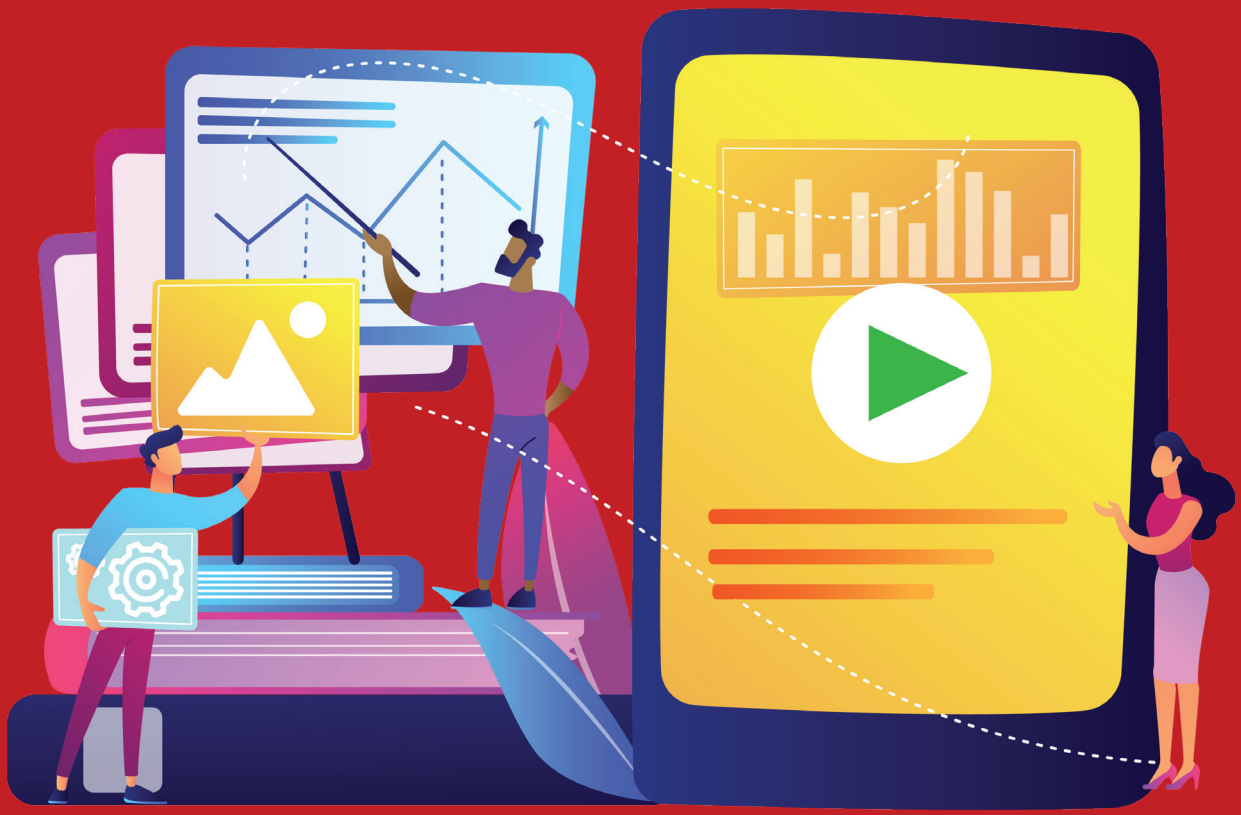
td at work

TIPS, TOOLS & INTELLIGENCE FOR DEVELOPING TALENT

APRIL 2019
ISSUE 1904

Self-Directed Learning Made Simple

Amanda Smith



atd

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

instructional design
VOL. 36 • ISSUE 1904 • APRIL 2019

SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING MADE SIMPLE

What Is Self-Directed Learning? 2
Is Self-Directed Learning Right for Your Organization? 2
Set the Stage 4
Learner and Organizational Impact 9
Implementation Benefits and Challenges 12
Conclusion 13
References & Resources 14

JOB AIDS

Self-Directed Learning Program Guidelines 15
Learner Readiness Checklist 16

Need a trainer's lifeline? Visit www.td.org/tdatwork.

Printed in the United States of America.

For help or inquiries about your subscription, please contact Customer Care at 800.628.2783/703.683.8100 (international).

TD at Work (ISSN 2373-5570, Electronic ISSN 2373-5589, ISBN 978-1-94903-667-1, Electronic ISBN 978-1-94903-668-8) is published monthly by the Association for Talent Development, 1640 King Street, Alexandria, VA 22314. *TD at Work* is available for subscription in print or digitally. The subscription rate for the Monthly All-Access (12 print and digital issues, plus archive access) is $119 (ATD national members) and $159 (nonmembers). The monthly digital subscription rate for 12 issues is $69 (ATD national members) and $99 (nonmembers). Periodicals postage paid at Alexandria, Virginia, and additional entries. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *TD at Work*, 1640 King Street Alexandria, VA 22314. Claims for replacement of subscription issues not received must be made within three months of the issue date. Copyright © April 2019 *TD at Work* and ATD. All rights reserved. No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means—graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, or information storage and retrieval systems—without the express written permission of the publisher. For permission requests, please go to www.copyright.com, or contact Copyright Clearance Center (CCC), 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923 (telephone: 978.750.8500, fax: 978.646.8600). ATD Press grants permission for the material on pages 15-16 to be reproduced for personal use.

AUTHOR

Amanda Smith
Amanda Smith is the former instructional design content manager at the Association for Talent Development. In addition to instructional design, her specialties include content development and facilitation. Smith has more than 17 years of experience in the nonprofit sector developing and marketing talent development programs for the adult learner.

Content Manager, Instructional Design
Amanda Smith

Editor, *TD at Work*
Patty Gaul

Managing Editor
Joy Metcalf

Graphic Designer
Shirley E.M. Raybuck

In a world where many solutions to problems are just a click or swipe away, trainers must use more creative ways to steer learners on the right learning path. Let's face it—Google is our friend, but it can quickly become a never-ending rabbit hole, showcasing multitudes of information that may not pertain to our needs. How many times do we forget the original reason for our search because of the outpouring of data?

Instructional designers need to recognize and embrace this new reality. After all, Google, technology, and mobile devices aren't going away any time soon. In this digital age, learners are fact-checking and diagnosing themselves all under the same spirit of research. L&D professionals can use the habits that learners have undertaken on their own and integrate them into a self-directed learning program, providing the guidance and support learners need.

There are several key factors for why self-directed learning is steadily increasing. These include the widespread use of mobile devices, increased access to media, and the time constraints that individuals face when learning something new. The overall lifestyle and business demands that learners are experiencing are likewise

COPYRIGHT © ATD

influencing how they consume information. The desire for quick, accessible, controllable content has a significant impact in training.

Participants are already familiar with this style of data consumption in their personal lives, and they'll only further demand it. Mobile technology will remain a staple for future learning. Self-directed learning aligns well with mobile learning, because learners can receive the content wherever and whenever they want and need it.

The evolution of media, across multiple formats, has created deep and meaningful learning experiences for participants. Media have become a component of active learning, which plays a key role in self-directed learning. To this end, instructors can engage learners by using film, music, videos, podcasts, social media, and much more.

Timing, too, has become a critical factor for today's learner. We can expect that this will only become more constrained in the future. Instructors should remain steadfast and committed to developing training in a digestible format that keeps learners engaged and renders swift results. When there are time constraints—a certainty we all can relate to—self-directed learning enables participants to learn at their own pace, on their own time. This opens many opportunities for L&D to occur and increases learner motivation, because they determine their schedule.

In this issue of *TD at Work*, I will

- explain what self-directed learning is
- pose questions about learners that L&D professionals should answer before implementing a program
- show how L&D professionals can use self-directed learning in the context of a larger development program
- cover key components for building a self-directed learning program.

What Is Self-Directed Learning?

In self-directed learning, participants take complete ownership of their learning, from the needs assessment through goal-setting, active participation, and evaluation. The L&D professional's role is to integrate a diverse range of learning opportunities that support various styles of self-paced learning. It's best to include a range of learning options that the learner can adopt independently, such as video, e-learning, or a podcast. As Karla Gutierrez, an inbound marketer at Aura Interactiva, the developers of SHIFT eLearning, writes, "The availability of the right tools and technology, easy access to content, and an organizational learning culture that encourages and facilitates [self-directed learning] are integral for empowering learners to make their own decisions regarding their learning paths."

Research from Bersin by Deloitte, as outlined in the study *Meet the Modern Learner*, points to some generalizations about today's learners that L&D professionals need to be aware of. From that research, we can draw several conclusions to today's learners:

- Roughly 1 percent of a typical workweek is dedicated to L&D.
- Learners have more access to content because of new technology; users now want quick solutions.
- Learners are crossing boundaries to become less siloed and more collaborative.
- Most people understand the notion that learning should be continuous if they are to remain competitive.
- Learners have taken on more control and accountability for their learning.

As an L&D professional, you need to understand your organization—that is, the culture and the resources available to you; your learners; and your willingness and comfort level with letting go and handing over the reins in large part to the learners while continuing to serve as an adviser.

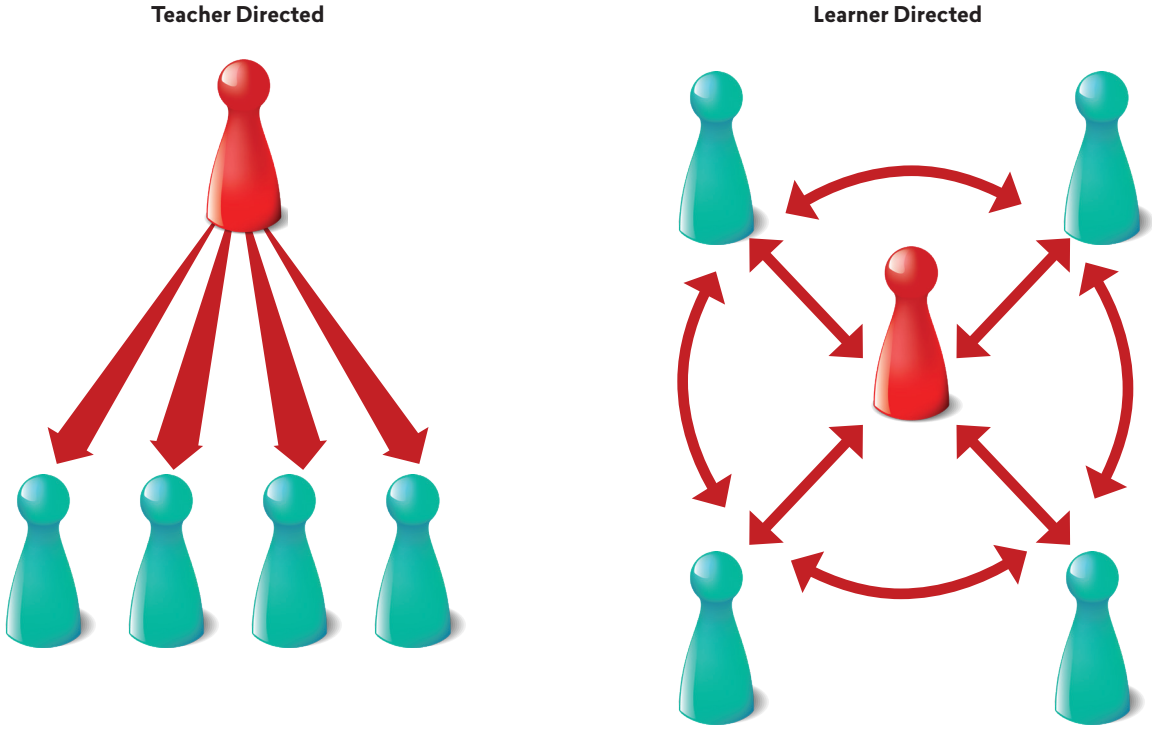
Is Self-Directed Learning Right for Your Organization?

In self-directed learning programs, learners are expected to take full control of the learning experience. But L&D professionals play a key role in designing self-directed training programs that are agile enough for learners to pace themselves and engage.

As you begin to think about developing a self-directed training program, ask yourself whether it's right for your organization or the individuals whom you are targeting. The Centre for Teaching Excellence lays out four key

COPYRIGHT © ATD

Teacher-Directed vs. Learner-Directed Learning



questions around self-directed learning:

- Are participants ready to learn?
- What are the learning goals?
- Are learners engaged?
- What is the impact for learners and the company?

Are Participants Ready to Learn?

Learner readiness is essential to the success of your self-directed learning program. Learning won't happen if participants don't show motivation. However, while a considerable factor, enthusiasm alone does not constitute learners' readiness to commit to the self-direct learning process. Part of the motivation will come from the learners having a good reason to accomplish what they set out to learn. They must understand what they want to learn and how they will achieve that learning, such as the required steps.

In addition to learner motivation, L&D professionals should measure learners' capability in acquiring a new skill based on their current level. For example, do learners need to receive additional information on the subject matter in the form of prework or do they possess working knowledge of the topic to comprehend and apply the material? Do learners have the resources or technical requirements to fully participate in the learning method?

Despite the many reasons why self-directed learning is popular today—with learners, L&D professionals, and organizations—it is not the solution for all training scenarios. Self-directed learning will really only work if participants have a specific set of competencies or traits: curious, motivated, engaged, strong project and time-management skills, and some computer literacy. This style of learning can help individuals expand on their current knowledge, gaining new skills and acquiring a sense of liberation—learning on their terms, which produces highly favorable outcomes for many. Learners have to know where they are to prepare for where they're going.

Buy This Issue

Subscribe To Monthly All-Access

COPYRIGHT © ATD