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Maintaining Learning Through Disruption

A resource for Learning Leaders through times of disruption as a result of the COVID-19 challenges

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Rapidly adjusting to a new normal

COVID-19: Shifting tack to maintain momentum.

The environment that we all work within is rapidly evolving and it is likely that the new ways of working that we are all experiencing, is here for the medium term.

COVID-19 is forcing organisations to adapt current learning approaches to enable remote and online delivery. The need is urgent and it is likely there is no budget available to make what seems to be radical changes in approach.

What many learning and HR professionals are grappling with is how to make this transition with the tools they have and still achieve the intended learning outcomes.

In this paper we outline a straight-forward, better practice approach to help everyone responsible to deliver effective on-line learning using what you may already have.

There are three steps to take in changing from face-to-face to virtual delivery that are aligned to the Develop, Implement and Evaluate components of the ADDIE[1] model:

01 DEVELOP

Review the initial learning analysis and design to see what needs to change.

02 IMPLEMENT

Provide information using email, interactive PDFs, digital magazines. Focus virtual workshops on interaction, personal engagement and discussion. Just like face-to-face, but in shorter, more frequent bursts using teleconferences or meetings and social/collaboration platforms if a virtual classroom isn't available.

03 EVALUATE

Prepare to fail fast. Collect feedback and information to identify any areas that need improvement and feed into the next session and future programs.

Our next piece will look at how to make changes to embed longer lasting change.

[1] Analyse, Design, Develop, Implement, Evaluate. Sink, D. L. (2014). Design models and learning theories for adults. American Society for Training and Development

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How to make the shift

Making a quick transition to virtual delivery does require some thought and application, but it needn't be expensive or overly burdensome.

Focussing on getting it in place and out to the workforce, is more important than making it perfect.

01 DEVELOP

- Review the previous analysis. **Has anything changed** in relation to who needs the learning, their current skills or knowledge or those required at the completion of the course? E.g. as a result of the pandemic. **If not then the program outcomes remain the same**. Otherwise update the outcomes.
- Review the **learning design against the learning outcomes** – determine if the content 'chunks' (70 20 10 element e.g. group sessions, skill based learning, small group discussion or enquiry based activities) **still work for the audience** needs. Revise if necessary.
- **Revise the learning pathway** and organise the content into smaller delivery packages. Work out **what can be sent as communications or pre-reading or web cam made videos** and plan for learners to review it in small groups and present their thoughts at the commencement of the session as a way of building engagement.
- Plan what activities can be supported by external speakers, or can be done individually or in small groups to practice or confirm understanding. Plan extra time for these to be completed. Think of **what technologies you can use to support delivery.** Email, phone, virtual meeting, collaboration and social technology platforms can work in combination to **replicate virtual classrooms.**
- Conduct a pilot **to test your ideas and tools and adapt the learning plan** prior to implementation.

02 IMPLEMENT

- **Prepare nominated speakers** and ensure that they are able to deliver content. They may be happy to pre-record their message and have a live Q&A session. Leader commitment to learning counts and allows them to connect to broader employee groups.
- Distribute pre-reading and confirm participants have received it. Accept that many will be balancing competing commitments. If you plan to use smaller groups to discuss the pre-reading, divide the group into teams and **give clear instructions on what to do and how to present their findings**.
- Consider using a facilitator if the task is complex and **use a 'producer' to handle the technology, group coordination and navigation support.** This keeps the facilitator focussed on maximising learning. Keep groups to manageable sizes.
- Begin with participant introductions to get them **familiar and comfortable with the technology.** Plan early discussions and interactions to test connectivity. Have **alternate plans** and communicate these.
- Conduct the session using the materials prepared earlier, which can be distributed to all participants beforehand.
- **Adapt your facilitation technique** to allow additional time to explore the material and to allow participants to ask questions. This is challenging in large teams, so think about dividing people up (as you would with a large group in any case). Use secondary meeting invitations for small group activities.

03 EVALUATE

- Follow evaluation leading best practice to evaluate efficiency, effectiveness and value of learning. For 'fail fast' lessons, use a survey immediately at the end of the course. Include questions that address how participants felt and what they got out of it, providing a free text box so that they can **address any gaps you may have not thought of**.
- Consider **involvement of another person during the implementation phase who is solely focussed on considering the process and structure** of the session(s). They can also provide immediate feedback on what needs to be adjusted.
- **Provide feedback** to all participants on what you adjusted and learned during the process to validate their contribution and what changed as a result.
- **Pilot the second course** with a former participant (even in outline) to test the changes.

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What to consider when facilitating virtual sessions

Virtual workshops are similar to physical workshops, they should be engaging, interactive and deliver to outcomes. When designing for virtual workshops, however, there are some things to consider to get the maximum value out of your time and deliver the best participant experience. Below is a list of top tips for collaboration online:

Keep it focussed.

Send emails, or communications with basic content so workshops can remain action oriented. When instructing or presenting information to participants, try and get your message across in under 90 minutes. Simplify your content and break your work into bite-sized chunks around the key decisions you need to make or messages you need to convey. Keep these sprints to no more than 90 minutes and mix in breaks, either over the course of a day or over multiple days.

Keep it human.

80 per cent of our communication is non-verbal and in the physical world we tend to rely on visual cues to maintain focus, trust and engagement. It requires high levels of concentration and is tiring to be on teleconferences, again consider smaller bit-sized messages. Remind people that they are working with HUMANS – turn cameras on and build in interactions between people early on so they feel connected. Ask people to add comment by name, or by geography if working across different locations, and be prepared to ask a question in a number of different ways until you elicit a response.

Set your participants up for success.

Spend time at the start of your agenda to familiarise the audience with the environment and way of working, and let them know of any housekeeping (mics on mute etc.). Mobile phones are a distraction in a face-to-face environment, and they can be a crippling distraction in a virtual one; so ask people to TURN THEM OFF. Include time in your introduction for people to assemble and adjust their tech settings if needed. At the start, take time to explain not only the work to be done, but the tools they have to do the work (team rooms, digital notebooks etc.), remove as much complexity you can to help them work effectively.

Make the most of your tools.

One of the best things you can have for a virtual workshop is a shared canvas (which replicates a physical whiteboard). These are available in a number of collaboration platforms and can be a focus for interaction. This also means that you will have ongoing access and can create a culture of collaboration because you are helping familiarise them with their collaboration tools. Consider online quizzes, live surveys, alternate engagement tools to change the energy. Use a dedicated person to manage the technology before, during and after the session. This role is often called a 'producer'.

Maintain the energy.

In a physical workshop we naturally design in movement, changes of teams, meal breaks, etc. In the virtual environment we have to be far more purposeful about this. Design in time for breaks, groups stretches, meditation, a screen break, a daylight break. Keeping your bursts of activity to 90 minutes sprints really helps.

Match the team size to the work.

On video calls, seven is about the maximum number of people you can have in a team before people start talking over each other – use this as a max for breakout groups. Consider what your objective is when designing group and work-arounds to establish the right number. If you want insights perhaps individual or pairs works, if you want innovation, aim for diversity and slightly larger groups.

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Tools for staying connected

There are a number of tools in the market that can specifically support working virtually. The examples below are tools used by KPMG, and may not address your specific requirements.

Any decision you make should be subject to your own specific functional and IT security requirements. KPMG does not endorse or promote any of the below products.

Collaboration tools

Microsoft 365

Teams
Collaboration tool for teamwork, communications and files in topic specific channels.

One Note
Capture and organise meeting notes and share.

Planner
Create plans, assemble and assign tasks, share files, communicate and collaborate with other users, and receive progress updates.

Yammer (internal)
Connect and collaborate quickly with groups based on interests and work areas.

Facilitation Tools

Microsoft 365

Whiteboard
Virtual dashboard to collaborate with others at the same time.

Bookings
An easy to set up and customisable scheduling and booking app.

Stream
Corporate video sharing service.

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