

HOW TO LEARN

by Mads Heising

Learning is achieved by strengthening patterns in the human memory structure so as the pattern appears contrasted by the person trying to recall the data. To strengthen these patterns they must be exercised to form.

There are a few principles to consider when preparing learning activities:

Exposure

If you want somebody to learn something, you must ensure that their memory structures are exposed to the knowledge you wish them to obtain. Since it is not possible for you to see the learner's memory, you must simply expose him or her to the knowledge. Traditional classroom training exposes the learner only one time, perhaps two times if preparation is required. This may be sufficient if the purpose of learning is to be able to find the information in external sources, but is often inadequate exposure to recall information of even the lowest complexity and the learner should therefore have repeated exposure, commensurate with the detail required in the recall.

Strength.

The more a particular structure is exposed during the learning process, the stronger the memory structure becomes and the easier it is recalled. If the learning outcome is to be recalled quickly or to great detail, the established memory structures must be strong and the learning activities should support that more exposure is required. This may be achieved by repetition, as is seen when practicing musical instruments, or it may be achieved by lateral exposure, by having a divers study of a subject, as is seen in eg. university studies.

Simplicity

The simpler a structure is, the easier it is to establish. Often the learning outcome in a course is not at all aligned with the discourse or purpose of the information resources - books, articles etc. Therefore only referring to these resources is not a good strategy because it does not present the learner with a simple concept, but instead forces the learner to extract a usable concept on his or her own.

This is not desirable from a management point of view, since you have less control over what is learned, and though it may be tempting to refer to reading material - since the learner hereby requires no resources to learn - this gain is almost always in inverse proportions to the effort required to ensure the correct perception, later on.

Rather the learner should be led to or presented with a simple concept.

Association

If the memory structure being established is forming part of existing structures, it becomes easier to establish. Whenever possible, exposure should seek to relate to common subjects already learned.

Coherence

If the learner is presented with a subject or group of subjects that have some kind of coherence either to each other or their operational application, it is easy to commit the information to memory, since coherence simplifies and supports internal association that strengthens the memory structures.

Lead the learner

If you present the subjects to the learner in the order they are relevant, you support coherence and simplicity as described above. You should to the greatest extent possible provide information knowledge - before introducing compound knowledge or action knowledge - in order to let the learner keep his or her orientation and to make associations in the memory structure.

Finally you should let the importance of a subject show by the amount of exposure you present to the learner - important items should always appear more often, in presentations as well as in repetitions.

Provide a pleasant experience

Learning takes place inside the learner and it will only take place if the owner of the memory decides to commit something to memory. If the learner dislikes to partake in your planned learning activities, your management will fail. It is important to remember that the more the learner wants to learn, the more effective the activity will become. You may find scenarios where learners are pressured to learn and pressure will of course have some effect in motivating the learner, but the effect of pressure is minuscule compared with the effect of facilitated learning. Traditionally this is addressed by doctrines such that ergonomics and physiological needs must be fulfilled.

In order to facilitate learning, the learner must have a willing attitude for learning to occur. If the learner is hungry, tired or cold, it will disturb the learning process. But more importantly if the task is not adapted to the learners - ex. by being too hard, seemingly irrelevant or in other ways not tailored to the learning situation - the learner will inevitably dislike the situation and even though the person wishes to cooperate, learning is not facilitated.

Instead it is much more conducive to ensure that the learner has a feeling of adequacy throughout the activity, so a feeling of accomplishment, rather than struggle is obtained from the activity.

Autonomy

Since the learner is the person with the most accurate registry of his or her own memory, the learner is also the person best suited to tailor the learning activity in relation to that predisposition.

It may therefore be advantageous to let the learner have some control of the learning activity eg. to skip reading passages that the person already knows, but also by making the learning activity into a task performed by the learner, rather than the trainer.

210810