Providing Constructive Employee Feedback

Creators: Tiffany Hayes, Christine Kreger, Meredith Lowe, Kelly Woodside
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Topic

Selection
When we met in person, we decided pretty quickly on a topic in the general area of management. Performance reviews were our starting point and then we settled on feedback based on a personal example and a broader awareness that it's a topic that management all struggles with.

Sourcing Content
We did a majority of the research ourselves to find content. There was a set of skills we knew we'd been seeing in the literature and from SMEs, so we were really just looking for sources, confirmation, and examples. It was really a matter of what we had time for, rather than what was available. There's a lot we could build out if we had all the time in the world, but we had to consider how much content you can fit into the course and the development timeline. At some point we needed to move on – we could have found and developed more and more.

Course Design Process

We divided up the resources that we found and, using GoogleDocs, started an outline to get the conversation started. Then we found frameworks or models that really resonated with us, then things really started to flow. The turning point was finding a book about qualities of feedback, with a structure of 1) prepare, 2) deliver the feedback, and 3) follow up. We slotted everything that we'd been researching into those categories.

We decided on a scenario-based learning approach, which guided our outline; we defined our scenarios very early in the process. We did research around scenarios and realized it would make the class a lot more interesting or challenging for the learner. We were inspired by Tom Kuhlman's 3 Cs of Scenario Building. Using the 3 C's elements—challenge, choice, consequence—was a way to make the design simpler, in terms of how to script it and how to break the interactions up. We thought, well, let's see if we can make it all work. We all used different approaches to building each scenarios. One person used post-its, one used the BranchTrack tool, and one built scenarios directly in Storyline. Because of that, the scenarios were all a little different, so it was challenging to work on consistency across the entire course.

I started adding quizzes or additional elements to the scenarios when there was something I wanted to bring in that wasn't fitting into the scenario structure of "here's what you're saying/deciding to your supervisee, here's where that takes you." I wanted to bring in something like, oh you should look at the job description or what would you do for an action plan.

The last piece to fall into place was the action plan, which serves as a kind of test at the end. We actually had a quiz at the beginning, a multiple choice about common mistakes in providing feedback, and we heard back loud and clear from the SMEs that it was too hard at the beginning, so we moved it to the end. Instead, to get learners in the right mindset at the start, we added the reflection box. For the quiz at the end, we went back to our learning objectives to make sure we had covered these points. We kept the quiz short – one question per objective.

Working with SMEs
Going into this process, we didn't have a good grasp of the concept of a SME and how to make use of SMEs. If we had a better grasp on what that was, we would have reached out sooner to others rather than do all the research ourselves. One of our SME's is a 10-month faculty, so they weren't available during much of this course development time frame; we needed to be thinking about when SMEs are available.

We worked with SMEs to develop the scenarios. We would write up a scenario and try it with our SMEs; we got a lot of good feedback around what to add, or how we were only giving "yes" feedback, or, we were telling them they were doing something wrong but not giving suggestions about how they could do it better. We had some good conversation around, well in real life, if you made one decision, it doesn't "end the game;" instead of having someone "try again," there was a concept of continuing the conversation.

Collaboration

We were able to develop a relationship and a trust that we could just throw things out there and if something didn't stuck, we just moved forward. We did a lot of brainstorming and experimentation that if we didn't trust each other, wouldn't have happened. We struck a really good balance between being too chaotic and unorganized and being too linear and getting stuck in a rut. I think we did it! I don't know how we managed that.

I think that the way our group was able to coordinate our different schedules, vacations that were scattered everywhere, we were still able to communicate really well, using WebEx, Adobe Connect, and setting up our meetings well in advance, being able to work our way through measurable goals every week. Saying, by next meeting we're going to be doing this. It really kept our project on task. It was nice to have that accountability on that end.

Roles
Our roles kind of fell out naturally. We had the advantage of one person's particularly strong organizational skills; she set up all of our meetings in advance and did the lion's share of the note taking. Two other team members did most of the research and the fourth person was the first one to step into Storyline. We all did a good job jumping in and saying, I think we should do this and we all said, yeah, ok that looks like it's going to work.
"*I became more and more comfortable feeling ok with bringing new ideas and I think we all did a good job of bringing new ideas and all jumping in*."

Collaboration Tools
I liked having the documents in GoogleDrive so you could comment right there, rather than using email where you have to say, a few threads below, you said X; rather we could just comment directly in the document and have it all there in one place.

We could have used the discussion boards in Moodle, but that required logging in and that required me remembering my login (I had trouble remembering my login). Having something like an IM string would have been useful. I actually wondered if using a chat tool [within Moodle] would be useful for all the scenarios when we're trying to just quickly make decisions or check in, when we don't need a record of the conversation.

Technical Development in Storyline

"*Getting started, it was just opening up and just seeing how it works*."

I appreciated the pure robustness of Storyline, but also how easy it was to get started. Each individual thing, learning each thing was easy to do. It's actually a very user friendly software. Figuring out what I wanted to do, I could then easily learn.

E-learning Heroes was awesome! All of the resources and content and supportiveness of Articulate was so helpful. We also learned a lot from each other! One member of the team really took the first plunge into Storyline, but it was great having four people on top of a new software.

I did appreciate having lynda.com (so much I talked my boss into my own subscription); it was most helpful to get my hands on the tool and do the exercises along with them in lynda.com. I liked the format of how we met together in Seattle. "This is what it does – then, here's the tool you use to make that happen." That was really nice. Everyone was super helpful. I would have had a lot less fun jumping right in if I didn't think others were there to help me.

Storyline Lessons Learned
We ran into this mysterious re-sizing font thing?! Font size would change upon publishing.

One of the big things with Storyline is that I don't feel like I have a good grasp on what the tool can really do. What helped me to learn it is that I knew what we wanted it to do – click a choice and move on to a response – but if we had a situation that we didn't know what we wanted it to do, it would have been hard to get started.

For the graphic elements, it would be helpful to see examples of what is appealing and start with those ideas first. Playing off other people's strengths, working with someone who has graphic design skills, where I can take notes and organize the project, then ask for help around picking the right colors or layout. Access to a graphic designer is a big advantage, and barring that (which I know that most libraries don't have), it's really helpful to have templates and examples available. It helps at least with the structure. Also, some pre-work in front of a class like this – asking people to look at examples, what worked, what didn't work, etc.

Reflections & Recommendations

Training Institute Curriculum and Training
This has been a really valuable experience. It was a lot of trying to get through certain aspects of the work, but it was really rewarding. I wanted to thank you all for your support and quick response time and sitting in on our meetings. Having a structure of learning this kind of stuff in general is really good. If I had the software, I don' think I would have used it as effectively. It was so nice to learn together. It was an amazing opportunity! I enjoyed it.

So this project became a refuge; it was a lot of work, but it was really inspiring to work with people who shared my passion and can bring their perspective. I learned a lot about the tool, what I can do and re-energizing myself within the profession.

It's a tool in my toolbox –to consider how do I make this fit the audience and the content, in a way that it makes sense. I'm not just going to roll out everything as elearning.

Having someone guide us along, it always made us feel better to come out of a group meeting and have you say, "yes, you're right on track, yes, you're doing it right. Or good thought, run with that."

Barriers

It was pretty ambitious of us to take on a new software, a new pedagogy (scenario based, jump in and learn as you go), and a new group of people in multiple different time zones, but that being said, I'm not sure I would have done that differently. I'm not sure I'd do it again in the future.

I was asked did we feel we would be able to roll out another elearning project rapidly – is it a time saver? "*No, it takes time to create elearning, regardless*."

I wonder if it would have been helpful to do more with Articulate before we met in person – the in-person workshop got a little too in the weeds with Storyline – getting into color schemes, a little cart before the horse. Focusing on the content first, I was a little bit frustrated with that piece of it – I thought the content was more important to focus on first before the format/colors.

We were trying to do a lot of things in a short amount of time. Maybe instead of providing the lynda.com tutorials – my preference is not to watch a video – have an exercise and have us develop a small thing beforehand. The design thing threw me a little – doing too much in a short amount of time.

Recommendations

More time in person would have been nice, I know it would have been hard to do. Maybe you could have the small groups meet together online first before meeting in person. Build in more time to meet as a group.

More concrete pre-work and pre-meeting with teams before meeting in Seattle so we didn't feel so rushed. "When we meet in Seattle, we'd like you to be able to do x,y,z" – we could have organized ourselves a little earlier. I needed the time in Seattle to narrow down our topic, doing research in the off-person meeting didn't feel like a good use of time.

It was validating/helpful to understand where we were compared to the other groups, we always felt behind, so learning during our meetings with Jennifer, that we were actually ahead of the curve was really validating, so I wonder if asking people to post regular updates somewhere that we could share. "Hey, here's where we are with our group." It would also be helpful to know what others are learning and if we could learn/copy from them. Live from the field sharing.

It would be nice, 6 months away, to reconvene for a 45 minute meeting, how are you using elearning now – maybe it's a discussion thread, etc. but something to give us momentum to keep doing something and moving forward!