7 Principles
for Impactful Digital Learning

Organizations that want to improve productivity, competitiveness, and employee engagement can achieve all of those critical business imperatives through effective learning programs. What does it take to create a high-impact learning program? Regardless of the types of learners, modes of delivery, or topics being used in a learning program, we've identified seven key principles that ensure successful, impactful learning projects.

Our team of learning experts examined quantitative and qualitative findings in the broader market, and through our direct work with thousands of clients across the globe, identified common denominators among organizations with high-impact learning programs. We call these denominators the seven principles for impactful learning.

In this e-book, we're sharing these seven principles and the reasons why we think they matter. We'll then provide some tips that will help you easily put them into practice. We believe that when combined and applied, these recommendations will deliver high engagement rates and true impact for your learners.

Learning must trigger engagement and motivation for every individual

The Challenge:

Providing adult learners with engaging training courses is a challenge, especially when it comes to online learning. Learners often list the absence of an inspiring instructor, the lack of interaction with peers, and the repetitive aspect of courses as reasons why online learning can never be as efficient as face-to-face training.

The Theory:

According to John Keller's ARCS model,[1] there are four steps that will generate motivation and engagement in learners, whether in a classroom or online:

- **Attention:** Grab learners' attention by surprising and involving them in the training course.

- **Relevance:** Make sure the learning is relevant to the learner by linking it to real-life experience and contextualizing it.

- **Confidence:** Create easy-to-navigate learning experiences that feature clear objectives and provide learners with feedback to boost their confidence.

- **Satisfaction:** Reward learners and boost their satisfaction through rewards, praise, and feedback, without sounding patronizing.

1 John Keller. Motivational Design for Learning and Performance. 2010.

Our clients' voice

"As we became more familiar with CrossKnowledge, we were very impressed with their approach, innovation, and creativity. The learning experience is much more appealing than what we had before. This really boosts engagement and encourages content utilization."
— ***Organizational Development Director, Ricoh***

The Practice:

- Try to captivate your learners through interactive courses that feature an inductive instructional approach. By alternating concepts with practice, they will assimilate knowledge much better, and remain focused and engaged through the end of the course.

- To get a personalized learning experience, you will need quizzes and self-assessments. Make sure learners follow courses they really need, relating to their daily jobs and responsibilities. Through self-assessments, they will be able to measure their progress.

- To boost learners' confidence, make sure they clearly understand the goals and objectives of the course they're about to follow, and what it will take to succeed.

Learning must not be limited to only remembering, understanding, and applying; learning must be active and purpose-driven

The Challenge:

The risky temptation associated with online training programs is to try to prepare employees for future challenges. It seems like good logic — make sure your employees develop the skills they will be needing tomorrow. In that case, however, there's a big risk your employees will complete training courses that don't relate to what they're going through at work right now. This will make the training program more abstract and less interesting, thus lowering completion rates, retention, and overall engagement.

The Theory:

The overarching goal here is to give meaning to training courses, and to make sure every single learner can answer the question "What's in it for me?" The 70-20-10 model, initiated by Eichinger and Lumbardo in 1996[2] and made popular by Charles Jennings, as well as David Kolb's research on experiential learning[3], proves that learning cannot be achieved without integrating a social and environmental factor for learners. In the 70-20-10 model, learning from experience accounts for 70 percent of the total learning potential. This means sharing with a manager and peers, in addition to actually putting learning into practice, is essential to the overall learning experience.

2 Michael M. Lombardo and Robert W. Eichinger. The Career Architect Developlment Planner. 1996.
3 David A. Kolb. Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development. 1984.

Our clients' voice

"With this platform, our sales teams have access to the four pillars of high-performance sales. They can measure their performance, they're more efficient thanks to the range of tools available to them, they understand the strategic vision of the company, and they can take up the challenge of training."

— *Executive VP of Sales,*

Reed MIDEM

The Practice:

- Try to select training courses that catch learners' attention through concrete, realistic situations they can relate to.

- Aim to apply the 70-20-10 model as much as possible by always linking concepts to real-life situations, making sure learners can put the conceptual parts of learning into practice, and that they have an opportunity to share best practices with others.

- Make sure your learning environment is customized. Making a learning portal into a familiar environment (with your organization's codes, colors, logo, etc.) will give meaning to the training initiative.

Learning must prove its value through measurable results

The Challenge:

Measuring the impact of training initiatives is a major stake for L&D and HR departments, but it's easier said than done: In 2012, only 2 percent of organizations evaluated the ROI of their training programs (Wargnier, s.d). The benefits associated with this kind of measurement vary. If we had to name two, we'd say that measuring the impact of training is key in proving L&D's value and its contribution to the organization, as well as in fine-tuning overall training program and improving them based on past success. The difficulty lies in finding the right KPIs and linking them back to initial investment to prove the value of these initiatives. What are the best measurable indicators? What is the best way to concretely evaluate the impact of training, going beyond the traditional satisfaction survey?

The Theory:

The Kirkpatrick/Phillips model[4] outlines five levels of impact in training, from the most immediate to the most beneficial.

Level 1 is reaction: Did learners enjoy their training? Were they engaged?

Level 2 is learning: Were learners able to learn something from their training?

Level 3 is behavior: Did learners use the new knowledge or skills as a result of their training?

Level 4 is results: Did the training lead to an increased business result?

Level 5 is ROI: ere these business results worth the effort?

Ideally, when a training program is implemented, it should create a chain of impact at several levels, beginning with learners' reactions and ending in ROI. If measurements are not taken at each level, it's difficult to conclude that the business results achieved were actually caused by the program.

4 D.L. Kirkpatrick. Evaluating Training Programs (Second Edition). 1998.

Our clients' voice

"Early results have shown that the training program has been worth the investment. In Russia, Clarins has now been the No. 1 skincare brand for two consecutive years. In 2013 and 2014, in the same market, the number of products per sale increased by 10 percent and average amount spent per sale increased by 11 percent. As for Travel Retail Europe, the average number of products per sale increased by almost 6 percent in a single month!"

— *Group's International Training Development Director, Clarins*

The Practice:

- The industry you operate in, as well as the maturity of your organization, has an influence on the type of metrics you set to capture the added value of L&D initiatives. For example, if you are part of a financial organization, you'll need to include corporate compliance metrics, which might not be the case if you work at an advertising firm.

- When measuring the impact of L&D activities, try to estimate to what extent do these initiatives impact employee performance and business objectives. You can try pinpointing one strategic project for the organization and focusing on correlation between training initiatives and that specific business challenge.

- If you're having trouble linking L&D initiatives to performance, try to link it to "soft" business measures, such as customer satisfaction, a less stressful work environment, or overall employee satisfaction.

Learning must be constructed, not acquired, and occur in an ecosystem where each individual can learn and teach

The Challenge:

Traditional formal learning is leaving out a key component to boost engagement and retention — construction. Learning programs often place an expert in the spotlight and regard learners as sponges who absorb knowledge and expertise. Digital learning also tends to reproduce this trend, pushing content to learners who view modules and are then quizzed to measure their knowledge retention. This top-down learning philosophy can make the learner feel passive and uninvolved in training, which in turn causes a drop in motivation and engagement.

The Theory:

According to the constructivist school of thought, led by Duffy and Cunningham[5], it's essential to consider that learners construct a large part of what they learn based on their experiences in real-life situations — it's an active process of constructing knowledge, rather than simply acquiring it. The emphasis moves away from the instructor or the content and toward the learner.

5 T. M. Duffy and D.J. Cunningham. Constructivism: Implications for the Design and Delivery of Instruction. 1996.

Our clients' voice

"We want our staff to take ownership of their learning. At an annual appraisal, the staff member and the manager have to be able to define training needs and identify related content — without the HR department having to push things along. All the modules have to be at their fingertips. That's our vision. We want to instill a real learning culture in the group."

— **Group L&D Director,**

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The Practice:

- Make sure your training courses are not just about a featured expert sharing their knowledge, but that they involve the learner and invite them to co-construct learning takeaways based on their own experience.

- Try to work mentoring into the process of learning as much as possible. A mentor, be it a peer, a manager, or an external trainer, will help foster dialogue and sharing with the learner, challenge their thinking, and make them a co-constructor of their own learning experience.

- The power to learn from others is an essential force: Aim to create environments in which learners with different skills and backgrounds can collaborate to create a shared knowledge and understanding of a specific task or competency. The added benefit will be that learners will want to share this knowledge with their peers, thus establishing the model for a learning culture in your organization.

Learning is an
emotional process

The Challenge:

Learning can hurt. Emotions — positive *and* negative — play a key role in the way we learn, and can impact each learner differently. Failure to understand a new concept, for instance, could boost one learner's desire to get it right the second time around, while permanently discouraging another learner from ever trying again. The challenge here is to move away from trying to control emotions and instead learn to use them to boost engagement and retention rates.

The Theory:

Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy[6] identifies three domains of learning:

- **Cognitive:** This relates to mental skills or knowledge.

- **Affective:** This relates to growth in feelings or emotional areas.

- **Psychomotor:** This relates to manual or physical skills.

If we look closely at the affective domain, it becomes clear how essential it is to take feelings and emotions into account when trying to construct impactful, effective learning. In order to enable learners to internalize concepts and values, training courses must incorporate an emotional factor.

6 B. Bloom. Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals. 1956.

Our clients' voice

"The aim of our digital platform was to develop a social network and build collective intelligence. That means that the community has a vested interest in collective learning, which is seen as a key part of employees' involvement in the business."

— *Marketing Manager,*

Dessange International

The Practice:

- Appeal to learners' emotional intelligence through training. Value learning content that features storytelling and uses metaphors, images, and other techniques that generate emotion and identification from the learner. Appealing to their emotional intelligence will make a lasting impression and boost their ability to assimilate the concept and apply it to their situations.

- When building your training program, include modalities that will generate diverse emotions in your learners. For example, generate positive reinforcement by unlocking badges when a new training course is completed, or boost competitiveness through gamification, by creating a leaderboard that ranks top contributors.

Learning must occur in a safe environment

The Challenge:

The corporate learning environment can be intimidating. Learners risk being constantly subjected to judgment, confronted with their own skills gaps, and compared with other, better-performing colleagues. Another risk associated with professional training is having learners keep to themselves because potential repercussions keep them from speaking up. They may worry that their manager may frown at a particular a comment or be concerned about how suggesting an improvement may make them look.

To make sure employees get fully involved in their training programs, L&D departments need to guarantee that the learning space is an open, safe, and judgment-free zone, while still protecting the organization's needs.

The Theory:

According to Amber Dailey-Hebert,[7] corporate learning needs to meet these six conditions to create a safe learning environment:

1. Enable verbal exchange instead of playing the role of a judge or referee

2. Offer a sharing space

3. Accept others' ideas without prejudice

4. Be a model of learning by error

5. Create a climate of communication that is psychologically reassuring

6. Allow for risk taking and innovation

Our clients' voice

"Staff have quickly adapted to the new platform and specifically to the blended approach of using video chat facilities and to uploading documents to the platform. For us, this is the perfect way to make learning more attractive, more effective, and also more efficient. And it brings learning to the workplace. Attending a course is not enough; you have to participate before, during, and after a course. It's part of one's daily work."
— **Head of L&D, Rabobank**

The Practice:

- Enable discussions. Turn the discussion feature on. Encourage learners following similar training courses to share and discuss with each other. Through every discussion generated, you're adding value for your employees by allowing them to learn from each other and by creating an open communication platform. If you want to make sure discussions don't stray too far from corporate policies and values, add a moderator.

- Keep the training going by setting up alumni communities. That way, learners will continue to share and talk about how they apply learning points from previous training courses long after they're completed.

- Don't stigmatize failure. Make sure that when employees don't immediately reach the objectives set out for them, they are encouraged to try again in a kind, non-patronizing way. Sometimes, it takes more than one try to make it right, and employees should feel safe to ask for that second chance without judgment.

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Learning must be able to occur anywhere, at any time and take into account the constraints of the individual

The Challenge:

If you're feeling like information is coming at you from every direction, all the time, and that its quality is inconsistent, you're not alone. Information overload is real, which creates the desire to access curated, qualitative learning content that relates to our personal needs. To respond to the "too much information, too little time" crisis, L&D departments have a responsibility to provide employees with great, customized content, and to deliver it in a seamless way.

The Theory:

As Theo Hug[8] put it, microlearning facilitates learning with smaller learning units and short-term-focused activities. Repetitive learning, achieved by embedding the learning process into daily routines, is highly effective. New learning spaces emerge by making use of different communication devices, which enables lifelong learning.

8 Theo Hug. Micro-learning and Narration. Innsbruck Paper presented at the fourth Media in Transition conference. May 6-8, 2005. MIT. Cambridge, Mass., USA.

Our clients' voice

"We wanted an intuitive and easily accessible platform, a wide range of content and formats, a social and collaborative dimension, and an open system. In other words, it had to be accessible anywhere — from a computer, tablet, or smartphone. The CrossKnowledge Learning Suite appeared as the best-designed solution in terms of user experience."

— *Learning Practice International Director, L'Oréal*

The Practice:

- Make sure your learning is accessible at any time, anywhere, and from any device. That way, you foster "just in time" learning, where learners are able to easily and seamlessly access the right content when they need it the most — right before a meeting, while waiting for the bus, or during their afternoon coffee break.

- Strive for quality. There's a lot of content out there. Some of it is great — make sure that's what you provide to your learners. Employees usually only have limited time to complete training courses. By providing them with top-notch content with real value, you'll dramatically increase the level of learner satisfaction and your engagement rates.

- Did you know that only a third of L&D organizations have a good understanding of their audience (Bersin. The Real Challenge with Learner Engagement. 2015.)? By getting to know your learners, you'll allow them to choose content that's relevant to them, as active creators of their personal learning journey. By letting learners customize their training and make it their own, you'll guarantee the content they consume is always relevant, boosting completion rates and overall learner engagement.

About CrossKnowledge

CrossKnowledge is an engaging, forward-looking digital learning solution, driving business outcomes and the ability to transform individuals and entire organizations. We provide a customized, fully integrated learning solution and implement it at unmatched velocity. CrossKnowledge's learning solution is complete — bringing together our cutting-edge technology and world-class content into a blended environment. Only CrossKnowledge has the experience, agility, and foresight to help you build an innovative and more effective learning solution. CrossKnowledge, a Wiley brand, serves over 7 million users in 130 countries.

For additional insights into successful learning programs, discover our clients' learning journeys on our website.

CrossKnowledge

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We empower your transformation