ELEARNINGNEWS ARTICLE

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How well do you learn with Experiential or Inquiry Approaches: what's the best?

What is the best way to train workers? Are security policies better acquired with simulations or content presentations?

There are two approaches to training: one is directed, oriented to content, and the second is indirect, focusing on people and experience. What is the best way to acquire knowledge?

The Experiential or Inquiry approach: how effective are these teaching methods?

Direct teaching transmits content and provides activities that help people build a wealth of knowledge. Indirect teaching, on the other hand, uses experiential or investigative methodologies that lead people to discover the necessary information through simulations.
In the case of training on hazardous materials in the workplace there will be lessons, laboratories and tests in the case of the direct approach, scenarios and case studies are used when indirect approach is used.

There are conflicting opinions on the two methods of teaching.

The learning theorist Paulo Freire emphasizes that direct approaches fill students' heads with information but he says that in this way people do not remember what they have learned.
On the other hand Professor Barak Rosenshine of the University of Illinois argues that the key to successful learning is to build a wealth of knowledge that is easily accessible and that indirect approaches leave gaps.
By making a synthesis between these two points of view we can say that we do not learn with the mere direct transfer of knowledge, but we can not even say that one learns better only with experience.

The direct approach: the misunderstood option

Let's say we need to train staff on how to identify and treat chemical spills.

What's better to do?

1. Indirect method: throw chemicals on the ground and ask people to understand what they are.
2. Direct method: provide basic information to identify the spilled substance.
3. A middle ground: for example, simulating a loss of substance is less dangerous.

What learning sciences say

Science says that learning goes from the less complex to the more complex aspects: we remember the critical factors and concepts at an early stage, we understand what the implications are and we act, in the following phases.
So we need to remember, understand and put into practice.
Fire training in the workplace does not start with firing, but with basic notions of how a fire is created, the different types of fire and the substances that estinguishes it.
Hundreds of research have shown that bringing people to practice without first creating a knowledge base is inefficient, frustrating and leads to misunderstandings and gaps.
To train people on a new topic, the best approach is direct. Once the bases have been acquired, the experience and survey approach can be used to put into practice what has been learned.

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