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Learning

Free e-Book

How to leverage learning scenarios for
PROBLEM-SOLVING TRAINING

We believe in sharing our knowledge with our learning and development community. We hope you find this e-Book useful.

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Introduction

Problem-solving skills are essential for just about anything in life. Whether it's in the workplace, personal life, or academic settings, the ability to effectively identify, analyse, and solve problems is highly valued.

Problem-solving goes beyond finding quick fixes; it involves critical thinking, creativity, and the ability to make informed decisions. In this e-book we outline the importance of problem-solving skills for organisational performance and explore how you can use learning scenarios to help your teams improve their problem-solving skills.

As a collective team, we've spent the last thirteen years helping Australian organisations deploy problem-based learning scenarios to enhance role-specific performance, and we'd like to share what we've learnt with you.

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01
Understanding the importance of problem-solving skills

Effective problem-solving is a catalyst of organisational efficiency and growth, reaching into every individual's job role and higher-level strategic decision-making.

Investing in your team's problem-solving skills can stimulate innovation and drive organisational productivity ("Here is a better way to do this"), paving the way for process refinement and continuous improvement.

Why problem-solving skills are essential for organisational success

Proficient problem-solving skills are crucial tools for managers and employees in modern organisations, helping teams to analyse and address complex challenges, empowering them to navigate and evaluate various viable options for a successful outcome. In these times when the acronym VUCA

(Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous) is at the forefront of many leaders' minds, it is more critical that we prepare our teams to plan to respond, rather than react.

Problem-solving skills provide a solid bedrock, underpinning business stability. In unexpected and uncertain scenarios, these skills equip staff with the capacity to design appropriate resolutions, safeguarding operational functionality. They help enhance productivity by expediting decision-making processes, reducing time wasted on redundant actions, and leading the businesses towards objectives faster.

Empowering your teams to understand and apply the 'right' problem-solving approach for their job role contexts assists you in efficiently managing resources, eliminating wastage and maintaining a tight control on costs.

The impact of problem-solving skills on employee performance

Sound problem-solving skills can empower staff to resolve issues promptly, minimising BAU disruptions and optimising workflows. Competent problem-solving abilities in employees are not just about resolving issues, they're the catalyst for optimal daily productivity. When problems are solved swiftly and effectively, employees spend less time firefighting and more time forging ahead.

An employee equipped with adept problem-solving skills becomes an asset to any organisation. They not only tackle complications head-on but also conceptualise innovative solutions, consequently driving an upscale in performance. In an era where workforce productivity is paramount, proficient problem-solving skills can be a game-changer. The ability to identify, analyse and overcome obstacles can translate to improved overall staff performance and, consequently, organisational success.

How problem-solving skills contribute to innovation and productivity

Fostering innovation in the workplace requires effective problem-solving. Employees with fine-tuned problem-solving skills can conjure creative solutions, leading to dynamic innovation and, naturally, enhancing productivity. Leveraging problem-solving skills goes beyond just resolving issues. It stirs the innovative mindset, triggering new ideas and strategies.

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Exploring learning scenarios for problem-solving skills

What are learning scenarios and how do they work?

Learning scenarios simulate real-life challenges, allowing learners to find solutions, thereby strengthening their decision-making and problem-solving competencies. This makes problem scenarios effective for honing problem-solving skills in a risk-free environment.

Execution is key in learning scenarios. They involve presenting employees with a problem and letting them wade through available data, consider options and make decisions. This way, learning is rooted in experiential understanding rather than mere theory.

Learning scenarios capitalise on hands-on and active participation. As learners navigate through specifically designed learning environments and challenges, they absorb effective strategies for problem-solving, in line with the set parameters for role-specific successful performance outcomes.

Success in using learning scenarios goes hand in hand with realistic design. Authentic learning scenarios ideally mirror the complexities of the actual workplace. Consequently, when employees engage in problem resolution within these scenarios, they are essentially gearing up for real-life organisational problem-solving.

How can you improve problem-solving skills in your organisation?

A very powerful way to do so is via contextualised simulated learning scenarios.

Learning scenarios allow your team members to experience relevant scenes with problems that may occur and practice to tackle complex tasks, thus fostering a proactive problem-solving approach with feedback on their performance.

Embracing learning scenarios to elevate problem-solving skills isn't merely an L&D initiative, but a pathway to overall enterprise success. It can help cultivate a culture of critical thinking beyond the learning experience.

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Different types of learning scenarios for problem-solving skills

Learning scenarios can take many forms, and the right one will depend on the complexity of your 'problem' at hand, your learning cohort, the topic, and your specific learning context.

Case Study: Real-life challenges to stimulate solution crafting.

Role Play: Interactive simulations to master decision-making.

Games: Innovative and engaging tasks to sharpen solution identification.

Scenario-Based eLearning Modules: Virtual training solutions to foster strategic thinking.

Thought Experiments: Hypothetical problems, prompting abstract reasoning and perspective-taking.

Organisational decision-making can vary from small operational processes ("Has the applicant filled out the correct form, and have all mandatory fields been completed?") to large-scale rollouts of new product lines across different sub-brands ("How would I as business unit-owner in Region 1 solve this particular problem, in line with global HQ guidelines and targets, but with local realities in mind?"). This is why it's important to evaluate which type of scenario and learning solution will best serve your purposes.

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Choosing the right learning scenarios for your context

Knowing the perfect learning scenario and solution is the first step towards robust problem-solving. By comprehending your team's unique needs and pain points, you can opt for the learning plan that is most effective in bolstering their problem-solving prowess.

This choice involves a thorough understanding of your organisation's learning culture, performance goals, specific business challenges, and, last but not least, a very clear understanding of the problem at hand that needs solving. If you have identified that a learning intervention can help improve your team's skills, it's time to think about suitable scenarios.

Creating engaging and interactive learning scenarios

When designing captivating learning scenarios, integrating real-world challenges faced by your staff boosts relevance and practicality of your learning intervention.

Strategically designed scenarios should encourage active engagement, and guide learners through problem-solving processes. Elements such as quizzes, branching scenarios or simulations inspire critical thinking and drive participants to explore potential solutions.

In the design phase, collaboration with relevant stakeholders is key. Include learning strategists, instructional designers, employees and subject matter experts in the design process to ensure the learning scenarios reflect actual workplace issues and conditions, thereby fostering a more effective and grounded learning experience.

## Identifying learning objectives and desired outcomes

As all learning interventions do, learning scenarios also need clear learning objectives.

What situations and problems should your learners encounter? Can you pinpoint desired task complexity levels, decision-making authorities, and escalation points? Establishing these parameters when determining your learning outcomes helps make them relevant and measurable at a role-specific level.

In small teams, understanding the distinct capabilities and shortcomings of each team member can even lead to tailor-made learning scenarios enhancing an individual's problem-solving skills.

The desired learning outcomes you identify can be an amalgamation of immediate and long-term goals. Immediate goals can range from understanding problem-solving techniques while long-term ones may seek sustenance of these skills under various situations. Remember to link these desired outcomes back to the overall team and organisational goals. This alignment will keep the learning process relevant and ensure that the problem-solving skills developed are directly beneficial to your team and the wider organisation.

![Liberate Learning logo]
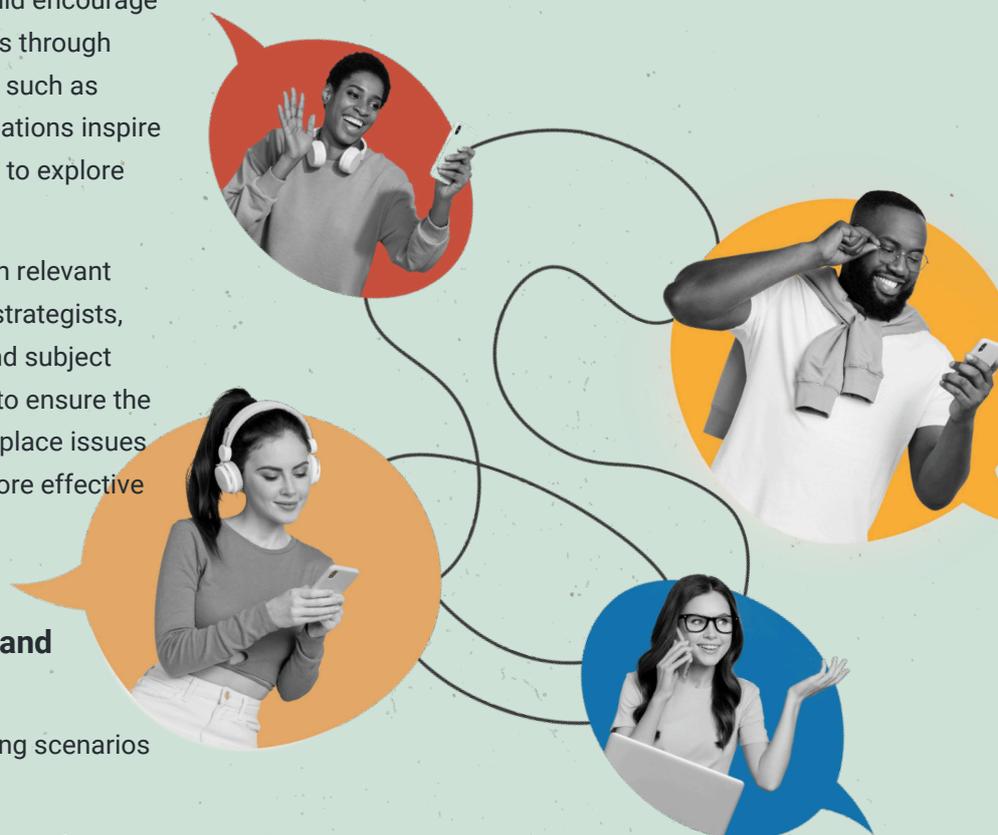
Aligning learning scenarios with organisational needs

Tailoring learning experiences to directly align with business objectives ensures the development of relevant competencies. When you calibrate learning scenarios to organisational directives ("What does a good outcome look like?"), problem-solving productivity is magnified.

This strategic alignment means you need to identify the specific problem-solving abilities needed within your organisation; having them established as first-hand learning objectives ensures that each learning scenario brings us one step closer to the target.

Don't overlook the resources, systems, and tools already available in your organisation. Leverage them to build coherent and grounded learning scenarios that are contextually relevant for your learner audience.

Measuring the effectiveness of learning scenarios

How will you know whether your scenarios had a positive impact on problem-solving skills? This is where eLearning, branching scenarios and full simulations have an advantage over face-to-face role plays.

Thanks to the sheer endless variations that are possible to create in an online learning environment, you can set up as many scenarios with as many permutations as you deem are needed for your learners to practice and gain confidence.

Then, you can track and evaluate your employees' abilities to approach and resolve challenges by rich data you can get from your eLearning. These formative assessments could be based on performance-relevant tasks or simulations reflecting real-life situations, and a summary quiz at the end allows you to record the knowledge a learner gained during the scenarios.

Make sure you obtain continuous feedback from learners, as it plays a crucial role in determining scenario effectiveness. If employees find scenarios engaging and relevant, they are more likely to have a positive effect on their learning success. Lastly, beyond qualitative learner feedback, consider business metrics impacted by enhanced problem-solving. Ultimately the goal of most learning should be to improve workplace performance – can your employees complete their role more efficiently or effectively after the learning intervention has occurred? For example, reduction in task completion time, improved project outcomes and fewer errors could be indications of your learning scenarios being effective.

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The role of subject matter experts in making a scenario relevant and contextualised

When you embark on the path of learning scenarios, relevance and context is key.

Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) play a crucial role in making learning scenarios relevant and contextualised. Their expertise and knowledge in a particular field or industry ensure that the scenarios are accurate, up-to-date, and aligned with the learners' needs. Here are some ways in which SMEs can help you:

✅ **Provide domain knowledge:** Your SMEs possess deep knowledge and understanding of the subject matter. They can contribute by sharing their expertise, insights, and real-world experiences related to the specific industry or field of study. This ensures that the scenarios reflect the realities and challenges faced by learners in their workplace.

✅ **Aligning scenarios with learning objectives:** They collaborate with instructional designers and educators to align the learning scenarios with the desired learning outcomes. By understanding the objectives, they help design scenarios that address specific learning gaps and focus on the skills and knowledge that learners need to acquire.

✅ **Validating scenario authenticity:** SMEs can also review and validate the authenticity and accuracy of your scenarios. They ensure that the problems presented, the tasks assigned, and the solutions proposed are realistic and relevant to the learners' actual work environment.

✅ **Reviewing and updating content:** Since SMEs stay updated with the latest industry trends and practices, they also play a vital role in reviewing and updating the content of your learning scenarios. They ensure that the information, examples, and case studies used in the scenarios are current, reflecting the best practices and latest developments in the field.

✅ **Addressing learners' questions and doubts:** SMEs are often involved in the development of supporting materials, such as instructor guides or FAQs, that accompany the scenarios. They can anticipate and address potential questions or doubts that learners may have during the scenario. This ensures a smoother learning experience and enhances the overall effectiveness of the scenarios.

✅ **Setting workplace performance goals:** In conjunction with business leaders, SMEs are better able to understand the business problem to be solved and how to collect evidence that the learning has had a positive impact. They can match required outcomes to specific forms of measurement to ensure the business can truly measure the efficacy of the learning event.

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03
Maximising the benefits of learning scenarios for problem-solving skills training

How learning scenarios compare to other forms of learning

Learning scenarios offer a rich and immersive learning experience that sets them apart from other learning interventions. Your learners are encouraged to think critically, make decisions, and experience the consequences of their actions within a safe learning environment. This hands-on approach fosters deeper understanding, enhances problem-solving skills, and promotes active participation.

Additionally, learning scenarios often incorporate multimedia elements, such as videos, simulations, and case studies, which further enhance engagement and make the learning experience more enjoyable and memorable. By immersing learners in authentic and relevant scenarios, these interventions create a bridge between theory and practice, enabling learners to develop practical skills that can be immediately applied in their professional lives. The effort that goes into the storytelling will also signify to your learner audience that what they learn is important, beyond a 'tick and flick' or 'click next' exercise.

Sometimes, the complexity needed in analysis, design, development, and production means that your in-house L&D or OD team may not have the capability or capacity (or technology) to initiate and incorporate learning scenarios. This is where an experienced custom Learning and Development partner may be able to help you.

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Promoting continuous learning and development

Learning scenarios are not set-and-forget learning interventions. A learning scenario can only be effective when it adapts to evolving business problems. As such, continuous adaptation and evolution of learning scenarios directly reflect your organisation's commitment to enduring learning and development.

Cultivating a learning culture through evolving scenarios will stimulate innovative problem-solving approaches that keeps pace with the rate of change. As the scenarios present new challenges, employees further enhance their skills, driving the organisation towards a sustainable future.

Fostering a culture of collaboration and teamwork

Learning scenarios with a social learning aspect offer the unique opportunity to foster a team-based approach to problem-solving. By mimicking real-life situations and enticing learners to collaborate, you can encourage your teams to think collectively, addressing problems as a unit.

In a richly interactive environment, group-oriented learning scenarios can intensify the development of problem-solving skills at a collective level. Teams converge to solve issues, leading to a unified and more effective response. Promoting teamwork through learning scenarios can further enhance the culture of collaboration. Employees learn to rely on each other's strengths, which can help fostering unity and cohesive problem-solving.

Group-oriented learning scenarios also encourage open communication, drive critical discussions, and allow teams to explore different perspectives. While looking at situations from another perspective, learners will increase empathy for their peers in other roles. Through simulations, employees are able to assume alternate roles to those that they are employed in. When they make decisions in those roles, they can experience different challenges to those that they would normally experience. This communal approach can power more well-rounded solutions to organisational challenges.

Encouraging critical thinking and innovation

Tailored, well designed learning scenarios can act as a spark, igniting innovative problem-solving thinking. They present real-world complications, compelling employees to apply their creativity and innovate solutions, thus strengthening the overall problem-solving skills within the organisation.

Interactive exercises can prompt learners to examine problems from numerous angles, assess the impact of different solutions, and thereby refining their critical-thinking skills.

A focus on critical thinking helps foster a culture of innovation where employees are more attuned to change, more proactive, and able to turn challenges into opportunities faster.

Remember, an effective learning scenario should be learner-centred, engaging, and provide ample opportunities for practice and application of problem-solving skills in a realistic workplace context.

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Your learning scenario checklist

When creating learning scenarios to improve problem-solving skills, consider the following checklist to ensure their effectiveness:

1 **Define clear learning objectives:** Clearly outline the specific problem-solving skills or problem knowledge learners should acquire by the end of the scenario.

2 **Identify the target audience:** Understand the characteristics, skill levels, and knowledge/skills gaps of the audience to tailor the scenario accordingly.

3 **Choose a relevant problem:** Select a problem or challenge that aligns with the business needs and real-world situations the learner may encounter in the workplace.

4 **Create engaging content:** Use a variety of multimedia elements such as videos, interactive exercises, simulations, and case studies to make the scenario more interactive and compelling.

5 **Design realistic scenarios:** Ensure that the scenarios mirror real-life situations with authentic challenges, allowing learners to apply their problem-solving skills.

6 **Provide context and background:** Set the scene by providing relevant context and background information to help learners understand the scenario better.

7 **Offer multiple solutions:** Where possible in the context of the problem at hand, encourage learners to explore different approaches and solutions to the problem, fostering critical thinking and creativity.

8 **Incorporate feedback and reflection:** Include opportunities for learners to receive feedback on their actions and reflect on their problem-solving strategies to promote continuous improvement.

9 **Allow for decision-making:** Present learners with choices and consequences, allowing them to make decisions and experience the impact of their choices.

10 **Assess learning outcomes:** Evaluate the effectiveness of the scenario by assessing learners' performance and measuring their mastery of the problem-solving skills targeted in the objectives.

11 **Iterate and improve:** Gather feedback from learners, instructors, and stakeholders to identify areas for improvement and refine the learning scenario accordingly.

Notes

Want to learn more?

If you would like some support in making your team better at solving your business problems, get in touch with our team of learning strategists:

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