Launching a Culture-Based Learning Product

Taking culture into account can make a successful, human-centered product launch possible.

By Patricia A. Young and Brandon C. Taylor

Scenario: Edgar, an instructional designer, has been designing training materials in house for years. Finally, Edgar has been given an opportunity to launch the company’s first international learning product, which will be used by employees from around the world. Edgar eagerly takes the assignment with high hopes of making a successful and creative product launch. After savoring his great assignment, Edgar realizes he has never launched such a product. Where should he begin his research? What is most important in the successful launch of a learning product?

Design and a successful launch. A variety of data can be collected about the learner. If the learners are diverse in ethnicity, race, gender, learning styles, class, demographics, history, experiences, beliefs, values, norms, interests, and ideologies, it is best that the product developed be culture-neutral and generic. If the learners are similar in these areas, then the products designed are more culture-specific and specialized.

Collect data about your learners in each of the demographic areas listed. This data will assist in the design of the product. If the design of a product is generic, cultural considerations should be made to not offend people of diverse cultures. Everything must be generic and ethnically unbiased.

If the product is more specialized, then the culture of the learners should be integrated throughout the product’s design. For example, Edgar could decide to use a symbol throughout the learning product and then later find out that the symbol is offensive to some of his learners. Had Edgar done the research about his learners, he could have minimized bias and offensive items.

Planning the instruction is crucial to designing a learning product. Certain information must be considered and finalized before moving forward. The plan of instruction should contain the following: learning objectives or outcomes; length of time; teaching methodology; and evaluation.

Successfully launching a culture-based learning product requires a plan of action guided by a model, framework, or guidelines. This framework should include a plan for developing the product, managing the product, analyzing the product and process, organizing the team, assessing the process and product, conducting training, and meeting the needs of the learner.

These guidelines should provide a more human-centered plan for product development and design. A focus on the needs of the learner provides a more human-centered product. Focusing on the learner minimizes biases made about the learner, incorrect designer assumptions, and explicit and implicit misrepresentations.

Innovative ideas can come from other places. The more you read, the more likely someone else’s ramblings will spark the creative bug in yourself. Researchers come up with different spins on research because they have read widely, and then more specifically, in their areas of expertise. This search for knowledge helps in developing one’s own ideas and thoughts. Like researchers, designers must search for knowledge to continue to be creative.

Meeting the needs of learners is not easy, but it is also not impossible.

Knowing the culture of the learner contributes to the overall product design and a successful launch. A variety of data can be collected about the learner. If the learners are diverse in ethnicity, race, gender, learning styles, class, demographics, history, experiences, beliefs, values, norms, interests, and ideologies, it is best that the product developed be culture-neutral and generic.

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Determining what content the learners should know upon completion of the learning product? Typically, how many hours and days should the learners...
engage the product to acquire the learning objectives? Will the content be delivered by a trainer who implements group discussions, lectures, and activities? Will the content be delivered by a software through which more teaching methodologies and strategies might be implemented? Last, determine how the outcomes will be measured?

Providing multiple pathways to learning outcomes means that the product provides more than one way to acquire the knowledge and information. These pathways are each different, but the outcome is the same. The idea here is that people think differently; it behooves designers to accommodate for the diversity of learning styles in product development.

Field testing a product might seem like standard operating procedure; however, it is often pushed to a later stage in product development. Field tests or pilot studies can provide valuable information throughout development and before the launch. As money and time permits, conducting field tests can move a product from unacceptable to acceptable.

Diversifying the media format means providing multiple ways of accessing the content. This could suggest providing print, web-based, or software access to the same information. A variety of media formats best meets the needs of learners who learn through multiple modalities. Further, it can help reinforce content delivered through one medium.

An examination of the environmental culture means workplace culture, school culture, or popular culture. An examination of the individual or group culture means ethnic cultures such as Native American, Chinese, or Korean. In terms of the learner, identify and examine the workplace culture and how it may influence the what, when, where, and how for the learner. If there is an individual or group culture present, determine the what, when, where, and how these may influence the learner. For example, should employees take training online or in a classroom?

Culture-based content is specific to the needs of the learners. Given the information acquired about the learners, how is the content more generic or specialized to the learners? The content of the product must meet the needs of learners as they are considered the core of the design process. Culture-based content provides for the needs of learners in both anthropological and psychological ways. This means that the learner’s ways of being and seeing the world, as well as psychological ways of being and seeing the world, are addressed in the design of the product. Given this, the needs of the learner are met on multiple levels.

Diversifying assessments is not limited to the plan of instruction, but should be considered as a major part of the design process. In particular, if learners are not successful on assessments then the design of the product is flawed—not the learner. Flawed assessments should be re-evaluated and replaced. Providing multiple assessments allows for a diversity of learning styles. It also allows learners to reinforce content through multiple forms of assessment.

The assumption that everything has been covered is a false one. Search for questions that have not been asked and answered. A thorough review of those things made explicit and those things that are implicit in designs aids in minimizing bias and offensive items.

Results

Now the product is ready to launch. A more human-centered approach has been considered and implemented. There is improved learning, organizational performance, and performance measures. Culture has been considered. And most importantly, guidelines assisted in creating a launchable product.

Edgar is pleased.

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Resources:
