

How can organisations create a compelling learner journey?

Cathy Hoy, Chief Learning Officer at the Learning and Performance Institute (LPI) joined us for our roundtable event to discuss what makes a compelling learner journey, advising organisations on the ways they can look to create one for their learners. It was an extremely insightful discussion, and here we share her thoughts and ideas.

Onboarding: where it should begin

Cathy stated the learner journey should start at onboarding. She believed it was important because during the first three to six months of a new employee's time in a business, they are consciously, or unconsciously, assessing whether they like it there and if they want to stay, and L&D can play a big part in retaining them. It can even help get them excited and eager to begin by starting the learner journey before they join! But, it is essential to think carefully about the overall journey - a theme that was important throughout her talk.

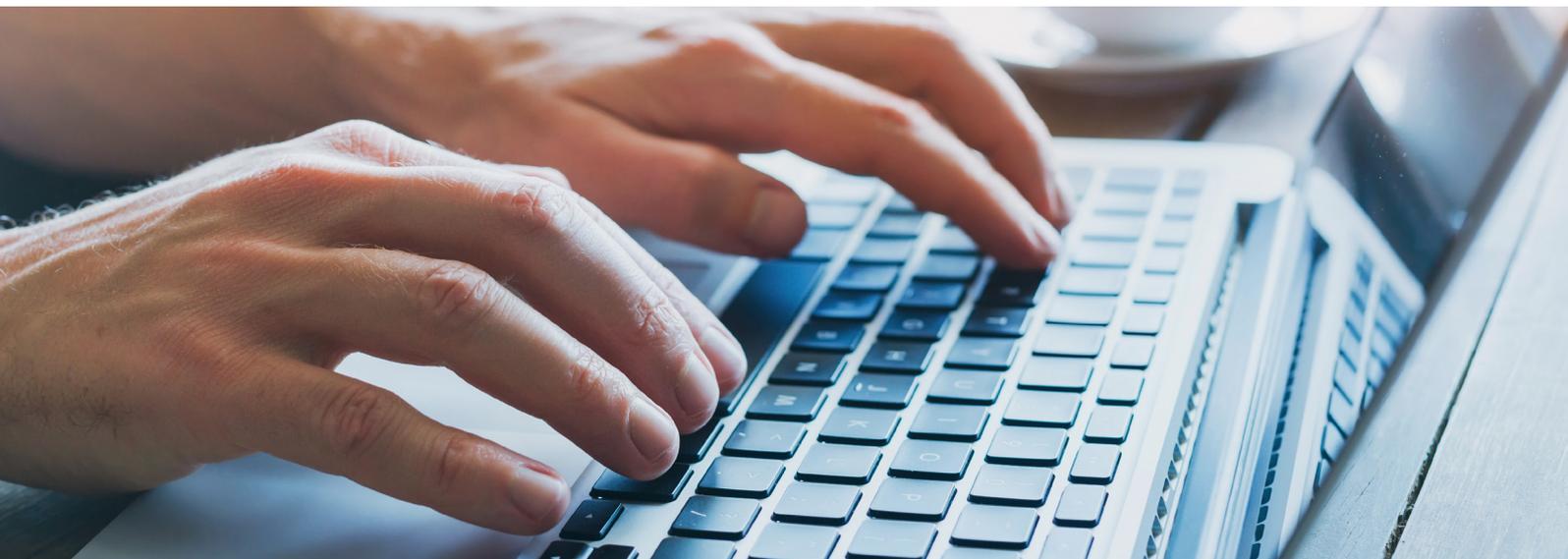
Considerations for the learner journey

She explained that when thinking about the learner journey, L&D professionals need to take into account the considerations of both the learners and the business. For each, they can be broken down into three categories: current needs, future needs, and expectations and it is for the L&D department to understand these and plan their approach with these in mind.

For example, for the future needs of a business, it may be predicting the skills and knowledge that will be needed in the future but are not essential now. With things evolving and changing quite rapidly, there will be jobs in the future that don't even exist yet. But L&D teams have to try and forecast for these changes and prepare ahead of time.

For the learners, L&D professionals may be thinking of their career paths, and thinking how they can map the learner journeys to support that. They should also be aware of the learners' expectations and the questions they may be asking such as: am I going to be able to develop? What training will be available? Is there coaching or mentoring?

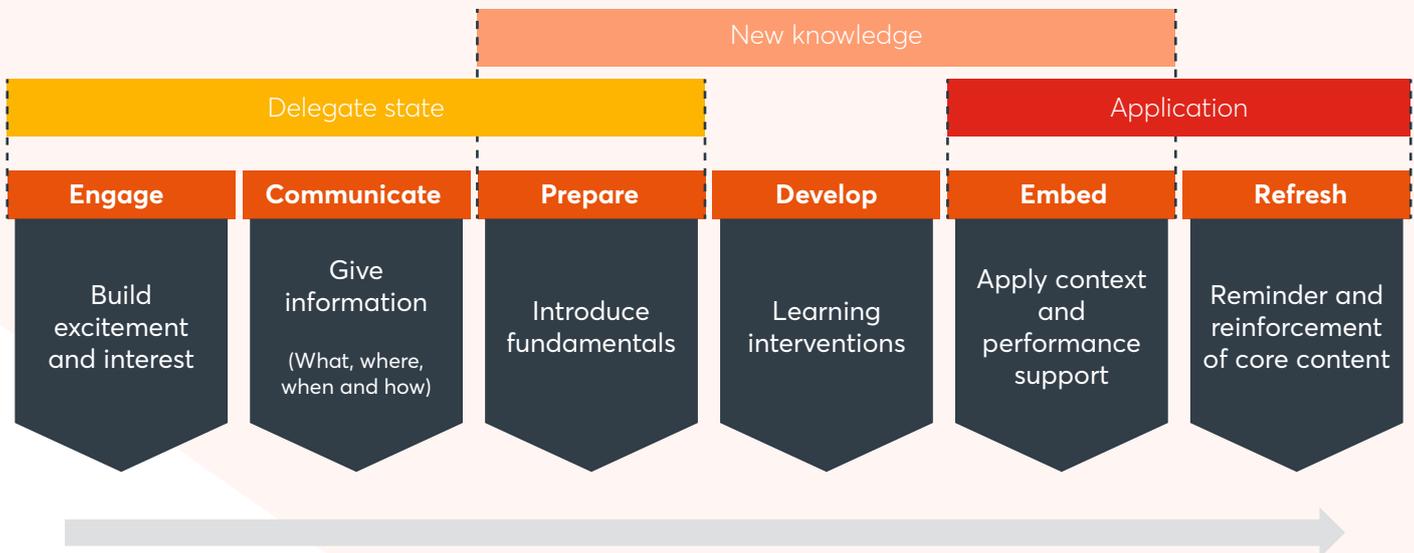
But, overall, an important part of planning the learner journey is seeing it as just that – a journey. There are different stages to it, and L&D professionals need to consider how people are going to think or feel at different stages of it, as this varies throughout.



The learner journey: what does it look like?

Cathy explained how the learner journey can be broken down into three parts. It isn't just about the training, that is just one part of the journey; there are in fact three parts altogether, each covering certain steps along the way.

Learner journey approach



The delegate state

During this stage, the learner is set up and prepared for the learning. The aim is to have them invested before they even begin, and to get there, they need to understand why they're doing it, and what they're going to get out of it. It can include anything from teaser campaigns to preparation and activities they need to do prior to the training, and overall, the L&D professionals should want their learners curious and eager to find out more.

This part of the learner journey is especially useful and important in these remote, virtual times, as it can be used to get to know the learners before the training begins. It is where the connection and building of relationships can begin, which will help the learners feel more comfortable once they begin the virtual training.

New knowledge

This is simply the learning intervention – the training they are completing. The most obvious part of the learner journey, but which is nothing without the two surrounding parts.

Application

Cathy explained that this stage is often overlooked. Yet once the training is completed, it is important that work is done to embed and reinforce it, otherwise the training can be wasted. She provided examples of ways to achieve this – quizzes and micro learning pieces, 1-2-1s with the manager where they can look at the training in the context of their role and make sure it is applied effectively and appropriately, or even a follow-up call from the trainer to see if it was successful and to find out if there is anything they need further support or help with.

Learning journey example



Overall, the learner journey could span three to six months, and this breakdown will help L&D professionals decide what needs to be done at each stage, and where the learner is at on their journey. It can't be done by the L&D professionals' will alone though, they need the support of the business, especially the line managers. Cathy stressed their important supporting role by explaining that it is their investment in their team's success along this journey which will make it a lot smoother – without the buy-in of their managers, the learners are going to struggle to be invested themselves. Following Cathy's talk we had three breakout sessions. Here we summarise the discussions.

What cultural aspects need to be considered?

- Culture issues and barriers lie with senior management / high level stakeholders' attitudes. Learners are keen to engage and embrace new ways of learning, whereas SLTs are still focussed on completion and compliance metrics
- SLTs need to shift their value perception of L&D to a more strategic approach - tying in L&D with business objectives and work across the business in a partnership way, instead of keeping L&D siloed
- L&D still need to be able to balance the business impact against the learner experience
- Emphasis has to be on connectivity with staff, helping them to connect and build relationships with colleagues
- If managed, remote ways of working and training staff can result in much closer relationships with colleagues across the business

What technology or new technologies can they utilise to aid with this journey?

- Technology, such as video, allows the trainer to introduce themselves prior to the course, set expectations and put learners at ease
- It is beneficial to the learner if they can access the information on their own devices such as mobile phone or tablet or even through an app
- Organisations should look to utilise existing and familiar software and tools where possible, such as Teams, so learners aren't daunted by new unfamiliar technology
- Through developing social collaboration, technology can help build a culture of learning; for example, peer-to-peer group discussions, sharing best practice and knowledge, and setting up communities
- Importantly, technology should aid the journey, making it easily accessible and flexible from the learners' perspective

How have new learner expectations and behaviours impacted planning for this journey?

- Learners now expect easier availability, any time, any place, any where
- Organisations should allow a more self-guided approach to learning
- Learning should be bite-size, easy to digest and available on demand
- Organisations need to consider how to plan for interactivity with learning
- Allow learners to try new ways of learning, particularly creating a blended approach and mixing old with new
- Learners want to be rewarded after learning and feel that it forms part of a bigger picture in their development

