

The Key to Achieving High Yield Return on Instruction

Technology Matters

Research Matters

Strategy Matters

Methodology Matters

Leadership Matters

Measurement Matters

Other Matters

Engaging our Learners

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PerformanceMatters
MAGAZINE

Engaging our Learners

The key to Achieving High Yield Return on Instruction

It always has been the case that learners have the final say in whether or not they learn and perform. This doesn't mean that other things don't get in the way of learning this – such as poor instruction. But no matter how gifted an instructor may be or how instructionally sound learning and performance support is, an unengaged learner will yield little to no return on any instructional investment an organization might make. This instructional investment involves all we do when creating a complete learning and performance solution.

The following formula shows the key enablers for achieving high yield return on instruction. They are personal engagement, experience level, relevance, need, and modality and methodology.

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc}
 \text{P} & \times & [& \text{E} & + & \text{R} & + & \text{N} &] & \times & \text{M}^2 & = & \text{ROI} \\
 \text{Personal} & & & \text{Experience} & & \text{Relevance} & & \text{Need} & & & \text{Modality} & & \text{Return on} \\
 \text{Engagement} & & & \text{Level} & & & & & & & \text{x} & & \text{Instruction} \\
 & & & & & & & & & & \text{Methodology} & &
 \end{array}$$

Personal Engagement **P** is at the beginning of this formula because it determines whether or not learning even happens. Make "P" zero and the rest of the formula is zero. Without the learner's engagement, regardless of what the instructor does, the Return on Instruction is zero.

The formula explains why our efforts sometimes fail to deliver consistent measurable outcomes. It also demands that we not only understand the drivers of personal engagement but that we develop strategies into our practices that foster personal engagement. The formula therefore becomes a guide for designing and implementing a learning and performance support strategy with the highest possible Return on Instruction.

In his book *The Employee Engagement Mindset*, Tim Clark provides a framework that is proving effective in fostering personal learning engagement. According to Tim, most organizations are functioning with only 25% of their workforce highly engaged. This means 75% are not as engaged as they could and should be.

The first step in fostering learning engagement is to understand the Personal Engagement enabler shown in the formula above. Tim's model flips the primary responsibility for engagement from the organization to the employee and makes fostering that engagement a strategic priority for every L&D team.

Foster Personal Engagement

$$P \times [E + R + N] \times M^2 = ROI$$

The second step is to understand what drives personal engagement and incorporate strategies that fuel these drivers. Tim found that there are six of them.

Here's how we can address these drivers within the specific arena of learning and performance support.

Shaping

Engaged learners control and shape their own personal learning paths. They intentionally gravitate to environments where they have the means to control their own personalized learning, when and where they need it, in the way they want it. This speaks to the need for Embedded Performance Support Solutions (EPSS), doesn't it? The old world of blended training and tailored learning may be a good start but it isn't enough. We must enable learners to take control of their own learning when it is most relevant **R** to them – right at the moment of need **N**. This can't be achieved without performance support methodology and technology.

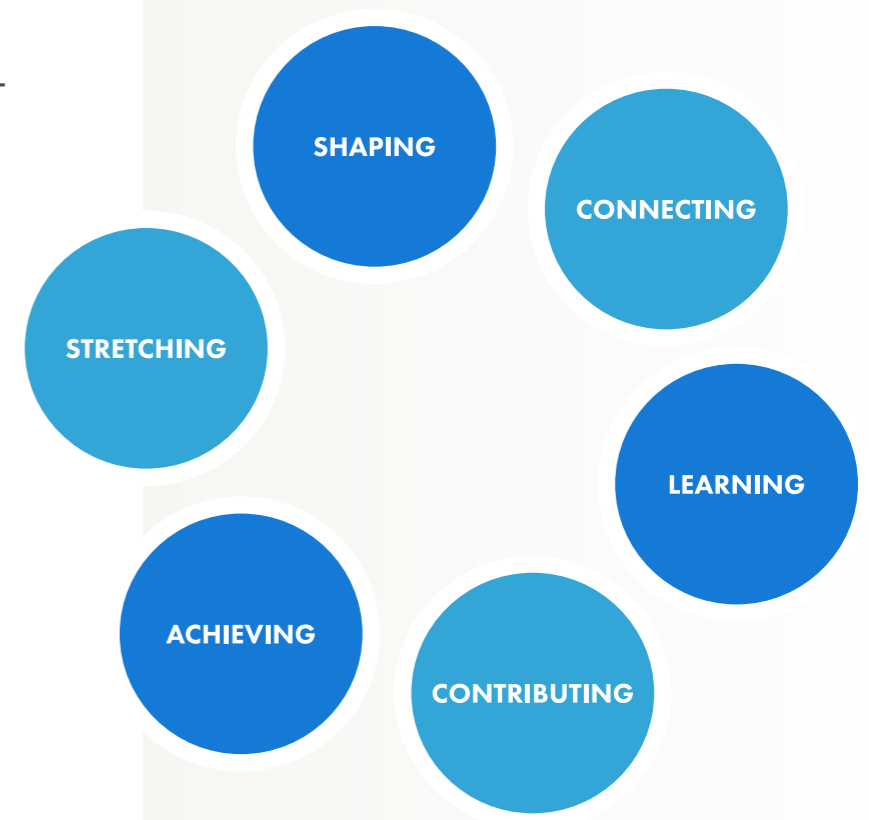
Connecting

According to Tim, people connect to their work socially, intellectually, environmentally, and/or inspirationally. When they connect to two or more of these anchors, engagement soars. Think about yourself for a moment. Do these factors, singly or in combination, anchor you to your learning? Think about the Pyramid for Performance Support. These connectors can be incorporated into the lower three levels. The degree to which we design for and enable hooks to these connectors will determine whether learners intentionally engage.

Learning

Peter Senge observed that "Real learning gets to the heart of what it means to be human" and that "there is within each of us a deep hunger for [real] learning." In his research, Tim found that when people experience "real learning" their engagement level soars. So what is "real" learning? It's learning that readily leads to successful on-the-job performance. An effectively designed EPSS provides access for learners to

The Six Drivers of Personal Engagement



the type and level of learning they need at every moment of need while they are doing their work. It is in this moment that learners can best recognize and celebrate successful performance, thereby increasing their personal engagement level.

Stretching

Stretching is the only path to continuous improvement. This happens when learners flee their comfort zone into the outer limits of their capabilities and stay there until it becomes their comfort zone. Fear of failure suppresses stretching more than any other factor. By providing learners with the support they need to *safely* flee their comfort zone, navigate through their discomfort zone, and anchor themselves to the outer limits of their capacity, we enable continuous improvement. People are more likely to stretch when they know they can recover if they make a mistake.

Going to one's outer limits ignites engagement! Performance support provides learners with the safety net they need to boldly venture into unexplored areas of learning and performance. As learners become confident in their ability to safely stretch beyond their comfort zone, they experience the exhilaration that accompanies continuous improvement. Performance support enables the trip stunningly.

Achieving

To achieve is to accomplish something that is personally rewarding. Continuous growth through stretching isn't sustainable without achievement. From Tim's work we know that learners can be motivated by recognition, rewards, results, or responsibilities. These motivators can shift over time. Solutions that provide learners with the opportunity to achieve according to their particular motivator will certainly foster greater engagement levels. Again, an EPSS is especially effective in facilitat-

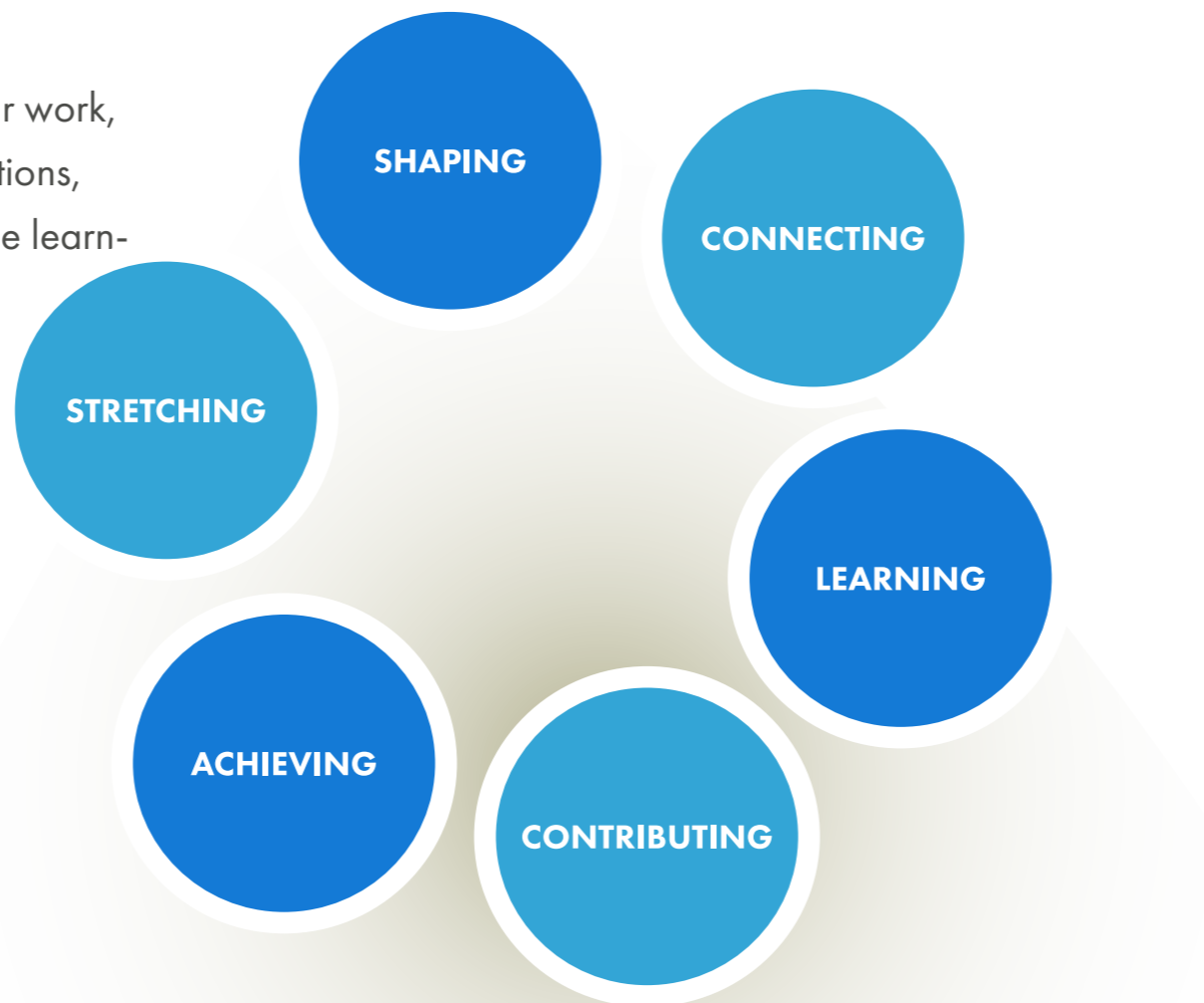
ing achievement because it immediately validates results. It can track usage and provide opportunity to recognize and reward performance. And it allows users to assume increased responsibility in maintaining its effectiveness.

Contributing

This is the ultimate engagement driver. Most people who leave organizations voluntarily have valued two things above all else – the contributions they have made and the relationships they formed working with others.

People prefer contributing in different ways. Some want to be anonymous and others public. They may also prefer contributing as individuals or as part of larger groups. Contribution is a self-driven effort. An EPSS can enable every combination of contributing. It can allow learners to choose how and when they provide valuable contributions.

When we lay these six connectors over our work, particularly our performance support solutions, we can intentionally design ways to enable learners to shape, connect, learn, stretch and contribute in ways they find meaningful and satisfying. If we don't keep the learner's engagement in mind, our solutions tend not to have the impact we desire.



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 \text{Personal} & & & \text{Experience} & & \text{Relevance} & & \text{Need} & & & \text{Modality} & & \text{Return on} \\
 \text{Engagement} & & & \text{Level} & & & & & & & \times & & \text{Instruction} \\
 & & & & & & & & & & \text{Methodology} & &
 \end{array}$$

The third step for fostering personal engagement **P** is to orchestrate the formula in ways that will best fuel engagement.

The learner's Experience Level **E** plus the degree to which they recognize the content as Relevant **R** along with the Need **N** they have to learn something become key force multipliers of engagement. For example, highly engaged learners with limited experience **E** in an area that they don't recognize as relevant **R** to their particular situation at a time when there is no pressing need **N** to learn will certainly be less engaged.

Compare that situation to what happens when a highly engaged learner, who is highly experienced in an area, recognizes that what she is learning is highly relevant. She will feel a pressing need to learn. In this scenario, there is no contest in terms of learner engagement.

With relevance in mind, here's a question: "In what environment do highly experienced learners generally find the most relevance and feel the greatest need to learn?" Answer: at the moment of APPLY in their own workflow. Compare the relevance of this critical moment of Apply to how learners generally feel when they face a practice activity that was designed for a large number of people to be delivered over a specific period of time in a traditional Instructor-led or elearning course. How relevant do they perceive that practice to be? How pressing is their need to learn?

Obviously the answers vary but that's the point. When it comes to learner engagement, the green parts of the Personal Engagement formula (E, R, and N) are optimally addressed in the workflow as close to the moment of Apply as possible.

Make Experience Level, Relevance, and Need a Force multiplier

$$P \times [E + R + N] \times M^2 = ROI$$

Learning right at the Moment of Apply can't and shouldn't always happen. This is where the **M** in the Personal Engagement formula comes into play. The **M** represents the two areas where we have direct control and primary responsibility. The following table shows how methodology and learner engagement must work together in order for people to truly learn.

Clear understanding of the intrinsic motivators of learning and designing them into the solutions we build is the secret sauce of engagement. Engagement is intrinsic and influences the effectiveness of our solution's modality and methodology rather than the other way around. Performance support does a brilliant job of helping enable intrinsic factors.

Methodology	Learner Role
Deliver Content	Capture and contextualize the content to specific on-the-job performance
Provide Examples	Capture and contextualize the content to specific on-the-job performance
Practice	Capture and contextualize the content to specific on-the-job performance
Integrate Review	Master and automate skills and knowledge
Check for Mastery	Verify understand and mastery Identify areas for improvement
Give Feedback	Pursue continuous improvement

M²

Move Methodology ahead of Modality

$$P \times [E + R + N] \times M^2 = ROI$$

As L&D professionals, we must understand the interrelationship of the building blocks of instruction in the left column of the table with the heavy lifting that learners must do during learning as shown in the right column. In the classroom, if the extrinsic factors on the left overwhelm the intrinsic factors on the right, at the end of the day our learners have their eyes glazed over and their hair blown back. They are absolutely done.

Here's a reality, though. A highly engaged learner, who is aggressively doing what you see on the right side of the table, will learn regardless of how effectively the learning solution employs the methodology shown on the left. Highly engaged learners can still learn with a poorly designed and/or executed methodology. But, they won't

learn as efficiently or effectively. As shown by the formula, learning outcomes can be accelerated to the degree we orchestrate the methodology on the left into a relevant solution, and deploy it at the moment of need to highly engaged learners.

For some reason, we have historically put the cart before the horse when it comes to the **M** in the Personal Engagement formula. We have tended to select the modality first and then determine the methodology. This is absolutely backward from what it should be. We should select modalities according to their capacity to enable methodology and harness personal engagement. Getting this order right turns **M** into an exponential enabler in the formula.

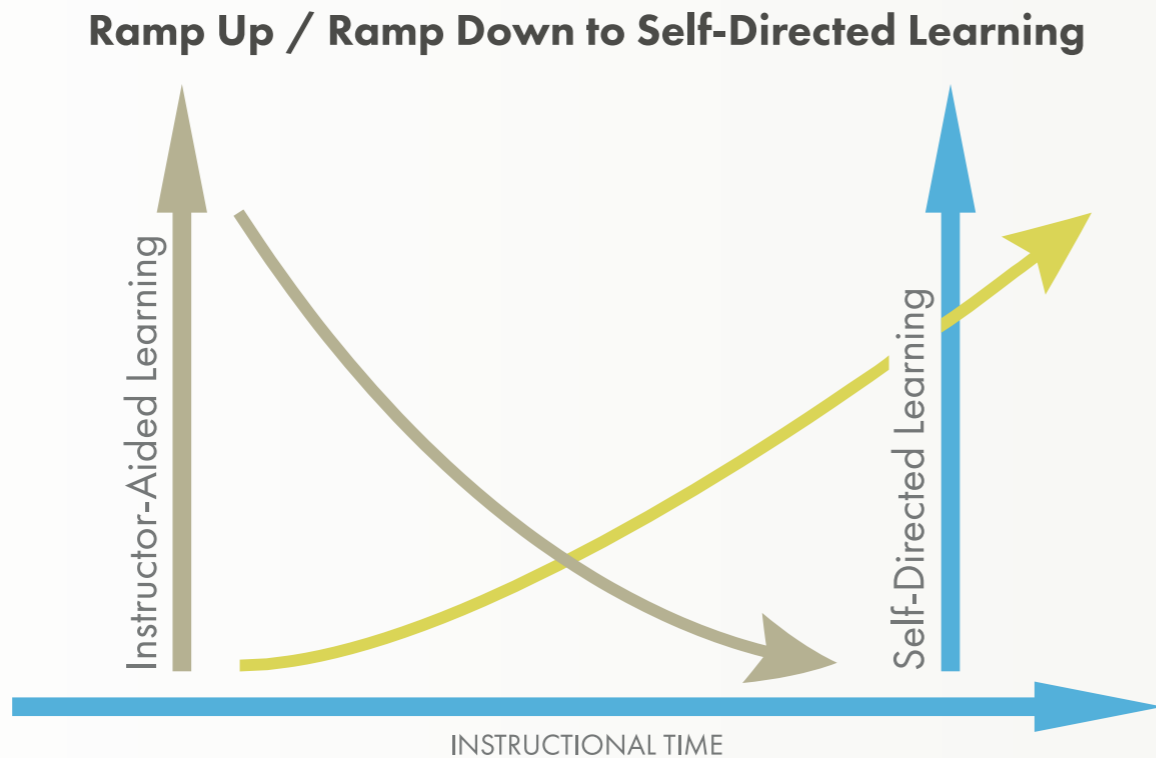
Here's the bottom line. We won't achieve high yield return on the work we do without intentionally fueling the Personal engagement **P** of learners. This includes delivering learning in an environment that takes advantage of their experience level **E** at their most relevant **R** moment of need **N**. The more effectively we engage **M** according to experience **E**, relevance **R**, and need **N**, the more exponential those returns become. Optimizing learning outcomes thus requires wrapping Embedded Performance Support Systems (EPSS) into the mix of learning modality options.

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 \end{array}$$

The final piece to increasing **P** is ramping down Instructor-Aided Learning and ramping up Self-Directed Learning. When self-directed learning is well designed and implemented, it will dramatically change the way we use instructional time. This is the whole idea behind the flipped classroom. When we flip the classroom, much of what we consider to be necessary content in formal instruction actually shifts to the performance support system.

Engagement becomes almost more important than content. The content is provided in the performance support system and learners will find it when they need it. This savings of effort can be redirected to improve the content and adapt it for consumption in the workflow. With more content in the performance support system, instructional time in the classroom diminishes and classroom focus shifts to teaching learners how to use the performance support system and the engagement drivers.

Use the Modality of the classroom to foster engaged learning



$$P \times [E + R + N] \times M^2 = ROI$$

New subject matter can still be introduced in the classroom but the nitty-gritty details of how to perform a work-related task will be provided through the performance support system. This approach develops self-reliant learners and fuels engagement within the classroom and on into the workflow.

If we want to speak of true engagement, let's meet our performers where they care. They love training; it's cool to go out to class. But the reality is that engagement is highest when it intersects with the user's needs and concerns. Performance Support is natively engaging so let's target that spot where they care.

If we don't make this shift, we will never be able to help our work force become top performers. The 25% that are engaged now will stay engaged, but the other 75% will continue to perform at lower levels.

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