

Previous Approach to Instruction

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Design

When I first joined the instructional design team at my current employer, the position was really less about instructional design than it was about documenting business processes and maintaining an intranet site used by the call centers. About three years ago, when the then-autonomous, small team of three was incorporated into the organization's official training department, I was drafted into a more formal role of instructional designer. Other than the limited documentation of the ADDIE model that I received as a member of the newly formed department, I had no prior knowledge of what instructional design was all about. As such, the area of design was not one of my strengths. I sought to solve this problem by learning more from my manager and peers, as well as from the ITMA program.

In my prior approach to instruction, during the design phase, my primary tasks would focus on the design of the material in terms of look and feel, as well as what topics to cover. The problem I encountered with this was that my design work led me down a road of creating a communication or knowledge dump rather than true instruction. I quickly learned through experience and working with more senior team members that it was also necessary to determine performance objectives that I want my learners to be able to "do" as a result of the instruction. I feel this realization was a significant success because it helped me have a clearer roadmap as I developed instructional materials moving forward.

Assessment was another personal area of weakness for me in my prior approach to instruction. Before my ITMA experiences, I did not realize the importance of aligning objectives and assessment items, or of creating assessment items *before* the instruction was developed. Prior to ITMA, I would write all of the instructional materials and create a knowledge check at the end of the project, instead of allowing the objectives and assessment to guide me through the entire process. With this approach, I was essentially waiting until the end of the project to determine how I would decide if I had arrived at the appropriate destination, instead of being prepared ahead of time through a proper planning process.

Develop

In my previous approach to instruction, most of my time and attention was placed on the development process. I would develop instructional materials for each project, primarily in the form of online, text-based HTML materials along with images and other visuals, although a few projects called for printed materials such as instructor guides and participant workbooks. As I grew in my position and expressed an interest in learning Adobe Flash, I also began developing multimedia e-learning programs. During the development process, I would ensure that I created materials that met the business objectives and that would meet the needs of my audience – both of which I consider significant successes, especially given my limited knowledge of instructional design and development at the time. I would sometimes run into the problem of complex business processes that, in their initial form, would have little meaning for my audience. I would solve this problem by applying principles of information mapping and business communications, chunking complex policies and procedures into manageable information that could be

taught more readily. Since I primarily write training for the call center audience, of which I was a part for several years before joining the original instructional design team, I was able to adequately convert business processes and narratives into documentation and training materials that would make sense to my audience.

Prior to my ITMA experiences, I would approach the development process as if there was little or no connection between it and the design. Certainly, I would refer back to the objectives to ensure I developed materials that supported the required topics; however, due to my limited exposure to and knowledge of the design process at the time, I did not allow the design to drive my decisions throughout the development process. As I developed in my role, I became familiar with the more detailed design reports that other department members were using and I attempted to fill my personal gap by incorporating my designs into that format. Additionally, as I progressed through the ITMA program, I began applying the knowledge and skills I acquired with regard to proper design and development, and I was able to begin approaching the development phase with the design as a roadmap.

Utilize

Because of my previous experience in web design and knowledge of appropriate, user-centric navigation and functionality within computer interfaces, my previous approach to instruction primarily focused on utilization in terms of the user experience. For instance, developing an e-learning program in a resolution higher than that of my audience presented a problem when users attempted to access the course. I would solve such problems by using some of the basics of interface design and business communications, and by altering my products to ensure they met the users' system requirements – as well as taking note to prevent recurrence of the issue on future projects. I even collaborated with team members to create basic user interface standards for use in e-learning products produced in Articulate and Adobe Captivate, which I consider an important success because it helped standardize utilization in terms of how the audience used our products.

While this approach to utilization is certainly important, looking back on my previous instructional approach, I see that I was only considering one part of the picture – the usability of my instructional products. But the “users” of my products are not just “users” – they are **learners**. I think this element was missing from my previous approach to utilization. How do I ensure the products I create will provide the learners with the resources necessary to learn the material and accomplish the objectives? For classroom instruction, how do I create resources for the instructor and learner to utilize in such a way that will facilitate learning? My previous approach to instruction lacked a consideration of utilization from this perspective.

Manage

In my undergraduate studies, I had a class in Project Management, and I adapted many of those concepts into my professional life, which I believe represents an important success. As such, even in my previous approach to instruction, I feel I was a good manager in terms of planning and coordinating projects (although the planning process was lacking in terms of the design, as previously discussed). As far as managing the project in terms of time, resources, people, and budget, I was able to use existing

company collateral, such as project plans, timelines, and resource assignments. On a large project, a common problem was difficulty in estimating timelines for completion of specific tasks and their interdependencies. I attempted to solve this problem by applying what I learned in Project Management and by using company tools (particularly the project plan, which is a template that details all the tasks, resources, and timeframes for the project). I also adapted key components of the project plan into a simpler template that can be used on less-complex projects.

Beyond project management, my previous approach to instruction also involved carefully managing my time and resources as I approached each instructional project. Additionally, I managed the storage and organization of information used by the trainers and the learners, placing documents into the appropriate sections of the call center's intranet site and adding e-learning courses to the Learning Management System. For instance, as I created HTML-based projects, it was my responsibility to load them to the intranet, create keywords and links, and communicate them to the appropriate individuals. As I created e-learning projects, it was my responsibility to add them to the Learning Management System and the course catalog so that learners could access them when needed. Finally, I managed by communicating my project status updates to key stakeholders and fellow team members, requesting communication from others as needed, delegating tasks to other teams or contractors when appropriate, and meeting with project sponsors. Generally, in looking back at my previous approach, I believe management was one of my strengths.

Evaluate

Prior to my experiences in the ITMA program, I did not place enough emphasis on evaluation. Unfortunately, in my organization, business moves at such a fast pace that there generally is little time for evaluation beyond a Level 1 assessment, which is used to determine how learners react to the instruction (Clark, 2010). This input can be valuable because it can determine how motivating and impactful the instruction is to the audience; however, it does not determine what the audience learned as a result of the instruction, nor the impact it has on the business.

To combat the problems of not having enough time for proper evaluation and only assessing the learners' reaction to instruction, I worked with my peers to create a template that could be modified for each instructional situation and used to perform a Level 2 assessment, generally in the form of a multiple choice quiz. I consider this a significant success because it achieved a better measurement of the knowledge the learners acquired through training; however, this was before I began the ITMA program – before I had a solid understanding of true evaluation. These knowledge checks were helpful for determining how well associates could *recall* specific information or find it in their resources, but they did nothing to measure how well the learners could *apply* their new knowledge in the performance environment and in differing contexts. My previous approach to instruction did not put appropriate emphasis on evaluation, partly as a result of time and resource constraints, but also as a result of my limited exposure to the practice at the time.

References

Clark, D. (2010). *Kirkpatrick's four-level training evaluation model*. Retrieved from <http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/isd/kirkpatrick.html>