as supporting and enabling knowledge, not essential knowledge. If they can do the behaviour acceptably and yet not fully understand the model it is based on, who cares? Sure, some learners might take a more wide-ranging approach to the content they consume, so by all means make extra material available or suggest how they can discover it for themselves, but don't make it mandatory.

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Limiting your content to what learners must have in order to start and continue practicing a skill helps ensure that your content is directly relevant. Notice that this relevancy must be from the perspective of the learner, and in order for that to be the case, they must see the skill itself as relevant and useful in their current or future job role. If they don't think the content is relevant, but you are convinced that it is, you need to sell them on its relevancy. Force-feeding content to someone who thinks it is not useful is doomed to failure. You may put a lot of store in the old adage, "You can take a horse to water, but you can't make it drink." This is true until you realise that you can put salt in the horse's oats. A thirsty horse will always drink and one of the best ways to salt the oats for your learners is to tell stories that establish the relevancy of your programme to them.

When developing content for the study parts of a programme you should consider how learners might need that content after the programme as ongoing performance support. Imagine scenarios soon after and long after the programme when the learners will need support with their new skills. In each scenario, what do they need, and what would be the best way to provide it to them? You should be creating ongoing performance support materials anyway, so as far as possible, use these during the programme as well. They will learn how to use the support materials, it will save you time, and also reinforces the fact that the content is about supporting behaviours and performance, not just something to be consumed for its own sake.

Practice

ONE WAY TO THINK OF PRACTICE IS AS the engine room of behaviour change. Without practice, new behaviours won't come into being, and the old behaviours and habits will continue. If you want people to do things differently and develop new habits, practice is essential. Consuming content so that we know something, does not mean we make use of what we know. There is the all too familiar knowing-doing gap. For example, how many of us eat and exercise in the way that we know we should?

For most of us, practice means doing something as many times as we need to in order to get it right. For some, that means more or less mindless repetition, but for those who know better there is a way to make practice far more effective. In 1993, K. Anders Ericsson and colleagues published the results of their research into practice within the context of musical training and coined the term 'deliberate practice'. They found that, when it comes to practice, both quality and quantity mattered when building expertise and one was not much good without the other.

There has been much research since, and many of these studies were compiled in *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*, published in 2006 by Cambridge University Press. The 900-page-plus handbook includes contributions from more than 100 leading scientists who have studied expertise and top performance in a wide variety of domains: surgery, acting, chess, writing, computer programming, ballet, music, aviation, firefighting, and many others. Consistently and overwhelmingly, the evidence showed that experts are always made, not born, and the pathway to expertise is quality practice that is structured a certain way.

Not all practice makes perfect. You need a particular kind of practice to develop expertise. When most people practice, they focus on the things they already know how to do. Deliberate practice is different. It entails considerable, specific, and sustained efforts to do something you *can't* do well – or even at all. Research across domains shows that it is only by working at what you can't do that you turn into the expert you want to become. Deliberate practice involves two kinds of learning: improving the skills you already have and extending the reach and range of your skills. However, it takes effort, and therefore motivation. As the golf champion Sam Snead once put it, "It is only human nature to want to practice what you can already do well, since it's a hell of a lot less work and a hell of a lot more fun."

Some of the hallmarks of deliberate practice are

1. Planned sessions
2. Focussed intensity on a specific outcome for the session
3. Assessment through feedback and/or measurement to judge success and progress
4. Repetition of the deconstructed components of a skill
5. Reflection on results with a view to further improvement in the next session
6. Ongoing deliberate practice, long after the skill is established to combat skills fade and habitual familiarity

An obvious prerequisite for effective skills practice is that the learner must know what good looks like at different stages of the journey towards the desired level of expertise. Therefore, a definition of 'good' and how to assess it needs to be in the study content.

The learner's day to day workflow provides rich opportunities for meaningful practice using real-life examples that are immediately relevant. These opportunities should be seized as they occur, but you should go beyond this to planned and structured deliberate practice. For example, a novice radiographer might work with a senior colleague five times a week to assess x-rays for a specific ailment and receive feedback and coaching. Imagine instead if we gave the novice radiographer 100 x-rays to assess from historical cases where this ailment was suspected, and the true outcome was known. Their target might be assessing the x-rays with 80% accuracy.

When utilising practice opportunities in the day-to-day workflow it is important that these are managed for risk. A novice will likely make more mistakes and take longer to do a given task. Consider how the local line manager can 'insure' the activity and how closely they would need to be involved and informed to manage the risk. Consider also how much support the local line manager will need to give in terms of delegating tasks to make practice opportunities available and being present to help where needed if the practice goes wrong.

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Given the new skill is relevant to the learner, and it should be, learners will be able to find their own opportunities to practice as they go about their day-to-day activities. If opportunities to practice are not readily available and unlikely to become available, is the skill relevant for that particular learner? Do they really need this skill now?

Feedback

WITHOUT FEEDBACK, PRACTICE IS MERELY mindless repetition. It is the fuel for improvement and if you cannot measure something, you cannot improve it. Ken Blanchard went so far as to say, "Feedback is the breakfast of champions."

As stated above, feedback is an inherent part of deliberate practice, but it is worth pulling out as a separate part of the programme cycle because it is so important. One of the key figures in the feedback part of the cycle is typically the line manager, and yet many line managers are reluctant or have no place in their schedule for developing team members. This is really a cultural issue. If those line managers are asked 10 times about the business KPIs, but never about training or development of their team, the silence is deafening.

For decades staff development has been taken away from line managers and delegated to the classroom. Perhaps this was a mistake as we have reduced the involvement of line managers and reduced their ability to coach their people. When we consider that roughly 90% of learning (according to the 70:20:10 model) occurs on the job, it's obvious we should bring line managers back into play. If 90% of learning is happening in the workflow, they absolutely need to be involved, especially when we are delivering our programmes remotely and the majority of the programme activities are being done on the manager's watch. We need more than just permission from the managers; we need direct involvement, and dare I say it, passionate involvement. For this to happen, they need a clear line of sight between the programme and the benefits they will get as the team leader. How can you convert it from a should do to a must do?

Having said that, feedback can come from many places other than the local line manager. Feedback could come from more experienced colleagues, subject matter experts, coaches, other learners within the cohort – indeed, anyone the learners share their experiences with. The other place we get feedback from is direct measurement of our results. In the x-ray example used earlier, what percentage of x-ray assessments did the learner get right? Then, as the new skill gets introduced into

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the workflow, we start to see feedback from the destination environment. As the learner starts to behave in a new way, how does the system around them respond?

We want feedback for the learners to allow them to improve their practice, but we also want feedback for ourselves so that we have measures in place to understand what is happening. We need feedback on how well the programme is doing so we can improve it. Don't expect to get it right first time. Creating a blended programme of this type is an iterative process.

Welcome session

RESERVE THE FIRST HUDDLE IN YOUR PROgramme for orientation and setting expectations. Alongside the obvious need to ensure the remote session technology works for everyone and they know how to participate, you also want to establish the group as a group that will be working together for mutual benefit.

Before the first huddle, a lot should have happened so the learners enter the huddle motivated to participate. Nevertheless, this is a great time to 're-sell' the programme and pull many of the levers in the 12 levers model above. To help with this, consider including some managers or a previous course participant for part of the first session to tell their stories and 'add salt to the oats'.

Wrap up session

DURING THE LAST GROUP SESSION, YOU have a tricky balancing act to achieve. It is obvious that the programme is coming to an end and you need to balance the cessation of the formal programme activities with the need for them to continue practising and learning as their journey continues. If you give people a strong sense of closure, for example by giving them a completion certificate, you are sending the signal that there's nothing more to do. Instead, the signal you need to send is that there is indeed more to do. One way you can do this to set up some measurement that will take place in a few months' time. Another way is to tie the output from the programme into the performance review system.

Technology

GIVEN THE PREMISE OF REMOTE DELIVERY, it's obvious that technology will play a significant role as a delivery channel. So, let's list out what you might need to deliver…

1. Online facilitated sessions for your huddles
2. Online content such as elearning, videos, and documents
3. Ongoing performance support after the programme
4. Instructions for tasks and activities
5. Questionnaires and measures
6. Reminders and nudges when tasks are overdue

7. Online forum for asynchronous collaboration and sharing
8. Messaging related to the programme

There could be other deliverables depending on how you design your programme, but you get the idea. In addition to whatever online meetings tool your learners are most comfortable with, perhaps MS Teams or Zoom, you will need an online workbook that guides them through the activities they need to do when they need to do them, and trigger reminders when they don't do them. Much of the success of any programme hinges on holding people accountable for doing the tasks that they are set, whether that task is doing some elearning, practising a specific skill, attending a huddle, or completing an activity like an assignment. You will find it difficult to manage a programme successfully if there are no consequences for inactivity, and no way to track participation in all the activities within the programme.

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It's all very well saying we want self-directed and self-sufficient learners and we should stop spoon feeding them learning. The problem is that in many organisations, learners have become so accustomed to the spoon that we have to maintain some element of planned delivery to wean them off the spoon gradually. For remote delivery, we can't just give them a list of tasks and expect them to get on with working their way down the list.

You could track the activities in a spreadsheet for each learner and set up some email templates for the different messages and notifications that need to be sent, and then call them regularly to check on whether they have done what was asked; or you could use a workflow application. Think about it – if a programme lasts for 12 weeks with just 5 activities every week, that is 60 activities to track for one learner and 600 for a cohort of 10 learners! You definitely need digital help in the form of a workflow tool that will manage the delivery of a sequence of activities spread over time and automate the reminders and other interactions.

It's possible, though most unlikely, that your Learning Management System has this kind of workflow tool built in. Instead, you could run our Performance100 platform alongside your LMS, or stand-alone if you have no LMS, to handle the digital delivery of your programme. Ask us for a demo so you can see what is possible with this kind of learning workflow delivery platform.

Last word

EARLY ON IN THIS E-BOOK I SAID THE REAL question to answer is, "How can we deliver behaviour change remotely?"

I will let you into a little secret. This was always the question, but we very seldom asked it. In a way, nothing has changed, but everything has changed. Pre-COVID-19, we delivered the training course then, like Elvis, we left the building. The delegates went back to their jobs and we moved on to the next training course. We always should have been asking how to encourage behaviour change when we were no longer present, but we didn't. It always was about remote delivery of behaviour change. The pandemic has given us an opportunity to take that step back and fix our past errors.

"How can we deliver behaviour change remotely?" That question is the key to successful learning transfer and therefore the key to effective training, virtual or otherwise.

Thanks for reading this ebook. I hope you found it useful.

You picked up this ebook, which means you are keen to find new ideas and new ways of delivering training to get better results.

I can help you.

Together we can look at what you want to achieve and then develop your strategy to make it happen.

We can look at what you need to do to avoid the pitfalls and implement your improved strategy successfully.

What is your goal? What do you want to achieve?

Let's talk about it :-)

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Contact me to discuss how to achieve your L&D goals:
+44(0) 1908 325 167 or
paul.matthews@peoplealchemy.com

LinkedIn
linkedin.com/in/paulmatthews100/

Paul Matthews is the CEO of People Alchemy, a software company specialising in online learning tools

PAUL MATTHEWS

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