ELEARNINGNEWS ARTICLE

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Building tailor-made learning pathways

In this article we talk about how to create learning paths focused on specific target groups. Here are some tips.

When it comes to digital training, it becomes inevitable to structure the learning path on the basis of a specific target group.

Since March 2020, a phenomenon of acceptance of the use of digital as a learning tool has been defined with absolute certainty: people all over the world have dedicated more time to training, schools have introduced distance learning methods and, above all, webinars and refresher courses of all kinds have abounded in the early periods.

The opportunity to broaden one's cultural horizons clearly gave us a push and a stimulus to create new digital training proposals that could adapt to a highly segmented market.

For this reason, it is no longer possible today to envisage creating training courses aimed at large audiences but, increasingly, we are looking for solutions that will allow us to reach the specific needs of a certain niche or category of people.

A good **instructional designer** is able to perfectly identify the target audience and, even better, knows the multimedia products that will serve to intercept the needs of those particular learners.

When designing eLearning courses, therefore, the entire offer should be structured on the basis of the basic skills of a particular group of people and, above all, on the specific needs of that group.

If, for example, we are creating an eLearning product for a group of telephone line maintenance workers for a major multinational company we will need to understand the specific needs of that group of people and not be too general.

What kind of content will those operators need? Should the content be accessible in a mobile version when the operator is in the field? What are the tutorial elements on which we will have to structure videos to help that person?

This and many other questions will be necessary to model eLearning courses for a particular category of learners.

This is particularly important (and challenging), especially since, in the digital age, people are surrounded by information and can retrieve learning tools on numerous platforms.

Thus, the same telephone line operator may use a search engine to find a useful video for a maintenance operation, visit a sector forum with useful information or, in some cases, ask a colleague directly via a messaging service as well as find a post on a blog dedicated to that specific topic.

So why not structure a non-linear path where the learner is at the **centre of the experience**?

It is a question of creating a suite of tools, a sort of tool box, that can respond to the needs of that particular group of people who need to learn but who, above all, need a specific piece of information at a specific time.

This is perhaps the fundamental difference that marks our knowledge society: information is available and accessible at all times, whenever we want it and, for this reason, we also need to rethink training paths.

Identifying learner personas

In the creation of training pathways we should therefore identify

- Learner needs

- Time in the learner's career
- Actions to be taken

in order to plan the best pathway for our target audience.

According to the OK-LCD model, i.e. the Learning Cluster Design hypothesised by Crystal Kadakia and Lisa Owens, **action learning** is the way to satisfy modern learners in the simplest way.

As I mentioned before, the modern learner has the need to learn quickly and has access to a wide variety of learning objects. Moreover, we are talking about a particular category of people, often belonging to Millennials and Gen Z, who are used to using totally innovative tools for training such as social and micro-learning.

Think, for example, of the success that TikTok has had in recent years in the micro-learning field and what kind of approach you can have for the training of a generation that is used to consuming a lot of content every day.

Once again, it is not just a question of hypothesising **transmedia storytelling** paths, but of guiding people towards the right learning path.

Through the OK-LCD model it is therefore necessary to get to know the learners and their context and to identify their actual need. What you will have to do is to analyse the data of a particular context, checking its age and educational background.

At this point it will be necessary to create specific models that we will use as the target of our training action: the learner personas.

Over the years, working for a start-up in the field of marketing has led me to design "personas", i.e. a model of the ideal client which, through demographic or character data, helps me and my collaborators to build the product around our potential audience.

In a nutshell: focus on people, not products.

Creating **learner person** therefore tends to mean creating stories. However, it is about creating a description of a particular model of eLearning course learner that will consider attitudes, behaviours and daily life as well as all those aspects that could influence their learning behaviour.

What will be the action to be taken in order to model a learning path for that specific person? What will be the contents and, if they already exist, how will they have to be modified to fit our ideal learner model?

When creating eLearning courses we must necessarily ask ourselves who our listeners will be.

First of all, try to put down on paper what you already know about your audience and which, therefore, is provided to you by your customers. Let's imagine that one of our clients has asked us to work on a project on IT security for the company's newly-contracted employees.

You could then create a paragraph like this:

Mario Rossi is a 26-year-old recent graduate in the humanities with some professional experience gained in internship contexts and higher education masters. He needs to enter the working environment quickly in order to start performing his first tasks efficiently. For this reason he needs to know about regulations and good practices for IT security. He usually searches the company portal for information at random, as needed.

This first, concise description is useful to lay the foundations for an in-depth study of the type of learner person around whom we will have to build the course.

What information are we missing? What data can we retrieve from the corporate LMS?

A good starting point would be to interview a few people to find out what their favourite learning objects are, what platforms

they prefer to study on, etc. Other fundamental data can be retrieved from the LMS.

Other key data can be retrieved from the platform where other employees have already taken courses and internal certifications. From this data we can understand the completion rate, what has been studied in depth and what kind of interventions we can do to improve the existing content.

The analysis of the data collected will allow you to start working on the final design of your learner persona(s).

At this stage you will need to continue to engage with the learners in the corporate group, discuss with the company's HR manager the possibility of having focused on the central theme of the gap to be filled with the right skills and the right course for eLearning courses.

The main objective will ultimately be to reach the learners **when they need to lea**rn.
For this reason, you will not need to stop at identifying target demographics, studying empty numbers, but you will want (and need) to adapt these data and studies to a solution that is useful, effective and, above all, will be highly appreciated by the user base of your eLearning courses.

One of the objectives you can set yourself is to use your eLearning courses as a lever to generate ideas within your learner group. Through these ideas, you will have the opportunity to expand the boundaries of the course, from training to the corporate culture of your company or your customers.

This is what designing training experiences should be about: generating value around people and not only around the product.

What value will you generate around your learners?

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