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FACT SHEET



**ASSIMILATING DIGITAL LEARNING
INTO YOUR ORGANISATION**

INTRODUCTION

In the **previous factsheet** titled 'Digital Learning: South Africa's evolving institutional framework', we introduced the concept of digital learning, following which the institutional frameworks related to digital learning in South Africa were explored. While compliance and alignment to broader institutional frameworks are important, digital learning and, for that matter, any form of learning within an organisation must be aligned to the goals and objectives of the organisation. In this factsheet, we unpack various principles for good practices in digital learning. This will assist the HR practitioner, in particular the Learning and Development (L&D) practitioner, to ensure that the digital learning practice within their organisation is based on a sound **learning strategy** appreciating the **changes in the roles of the learner and the facilitator**. The HR practitioner must further consider the outcomes of the **learning programme**, assimilating the functionalities provided by the **learning platform**.

The most critical principle that should drive all digital learning activity in the organisation is that **learning must be learner-centric**. Thus, while digital learning might be similar to traditional learning and development in many ways, the learning strategy, the learning platform, the programmes developed, and the learning facilitator must always keep the learner as the central point of consideration, as indicated in the framework. This framework drives the structure of this fact sheet.

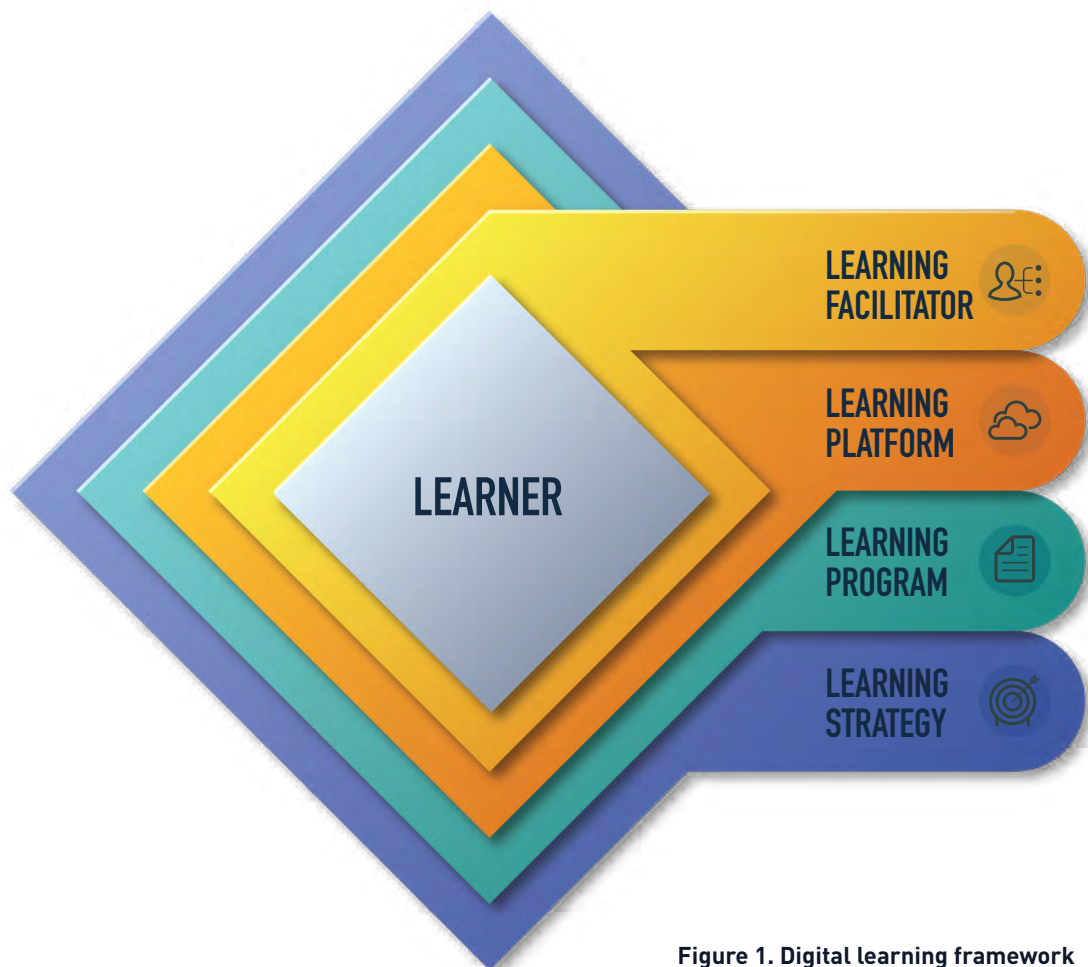


Figure 1. Digital learning framework
Source: Authors' construction

INCORPORATING DIGITAL LEARNING INTO YOUR LEARNING STRATEGY

In the previous factsheet, we discussed that digital learning incorporates learning that is facilitated, enabled or mediated using technology-mediated features (CIPD, 2020; SAQA, 2017). With all the tools and platforms available to organisations, and the various functionalities within such tools and platforms, one can lose track of the goal of learning which should subsequently lead to the achievement of organisational objectives. Please refer to the *Learning and Development Standard and to the Professional Practice Standard on Learning Design* where various learning concepts are discussed in the broader context of learning and development. The development and implementation of a learning strategy, incorporating digital learning principles, ensure that learning is aligned to organisational objectives and ensures that the approach to digital learning is systematic and intentional.

The following steps are suggested to incorporate digital learning principles when developing and implementing your learning strategy.

1. ALWAYS START WITH THE BUSINESS STRATEGY AND OBJECTIVES

If you are not addressing business needs, then your learning strategy is already starting off on the wrong foot. Do not fall into the trap of finalising the digital platform and technology before identifying what organisational objectives need to be achieved.

When identifying learning needs, consider immediate (current to next 6 months), short-term (1 to 2 years) and long-term (2 to 3 years) strategic objectives. This will enable you to identify the short-term and long-term needs and to prioritise what is urgent and important. The decisions related to delivering such learning in a digital manner may only be made at a later stage. However, appreciating and understanding digital learning can enable you to strategise and prioritise needs at this initial phase already.

2. IDENTIFY LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Once the business strategy and objectives are explored, identify learning objectives that are aligned to the immediate, short-term and long-term strategy. Once again, prioritising is relevant in this stage. Observe the 'less is more' principle. Avoid the tendency to offer a buffet of learning activities, especially in the context of digital learning, without clarity on how these activities align to an individual's job and/or career.

At this stage, it is important to jointly agree on learning objectives with senior management and line managers. Also, taking into consideration digital learning platforms and tools, identify various measures and measurement strategies that need to be incorporated to ensure that the learning objectives are indeed met. Do not fall into the trap of setting the success measures at the end of the design process; these measures should be defined right up front.

3. DETERMINE CURRENT COMPETENCY GAPS

Once the learning objectives are identified, the next step is to determine what the current status of learning, and specifically digital learning, is within the organisation. Answer the following questions at the organisational level broadly and at departmental or job group level specifically:

- What are the competence gaps that are currently being experienced?
- What competencies are present currently?
- What competencies need to be expanded on?
- How do people in your organisation learn currently?
- What are the various learning groupings within the organisation (consider type of work, demographics and other characteristics that may influence learning preferences)?
- What are the differences in how these groups approach learning?
- What learning techniques are they comfortable with?
- What devices do they have access to?
- How comfortable are they using technology?

This step must be consultative in nature, as this approach will also assist with the buy-in that is required for successful adoption of digital learning. This highlights the role of the HR or L&D professional in corporate learning. The HR professional, in consultation with management, must identify the specific needs of various individuals and fine-tune the digital learning offerings taking into consideration such specific needs. If this step is not followed, and generic courses through MOOCs and other broader learning marketplaces are offered to employees, the learning strategy may fail in aligning to the business strategy. HR professionals, with the support of line managers, must provide direction and clarity regarding what is expected of people within the organisation.

4. IDENTIFY LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Once the gaps are identified, the relevant content bridging the identified gaps must be developed. Such content or parts thereof may be already available internally. Once this existing content is analysed, determine what else needs to be created. Explore what content is available externally or what would have to be created from scratch. An additional tip is to get your leaders to teach or do case studies or, at the least, offer a recorded word of support to the programme.

5. DETERMINE DELIVERY METHODS

Now that the content has been developed, and the competence gaps are clear, the focus can be directed to the delivery methods available. Learners should ideally have access to a variety of digital delivery methods, considering the various learning preferences of people. Your learning offering should ideally cater to all the various styles and preferences of learning. The -agogical perspectives, as discussed **below**, must also be considered.

LEARNING MODALITIES

According to Barbe, Swassing and Milone (1979), there are several learning modalities that can be particularly strong in a learner. These modalities incorporate:

Visual learners learn by seeing. They prefer learning using pictures, images and spatial understanding. They would use graphic organisers, mindmaps, outlines etc to make sense of the content.

Auditory learners prefer using sound, music, and such. They would read aloud, appreciate verbal instructions, discussions, etc to engage with the content.

Kinesthetic learners learn by doing various activities. They incorporate tactile activities like putting something together and by practically doing something, they best understand the information available.

These modalities can either exist independently or in combination and can change over time.



Along with learning styles and various learning perspectives, a very important consideration in this stage of the learning strategy is to identify delivery methods for the learning to be effectively achieved. Various formats, including face-to-face (f2f), digital and blended offerings must be considered. Within the broader formats, various learning activities that would best meet the learning objectives must be considered.

Some other concepts that must be considered when determining delivery methods are:

- Social learning – opportunity to interact, collaborate and learn from one another
- Engagement and application – opportunity to engage with content and apply it in their work and their career development
- Gamification – utilisation of gaming principles and elements to enable learning
- Support/partner system (technical/learning support) – provision of technical and learning support (technical know-how, feedback, assessment, mentorship, buddies) to support learning.

At this stage, it is also important to think about offering the same content using different delivery methods for different target groups. Ultimately, learners must understand the need for learning, and they must be capable and sufficiently motivated to complete the learning activities. Identifying the push and pull factors are also important.

6. ASSURANCE OF LEARNING TRANSFER

An important consideration within the overall learning strategy is related to assuring learning transfer. While assessments come to top of mind to check for learning transfer, when it comes to the workplace, there are several other options available to assure that learning transfer has taken place. This may include a change in work outcomes, behaviour, or competence. Choosing the right methods of assurance is important in ensuring success in implementing the learning strategy. Several digital tools are available to assess the transfer of learning. However, once again, one must focus on the task at hand, without being distracted by what is available.

7. ENSURE SUFFICIENT RESOURCING

When it comes to implementing the learning strategy, considerable planning and effort needs to go into ensuring that the resources, tools and other technical requirements are all obtained and that the training process can be effective and aligned to the business strategy. Therefore, budget constraints and resource implications should be considered when finalising the learning strategy.

8. MEASURE LEARNING EFFECTIVENESS

Measuring the effectiveness of learning must be differentiated from assuring learning transfer. Simply put, just because the learner performed well in an assessment or activity, does not necessarily mean that the learning process has been effective, maybe it could have been achieved more quickly or more cheaply when using a different method. When considering measurement of learning, consider not just the learners, but the programme in itself as well. Learning effectiveness considerations include learner feedback, utilisation of resources/budgets, the effectiveness of the methodology, learning metrics and measurement models and return on learning investment.

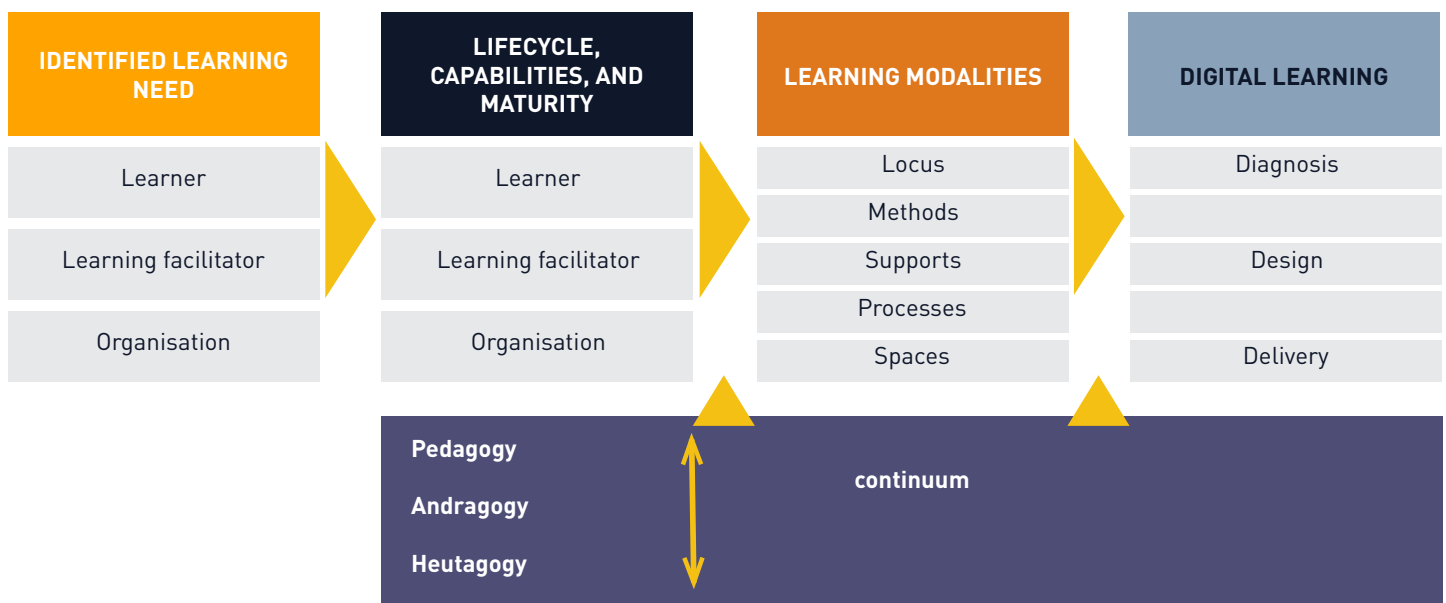
Besides providing a structured approach to digital learning, a learning strategy ensures that learning is provided to learners at all levels within the organisation. By considering the various principles of digital learning described above, HR professionals can ensure personalised learning, enabling people to integrate learning with their work. The learning strategy should enable people to design a carefully selected set of experiences and resources that are suited to their needs, whether digital or not. Digital learning also enables employees to learn at their own time and pace. Thus, a learning strategy that incorporates digital learning gives the opportunity to HR and L&D professionals to shape the way in which people learn. Once again, this is where one must be able to exploit the digital tools and functionalities available, being fully aware that such functionalities must not distract from the purpose of learning.



CHANGING ROLES, EXPECTATIONS, COMPETENCE, AND IDENTITIES IN DIGITAL LEARNING

Digital learning needs to be located within lifelong learning and, therefore, we need to understand how we formulate, design, deliver, and assess digital learning through an individual's lifecycle and their learning and career trajectories and transitions. This is especially the case with the discussion on the fourth industrial revolution (4IR), the new world of work, and the related transformations of jobs and careers. This means unpacking the changing roles, expectations, competence, and identities of learners through their cycles, trajectories, and transitions; and doing the same for learning facilitators as they broaden their traditional 'instructor' role and identity. This requires us to critically examine our conceptions of learner agency (autonomy, maturity, mastery, and empowerment); the associated assumptions of dependent, guided, self-directed, and self-determined learning; the incorporation of the workplace in learning and as a site of learning; and how we define, measure, and enable the competence and performance of learning facilitators.

The HR practitioner needs to deliberate on the learners, learning facilitators and organisational needs when developing and implementing the learning strategy. The practitioner needs to consider the appropriate locus, methods, support, process, and spaces of learning given the learner, learning facilitator, and organisational lifecycle, capabilities, and maturity. For example, the practitioner needs to consider whether the locus of learning should be instructor or learner-centred or what type of learning is appropriate and what learning spaces need to be created. Here, the differentiation of pedagogy, andragogy and heutagogy may be helpful. This is illustrated below with pedagogy, andragogy and heutagogy as a continuum, and is discussed further below.



The ‘-agogy’ of lifelong and digital learning: Pedagogy, andragogy and heutagogy

The previous Factsheet, *Digital Learning: South Africa’s evolving institutional framework*, introduced the differentiation of pedagogy and andragogy. This was for exploratory purposes. In this Factsheet we take the discussion further and explore the complexities and nuances related to the differentiation of pedagogy, andragogy, and heutagogy; and highlight that there are no absolute dichotomies of pedagogy versus andragogy or andragogy versus heutagogy. This can help surface and clarify how we think about the role, competences, identities, and agencies of learners and learning facilities, including our implicit and explicit expectations of them. We point out, then, that it may be helpful for the HR practitioner to consider the possibility of orthogonal rather than dichotomous relationships when formulating, designing, delivering, and assessing *lifelong* learning and *digital* learning.

For reference, we begin with simple definitions of each in the table below (see the previous Factsheet as well). There are many other emerging ‘-agogies’ such as paralogy, peeragogy and cyberagogy, which speak to the decentred, distributed and networked-based learning. However, the Factsheet will focus on the stated three categories of learning philosophies, methods, and practices for brevity and because most digital learning in organisations are still centralised. Decentralised forms of organising and organisations will be explored in a future Factsheet.

Definitions	
Pedagogy	Instructor-led learning
Andragogy	Self-directed and self-regulated learning
Heutagogy	Self-determined learning

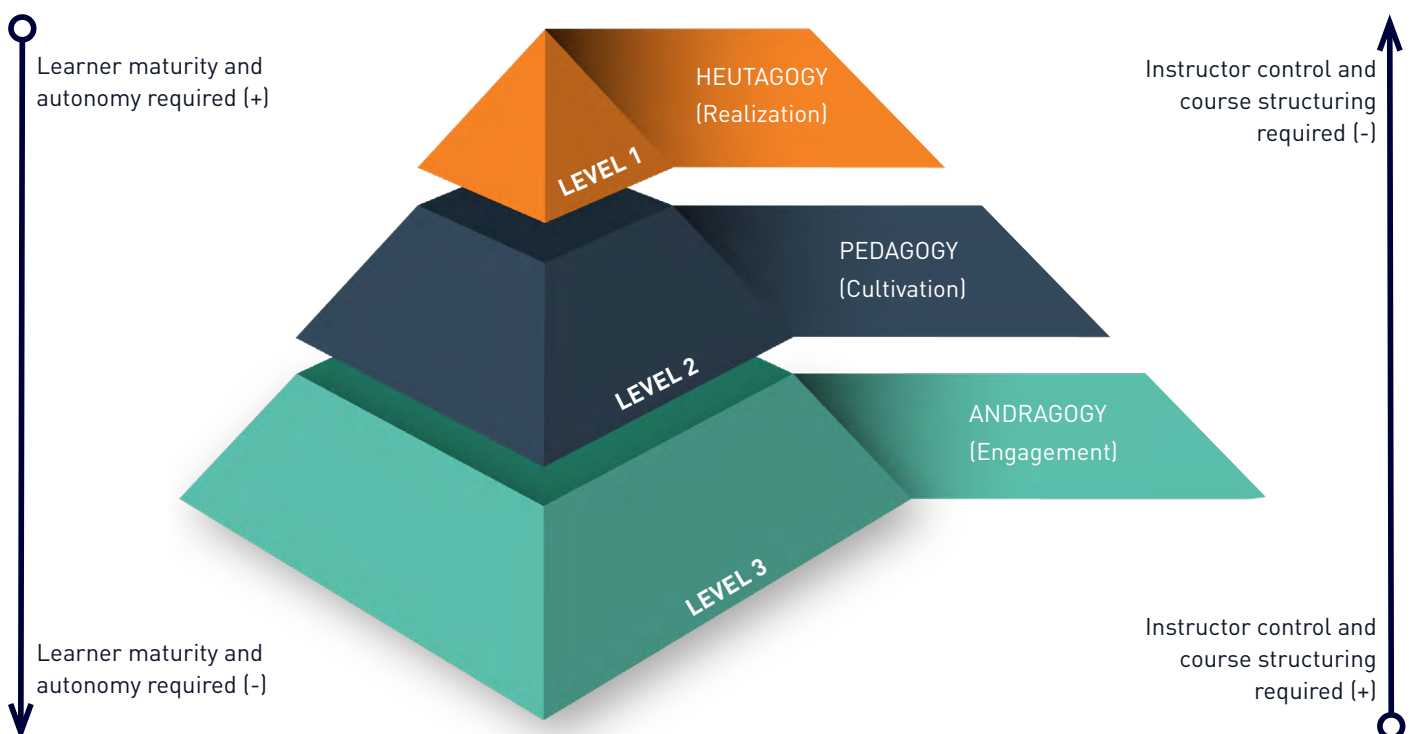
Surveying the literature, one finds that pedagogy and andragogy and, by implication, heutagogy are defined in contrast to each other (Delahaye, Limerick & Hearn, 1994; Merriam, 2001; Sandlin, Wright & Clark, 2013). Indeed, Knowles’ earlier consolidation of the ideas of andragogy suggested a clear dichotomy between pedagogy and andragogy; meaning, that learning by a ‘child’ and ‘adult’ were quite different in nature. He provided a set of assumptions of adult learners and related principles of adult learning. These are illustrated in the table below.

KNOWLES’ ASSUMPTIONS OF ADULT LEARNERS	KNOWLES’ PRINCIPLES OF ADULT LEARNING
Adult self-concept shifts from being dependent to self-directed	Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction. They need to understand why they need to learn.
Adult learner’s motivation to learn is internally driven	
Adult learner draws on their experience for learning	Experience (including mistakes) provides the basis for learning activities.
Adult learner is ready to learn what can be applied in their work and social roles	Adults are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance and impact to their job or personal life.
Adult learner is oriented to the application of their learning	Adult learning is problem-centred rather than content-oriented.

Source: Knowles (1984): The adult learner

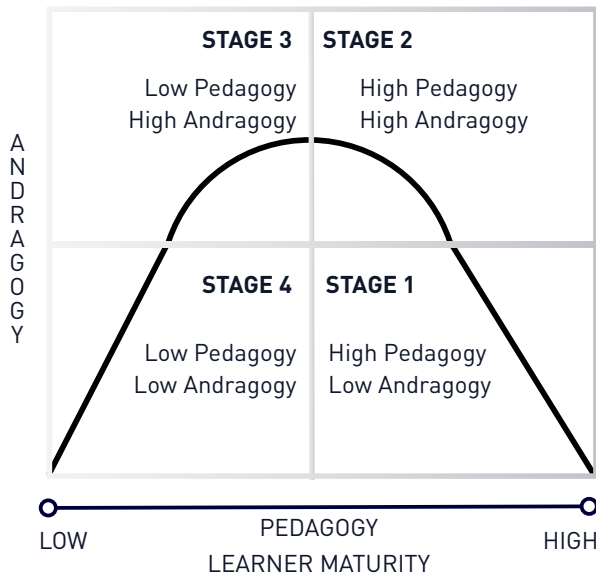
However, over the years critical reviews questioned the status of andragogy as a theory, set of principles, or valid construct, including how Knowles draws on conflicting philosophies and theories. More pertinently, the reviews questioned the assumptions that informed Knowles' dichotomy. These are the assumptions on what is a 'child', 'adult' and the learning content and process that is attributed to them; as well as assumptions on self-concepts, identity, autonomy, developmental trajectories, motivation and values. For example, children have agency and are capable of self-directed learning while also needing instructor-led learning and scaffolding. They also can and do engage in self-determined learning. Similarly, adults have agency and are capable of, and are motivated by, self-directed learning, but may need instructor-led scaffolding, support, regulation, and learning in certain contexts, situations, and domains.

Given these critical reviews, Knowles later suggested a continuum of teacher and learner-centred learning. The figure below provides an illustration of this continuum, with the inclusion of heutagogy.



Source: Blascke (2012, p60): Progression from pedagogy to andragogy then to heutagogy

However, the critical reviews suggest that Knowles' idea of a continuum does not address the criticisms of his assumptions and he continues to neglect the social, economic, and political contexts of individuals and learning. When attending to these contexts it is also important to consider the learning and pedagogic spaces that are created and their availability, access and inclusivity (see Jivan (2020) for a detailed discussion on learning and pedagogic spaces, and Jivan and Paile (2019) for an example of its application in relation to leadership development). Delahaye et al (1994), for example, suggests an orthogonal relationship between pedagogy and andragogy rather than a continuum, as illustrated below. This provides for the possibility of high pedagogy and high andragogy as in stage two. We can utilise Grow's (1996) staged self-directed learning model to explore how self-directed learning takes shape and needs to be developed in these different stages. As the learner navigates through these stages they take on and internalise the roles that the instructor played as mediator, coach, guide and learning facilitator.



Source: Delahaye et al (1994)

STAGE	STUDENT	TEACHER	EXAMPLES
Stage 1	Dependant	Authority Coach	Coaching with immediate feedback. Drill. Informational lecture. Overcoming deficiencies and resistance.
Stage 2	Interested	Motivator, Guide	Inspiring lecture plus guided discussion. Goal-setting and learning strategies.
Stage 3	Involved	Facilitator	Discussion facilitated by teacher who participates as equal. Seminar. Group projects.
Stage 4	Self-directed	Consultant, delegator	Internship, dissertation, individual work or self-directed study group.

Source: Grow (1996)

There are numerous models available. The above models are used for illustration and ease. They are meant to provide an entry point into the critical debates on pedagogy, andragogy, and heutagogy. They also illustrate that learning is continuous and, therefore, learners are constantly iterating and navigating through these stages as they navigate and negotiate their working, social and personal worlds. This reinforces the point that digital learning needs to be located within lifelong learning and the vicissitudes thereof.

LEARNER AND LEARNING FACILITATOR 4.0

As can be seen from the discussion and models above, the HR practitioner needs to be cognisant of the learner, learning facilitator and organisation's lifecycle (and trajectories and transitions), capabilities and maturity. These need to be considered in context and in relation to the specific learning need. An individual could be at different stages for a specific transition or subject domain for example. Generic prescriptions or universal generalisations may impede the appropriate diagnosis, design, delivery, and assessment of a digital learning programme.

With the above caveat, we can identify that the following will be critical for developing an empowered and self-directed learner and effective digital learning strategy in the context of 4IR and the jobs and skills identified by the World Economic Forum (2020):

- Meta-capabilities such as the growth mindset, emotional intelligence (self-regulation and management), resilience, learning to learn, learning agility, problem-solving, information search strategies, peer-to-peer learning, working with others, and collaboration
- Career management and transition skills
- Digital literacy skills, including the effective use of digital platform tools and resources such as discussion forums
- Digital platform skills
- Learning structuring and curating, time management, and creation and utilisation of learning spaces
- Domain specific skills in existing occupations or jobs (upskilling and reskilling)
- Domain specific and cross-domain skills in emerging occupations or jobs
- Future-proof skills
- Understanding of the changing world of work



The learning facilitator needs to be able to provide for the variegated needs of learners and organisations. Grow's (1996) model provides a useful framework of the different roles the learning facilitator needs to take on, from an authoritative instructor, mediator, and coach to guide, facilitator, and collaborator. Similarly, the HR practitioner needs to manage the development of the learning facilitator in terms of their:

- Meta-capabilities
- Career management and transition skills
- Curriculum and instructional design professional development
- Digital literacy and curation skills
- Digital platform skills
- Facilitation skills for digital programmes and delivery
- Creation of appropriate learning experiences and spaces
- Understanding of the changing world of work

Furthermore, the HR practitioner needs to also manage the institutional framework and systems such as the quality management system for digital learning. The QCTO guideline, as cited in the previous **Factsheet**, can provide a useful framework.

In f2f learning, there are circumstances where the learning designer and the facilitator could be two or even more different individuals. In fact, the facilitator appreciates the learner perspective more than the designer whose focus would be more on the content and how the content relates to achievement of outcomes. However, when it comes to digital learning, the designer's and facilitator's roles become more intertwined and in fact, it is good practice that the designer is also the facilitator. Thus, in this fact sheet, all reference to the learning facilitator implies the traditional meaning of learning designer and learning facilitator.

THE LEARNING PROGRAMME

The learning programme refers to the actual content and learning that the learner experiences. The learning programme includes various forms of content and activities, structured utilising learning outcomes and various assessment activities. There are various principles that must be incorporated when developing a learning programme, which are discussed below.

Digital learning principles to be incorporated when developing a learning programme

1. The learning programme must be learner centric. In other words, the end user experience must be prioritised.
2. Because different learners approach learning differently, the activities in the learning programme must incorporate various learning modalities.
3. The learning facilitator must focus on learning, and less on teaching, especially considering the andragogical and heutagogical perspectives, discussed **above**.
4. The approaches utilised to interact with large groups and small groups must be understood and applied differently.
5. The learners must be given an opportunity to contribute to content, and such contribution must be part of the learning experience.
6. The learning programme must incorporate opportunities for the learners to embed their learning into their day-to-day activities.
7. The learning programme must include collaborative activities. Opportunities to collaborate within and outside of the learning group and/or the team within which the learner works may also be considered.
8. Accessibility of learning must be given due consideration. Multi-device access to both content and activities are ideal.
9. An important consideration is the scheduling of training. Care must be taken to provide enough time to complete various activities. Reminders and checklists are tools that can be utilised to ensure learning is completed on time and systematically.
10. Asynchronous and synchronous learning elements must be incorporated.
11. From the beginning, identify metrics and reporting that matter within the learning programme. Consider the needs of the learner, the facilitator and the learning administrator.

Thus far, we have discussed incorporating digital learning into your learning strategy. Following this, we explored the roles of the learning facilitator and the learner. We also discussed the principles that must be considered when designing the learning programme. In the next section, we will explore what must be considered when identifying a learning platform.

IDENTIFYING A LMS/ LEARNING PLATFORM

The learning management system (LMS) is the platform that is used to house your learning programmes and is a critical element of the implementation of your learning strategy. It is an important tool within an effective digital learning experience. When identifying an LMS aligned to your digital learning strategy, the focus should be on the learner. The learning facilitator and the learning administrator, who are also end users similar to the learner, must also be considered, along with the information they may require to ensure effective learning.

LMSs in the market come with a wide variety of features, some of which may be essential, while others may be extravagant. The HR or L&D practitioner and the facilitators must know and consider the needs and goals of the programme that will be offered and thus, must work together to determine the features that the LMS you utilise must have.

Some of the important features of a LMS related to the various end users are:

Learner	Learning Facilitator	Learning Administrator
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ease of use • Multi-device access • Tracking learner activities • Personalised learning paths and goal setting • Personal learning assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content management • Scaffolding/adaptability • Testing and assessment • Teaching support • Conferencing and synchronous learning features 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reporting and tracking • Interoperability and integration to existing systems • Authentication and security • Customisation and branding • Certification management • Compliance management

LEARNING MARKETPLACES and MOOCS

Names like Udemy, Coursera, Khan Academy, LinkedIn Learning and South Africa's very own GetSmarter are becoming commonplace in the digital learning environment. These 'learning marketplaces' allow anyone to create and sell online courses in a relatively easy manner. Massive open online courses (MOOCs) are where these learning marketplaces originated, and hence these marketplaces offer MOOCs as well. Although some may argue that the concept of MOOCs may be outdated now, the concept of learning marketplaces and MOOCs remain the same. The learning outcomes are identified and the course is designed by a facilitator. Therefore, while there is access to learning, such learning can be quite generic in nature,

How do these marketplaces fit into your digital learning strategy?

Organisations can consider subscribing to these large marketplaces enabling their employees to access all the courses that are available at affordable prices to its users. Due consideration must be given to the fact that these courses are not highly customisable to organisational requirements. It is therefore recommended that introductory courses may be considered using these learning marketplaces, and that these courses must be supplemented by specific digital or f2f learning that aligns to the organisational objectives.



CONCLUSION

Organisational learning is not one-dimensional, even in the absence of digital learning. Furthermore, no two organisations would have the same learning strategy. In the context of a continually changing world, HR, and specifically L&D, practitioners have the important role of ensuring that learning occurs within the organisation timeously and efficiently, especially with the vast variety of tools that are available to them. A self-directed and autonomous learning environment benefits all stakeholders in the organisation. This factsheet provides HR and L&D practitioners the guidelines to create such a digital learning environment.

SABPP members have the opportunity to earn 1 CPD point for reading the factsheet and answering 3 simple questions by following the [link](#). We hope that you enjoy the read!

EARN 1 CPD POINT



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