

research snapshot

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E-Learning is only effective if it engages the content with the context of the learner

What is this research about?

Online learning tends to be largely dominated by an attitude of “compliance.” Educators create and control the same content for all learners. Evaluations are more often than not based on memorization and regurgitation of facts and figures. This approach may be effective for fostering compliance, however, it does not create opportunities for effective learning that can be applied to everyday situations – a major implication for workplace education designed to support professional development. Online learning, unlike classroom based learning, can be more easily customized so that it meets employees varied needs and situations enabling “performance learning” that has demonstrable learning outcomes – especially when using a Soft-skills Learning Triangle (SLT) approach.

What did the researcher do?

The researcher developed a new model - the Soft-skills Learning Triangle (SLT) - where learning was not limited to a one-way process where content was delivered to the learner. Instead, the content was customized and open to the unique, distinctive context of the learner involved by encouraging dynamic interactivity between learner-content-context, as illustrated in Figure 1.

What you need to know:

Used in online learning, the Soft-Skills Learning Triangle model creates better outcomes for learners. It fits the content according to the needs and experiences of the learner, allowing for “compliance learning” to be replaced with “performance.”

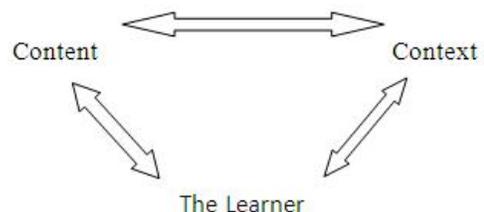


Figure 1: The Soft-skills Learning Triangle – interactivity for supporting management soft-skills development and “performance learning”

In this way, learners can be encouraged to apply their learning to advance their understanding and ability to have a constructive impact on the situations in which they are involved.

More specifically, the researcher looked at the usefulness of SLT for online learning in management education to develop soft skills, which are interpretive in nature and put to use differently by everyone. The researcher referred to two examples where SLT was used. First, she looked at the usefulness of SLT for online learning in a first year university course. Students here used online learning as tool to self-assess their skills development as a course project. The second example involved working with the Human Resources team of an international transportation company. They sought online learning through SLT to support internal development and promotion.

What did the researcher find?

The researcher found that there were three major benefits from using the SLT model with online learning spaces. First, SLT allowed for personal learning that valued the context of the learner. Learners were able to think on a deeper level about the content and apply it in their own work because the content was interactive. Learners worked with the content and reflected with their own personal and professional knowledge and workplace experience.

Second, SLT allowed for better evaluation of workers and their performance. It encouraged “performance learning”, where employees took ownership of their own learning and became more proactive. This was because knowing the content was not enough for success. The ability to reflect and apply led to better outcomes for employees and the company.

Finally, employees felt empowered by their learning. They were able to interact with the content and apply it in different ways. This

allowed the learning to extend beyond the online training aspect alone.

How can you use this research?

This research may be relevant for both academic and workplace educators and employers. It suggests the potential value in investing in different forms of learning and training to create better outcomes and success for learners. It may also be useful for researchers and workers in the field of human resources. Online learning reveals the changing nature of workplace training and the delivery of employee needs.

About the researcher

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