
Performance Driven Learning

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The leading edge in e-Learning may be defined by the Performance Driven Learning (PDL) approach to online education. Unlike traditional learning experiences in which students passively learn a series of concepts in a linear format, PDL educational experiences are engaging, relevant, and aligned with learners' natural approach to acquiring practical, real-world skills.

Performance Driven Learning is successful because it focuses on the application of newly acquired knowledge and successful performance in real-world situations. While PDL is one approach among many that we have used successfully, we have found that it is especially effective for content that is complex, difficult to define, and requires a student to analyze or evaluate a situation.

Designing for Performance

Each of our online educational courses has three basic components:

1. Performance Context
2. Learning Resources
3. Feedback

As learners enter an online course, they are presented with a business context or scenario that allows them to quickly identify a real world challenge that they will work towards resolving.

Once learners have identified the challenge, they can turn to learning resources that offer relevant instructional content, interactive learning objects, and suggested strategies that will support them as they solve the challenge.

Since a key principle of our approach is that learning is performance driven, one of the most critical elements of our courses is the feedback component. After students review a learning resource, they can return to the context or scenario to tackle the challenge. As learners perform, they receive feedback in a variety of ways including best practices from top-performers, process coaching, and expert solutions.

The discussion below describes each of the three components in detail and illustrates how each adds to a learner's experience.

Creating an Authentic Performance Context

A variety of tools are used, including scenarios, characters, artifacts, and realistic challenges to create an authentic environment that allows learners to demonstrate or apply their knowledge and/or skills.

Scenarios and Characters

The scenario is often a short narrative that presents an authentic business situation in which the student adopts the role of a professional facing work-related issues. The scenario, which may be introduced via an animation or video clip, introduces the central

problem around which everything else in the course revolves. Learning resources, artifacts, and media objects lead back to the project scenario.

Artifacts

Artifacts are resources that support and provide context to the scenario, characters, and realistic challenges. Artifacts help learners by serving as authentic tools for understanding and completing challenges. Some examples are:

- Company reports
- Internal e-mail communications
- Financial documents
- Market information or data
- R&D reports
- Resumes or bios

Realistic Challenges

Challenges, which are dependent on the scenario for definition and context, are the tasks that learners must complete. The number of challenges per course will depend on the complexity of the content and the desired duration of the course. This is covered in more detail in the Feedback section.

Supporting the Learner's Performance through Learning Resources

We would design learning resources (LR) in order to provide learners with the resources they need to gain a critical understanding of the course content and to achieve the learning outcomes. Each LR would explain a key concept(s) through short texts, examples, marginalia, problem-solving techniques, and suggested readings.

In the analysis phase, we would determine the appropriate scope (depth and breadth of learning resources) and the sequence of the content. By breaking the complete body of content into manageable "chunks" of content —LRs—we allow the student the necessary time to digest and reflect on the concepts presented.

Each LR in a course is designed to build competence and a foundation for the desired performance. To explain course concepts, procedures, and skills we would use the following tools throughout our LRs:

- Explanatory Text
- Business Cases
- Guided Examples
- Graphic Illustrations
- Interactive Tools
- Marginalia

Explanatory Text

We would use text as one of the most direct methods of presenting a concept to the learners. However, we rarely use text as the *sole* delivery mechanism. In most instances, we use text in conjunction with the other tools to provide an alternate presentation or to elaborate on the concept.

Business Cases

Business cases offer learners a bridge between the content and a real world application of the content. Business cases are often presented in their entirety. The realistic nature of business cases often appeals to adult learners who are interested in answering the question "Why should I learn this?"

Guided Examples

Like business cases, guided examples allow learners to quickly identify a real world-application of the content. Guided examples take the extra step of breaking down a real world situation and offering insights, suggested strategies, and potential outcomes.

Graphic Illustrations

The adage "A picture is worth a thousand words." applies to many learning situations. We use graphic illustrations for certain concepts, relationships, and procedures that are difficult to capture in a narrative.

Interactive Tools

Interactivity is essential to successful online learning. One of our strengths is our ability to design tools that engage learners and increase their retention of concepts. In most cases, they would be developed as re-usable learning objects built in Flash 5.0.

Marginalia

A key challenge in any learning situation is separating what the learner needs to know from what the learner needs to know *now*. We use marginalia to provide learners the opportunity to review additional information about a concept, while emphasizing a focus on the critical content.

Expert Interviews, "War stories", and Best Practices

One of the most engaging and effective tools we provide students is expert interviews. Through short video clips learners can see and hear experts share best practices, "war stories", and personal experiences in their own words.

Establishing Mastery through Feedback

While we present most of the content in LRs, the actual learning is balanced between the LRs and the performance feedback we would design into the course. The most

effective feedback is clear and specific in nature, and provides suggestions for improving performance.

The key to creating the complete learning experience is providing the learner with an opportunity to apply acquired knowledge in an environment rich with feedback.

We could use several types of assessment and feedback mechanisms including realistic challenges, simulations, and self-checks. Each of these tools can be crafted to provide both the learner and the course provider confidence that the learner has mastered the necessary skills.

Of course, we would also create a cumulative certification test to meet your reporting requirements.

Realistic Challenges

Challenges, which are dependent on the scenario for definition and context, are the tasks that learners must complete. The number of challenges per course will depend on the complexity of the content and the desired duration of the course. The successful completion of a challenge represents the learner's mastery of the course material. To complete a challenge a learner can submit deliverables such as memos, reports and slide presentations, or can work through a performance simulation.

Performance Simulations

Performance simulations are typically interactive scenarios that present the learner with a realistic problem and options for action. As learners choose their action, the simulation provides feedback that reflects actual impacts from their decisions. While most of our performance simulations provide a minimum level of branching, complex concepts and rigorous evaluation systems require highly evolved branching simulations.

Self-Checks

Self-checks are the least intensive of our feedback tools. The goal of a self-check is to provide learners with a quick assessment of their grasp of a concept. Self-checks are often included within LRs, and are usually limited to a few concepts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we would be able to deliver a course that would not only present content, but also improve performance. By using each of the tools in the manner described, we would be able to create an interactive, and impactful learning experience. In the next section, we discuss the cost structure for developing such a course.

BIOS

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