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The eLearning Guild's  
**LEARNING SOLUTIONS** SM

*Practical Applications of Technology for Learning* e-Magazine

**THIS WEEK: Design Strategies**

## Making It Matter to the Learner: e-Motional e-Learning

**By Clark N. Quinn**

**E**motion is hot. Business is exploring Emotional Intelligence in workplace effectiveness, Emotional Design in product and services, and we're selling experiences now instead of just services. Besides flavor-of-the-month, is there any "there" there (to borrow a phrase from the late author Gertrude Stein)? More particularly, are there any implications for e-Learning?

The short answer is that factoring emotion into your e-Learning is going to take it to the next level, where it *really* works. When we help learners emotionally, *viscerally*, understand why this coming experience is important to them, and maintain that interest through the learning experience, the outcomes are superior. If people care, they learn better. Period.

John Kotter, an expert on leadership at the Harvard Business School and a premier voice on how the best organizations actually "do" change, points out that, "Behavior change happens mostly by speaking to people's feelings ... in highly successful change efforts, people find ways to help others see the problems or solutions in ways that influence emotions, not just thought."

If we care about our learners and about the learning, we need to know the ways to address emotion in learning. What is the evidence?

*Why is it so difficult to engage learners in the learning experience? Perhaps our designs are missing key ingredients that could make learners care about the experience. This week's article reviews what we know about the non-cognitive elements of learning, and suggests how you can hook the learner, relieve anxieties as you set expectations about content, and design emotionally engaging experiences!*

A publication of



## Understanding the importance of emotion in learning

Daniel Goleman, the author of *Emotional Intelligence*, argues that EQ (Emotional Intelligence) is more important than IQ. (See Sidebar 1 on page 7 for bibliographic details on the books cited in this article.) Your “EQ” – self-awareness, altruism, personal motivation, empathy, and the ability to love and be loved – contributes as much or more to success than raw intelligence. He’s not alone in looking at a richer picture of intelligence, and we want to similarly look at a richer picture of learning.

In the same way, the emotional component of the relationship with customers, the “customer experience,” has become identified as a critical business differentiator. People care not only about price or features, but the overall relationship including the shopping and purchasing experience as well as subsequent customer service. All of the components create an impression that contributes to repeat sales and recommendations. Consequently, your new job title is User Experience Designer! We, too, want to think not just about the learning, but about the learning experience.

Going further, James Gilmore, co-author of *The*

*Experience Economy: Work Is Theatre & Every Business a Stage*, has turned the old “agriculture-to-industry-to-information” economy transition on its ear, and has remapped it onto a “product-to-services-to-experience” transition instead. The argument is that we have transitioned from a services economy to an experience economy where the emotional component of sensation is a critical factor, and individuals will discern and prefer experiences over undifferentiated services. Examples include theme parks, restaurants, and travel. There’s something there, but what does it mean for e-Learning?

Donald Norman, author of seminal books on design including *Design of Everyday Things*, and *Things That Make Us Smart*, discusses the emotional component of design in *Emotional Design: Why We Love (or Hate) Everyday Things*. After having argued for design to match the way people actually think, he’s now exploring the affective components in design as well. So we see a growing recognition of the importance of the emotional, the affective, components in much of our lives. What are the implications for us? Has anyone talked about this in regard to e-Learning?

John Keller has, at least where it concerns in-

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structional design as a whole. He developed the ARCS (Attention, Relevance, Confidence, Satisfaction) model as a framework to identify the important components to success. He suggests that those four components are important additions to instructional design: gaining the learner's Attention, assuring that what they study has Relevance, allowing them to proceed with Confidence, and having the outcome provide Satisfaction. While his work is decades old now, you wouldn't think it had been very influential if you had to judge from much of the e-Learning that's out there.

Michael Allen has specifically addressed the issue for e-Learning in his *Guide to e-Learning*, recommending ways in which to keep e-Learning from being boring. He recognizes that e-Learning is different than face-to-face instruction, lacking a trainer to address the emotional component, and he provides some very sensible advice on how to keep e-Learning relevant.

This is all well and good, but what are we really talking about? Is it just a matter of adding bells and whistles to keep e-Learning interesting, or is there something deeper and more fundamental?

### What is the value of emotion in e-Learning?

One of the possible implications is that we need to make all e-Learning more fun, more game-like. There's a wave of interest in games, exemplified by numerous authors, including semiotician James Gee (*What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy*), and industry pundits Marc Prensky (*Digital Game-Based Learning*) and Clark Aldrich (*Simulations and the Future of Learning and Learning By Doing*), making strong calls for the use of games in education. Is that all we need?

As a long-standing proponent of games for learning (from creating *FaceMaker* in 1981 to my own book *Engaging Learning: Designing e-Learning Simulation Games*, on how to systematically design them), I believe strongly in the value of such an approach, but that's not all I'm talking about. By the way, I want to be clear that I'm not talking about glorified flash card games such as quiz show templates, but instead *scenarios*, simulations with an initial state and a goal state wrapped in a story, and tuned until the experience has the aesthetic of a game (for the reasons I'll discuss later in this article). While such games are a valuable form of practice, this is only one component of an overall learning experience, and I want to talk about the bigger picture.

I want to argue that the non-cognitive components of learning are important (which may not be a stretch) and also to suggest that there are some systematic things we can, and should, be doing – even when we're not talking games. These things, by the way, are missing in our current e-Learning.

In a comprehensive review of elements that contribute to learning (for a research project I led developing an intelligently adaptive learning system), we identified 31 different factors on which learners could differ (my team included a senior cognitive scientist and a *psychometrician*, someone who measures psychological dimensions), in three categories. Cognitive science has recognized that it's not just about pure reasoning, and distinguishes the major elements of individual differences as cognitive, conative, and affective factors:

- Cognitive: working memory, inductive and deductive reasoning, abilities
- Conative: motivation, anxiety, etc.
- Affective: e.g. learning styles or personality traits such as independent and social learning, perceptual preference (e.g. visual, auditory), etc.

What struck me was that instructional design today is essentially completely focused on the cognitive. We are now beginning to talk about supporting learning styles (on the basis of very questionable models), but we do not systematically engage motivation, address anxiety, or really inspire learning.

The emotional component in learning is especially important in *e-Learning*. As suggested earlier, when we have a good face-to-face situation, a trainer handles the emotional component in the learning experience. Of course, social learning almost inherently invokes an emotional component, hopefully positive. In e-Learning, certainly asynchronous independent e-Learning, we need to compensate for that lack of touch. And we can.

Let me set aside, right now, the individual responsibility for maintaining emotional involvement in learning. Yes, the self-directed learner manages expectations, sets reasonable goals, monitors progress, and maintains commitment. And it has been a reliable phenomenon in online learning that the self-directed learners succeed. However, the evidence is that we can't always expect self-directed learners (unless you also address meta-learning, e.g. Jay Cross' [www.meta-learninglab.com](http://www.meta-learninglab.com)). I believe that we, as *e-Learning* designers, must address the important components without assuming perfectly capable self-learners.

We need to get beyond just the cognitive level, and address the emotional level. We're not ignor-

*I want to argue that the non-cognitive components of learning are important (which may not be a stretch) and also to suggest that there are some systematic things we can, and should, be doing – even when we're not talking games. These things, by the way, are missing in our current e-Learning.*

ing the cognitive level, mind you, we're adding to it, to a point where people *get it* at a deeper level. To make a point, we want them to know it in their heart, feel it in their bones, and understand it in their gut. Quite simply, learners learn better when they're motivated and when they're not anxious.

And to do that, we need to account for their motivation and their anxiety. To address their motivation, we need to help our learners understand why this is important, why it matters to *them*, and maintain their interest. To accommodate possible anxiety, we want to ensure that they are prepared and have their expectations set appropriately. How do we do that?

### What should you do?

What does this mean *you* could think about doing differently? I want to suggest several steps:

- Establish the importance of this learning to the learner
- Set expectations about what's coming up
- Assess, at appropriate times, how that emotional affect could be going (particularly for tough or low spots, and to signal successes and transitions to provide closure)
- Ensure interest in the stories we use to illustrate examples and practice
- Support the emotional component as well as the cognitive component in moving beyond the learning experience.

To make that more concrete, let me make several recommendations.

First, we need to hook their attention or else nothing will stick. One approach is an introduction (*before* presenting objectives) that demonstrates the consequences of *not* having the skills to be discussed (skill, not knowledge). Cognitive science makes it clear that just telling people things leads to inert knowledge, so we need to focus on new abilities. To put it another way, don't just *demonstrate*, rather, *exaggerate* the consequences of not having the knowledge.

For instance, Michael Allen created a video to address a learning need for flight attendants to perform their safety checklist. This video beautifully exaggerates the consequences of not knowing (or following) the procedure. Starting like a disaster movie, with dramatic music and sharp visual cutting, the video presents a plane in distress, making an emergency landing on water, and then zooms in to an empty raft inflator. After that, learners are, you can be sure, ready to hear the message about performing the safety checklist. As an alternative, I've also used cartoons to exaggerate consequences humorously.

And this doesn't mean a presentation of a bunch of statistics or a "talking to" by some official personage *unless* this person can do what I've suggested (that is, really inspire the viewers to totally accept the importance of learning this skill or knowledge). Exhortation has been an easy approach in the past, appealing to the personage as well, but it's overused. Ensure that your spokesperson can really bring home the message about why this experience is important.

Harvey Feldstein, a consultant from Australia (though apparently he enjoyed a successful career in the US first), recently told me about the time he was asked to align used-car sales teams with a more sympathetic selling process emphasizing meeting the customer's real needs (not just pushing another car). This moderately challenging (ahem) task was even more daunting given that the dealerships weren't going to change the reward structure for commission. He had quite a bit of success, however, with a video that showed a customer's emotional reaction to the experience of shopping for a car, hammering home how dehumanizing and disrespectful it was. He opened up the learners by engaging their emotional responses before addressing the necessary learning.

By the way, you can similarly emphasize the positive aspects of having the knowledge, so that learners can see the benefits of having the experience, rather than negatively emphasizing the consequences of not having the knowledge (though I recall some cynic saying that the three great motivators are fear, greed, and sloth). The point is to achieve wry recognition of the necessity of the upcoming e-Learning experience.

Once we've got the learners hooked, we can tell them what they are going to achieve. However, we tend to do even that without acknowledging the learners' emotional perspective. We typically present learners with a list of objectives at the start, yet we do a bad job of presenting those objectives in terms that make the learners understand that this is information they need, and that make the learners eager to achieve the outcome.

At the e-Learning Guild Instructional Design conference in 2005, Will Thalheimer (another e-Learning consultant) differentiated between the objectives designers use, and the objectives we present to our learners. He indicated that, for designers, the objectives identify the learning outcomes in terms of metrics and behaviors. However, learners care about what they'll be able to do differently, expressed in ways they understand.

It's more about marketing than about education,

really (though I maintain that good marketing is in fact educating the customer). Compare, for example: "Develop and deliver an intervention plan to address neurotic behavior, the plan to consist of both the steps to be taken and the associated timeline, in accordance with departmental regulations," versus: "Be able to develop a timely intervention plan to help your patients." Which do *you* think an audience of psychiatric nurses might resonate with?

Once we've hooked the emotional involvement, we can't risk losing it. We need to set expectations about what's coming: what'll be hard, what'll be easy, what'll be fun, and what they'll be able to do that they can't do now. Let your learners know that there'll be a bit of conceptual presentation, some examples pulled right from the field, some practice that's a bit tough but really valuable, and finally a wrap-up that'll help them keep this knowledge ready-to-hand. We're alleviating anxiety while maintaining motivation.

We need to maintain those expectations, too, as the learner should not be expected to remember it all. At times where they've just completed a tough slog through some conceptual material, acknowledge, or even celebrate it. Let them know they're done with examples, and now they're going to get a chance to practice themselves. Let them know they've finished the practice (and congratulations too!), and are now segueing out.

By the way, make sure those examples and practice are compelling. Making the practice into a game (see the earlier definition) is one option, of course, but regardless, your examples should be good stories, well-told, and your practice should similarly be contextualized and exaggerated for your audience, using settings that emphasize why this knowledge is important. Make the examples ones the learners understand and care about. Highlight the challenge, the diligence or insight, and the successful outcome (or the tragic consequences).

Finally, at the end of the learning experience, we also traditionally don't do enough, and there's more we should do. In addition to providing a wrap up, and pointers for further direction (both of which we typically *do* present), we should also provide some support for keeping these skills active until they are needed. That's the cognitive side. On the emotional side, we should help learners remember the importance of applying this learning, help them muster their commitment to persistence in keeping this learning active, and enjoy their complicity in applying it when relevant.



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## Design experiences

At core, you want to design experiences, not just learning. You can't make learners learn, you can only create environments that are conducive to learning, and to increase your likelihood of success, you'll want to engage learners emotionally as well as cognitively.

There's more, but this is getting into the speculative: Don Norman's book, *Emotional Design*, explores the cognitive effects of the emotional components. With a pleasurable affect (e.g. warm and fuzzy), cognition tends to broaden and be associative. A negative affect (e.g. rough and bitter), tends to deepen cognition. Theoretically, we should start the learning experience positive, get negative when it's time to dig in, and then get positive again at the end. Which, interestingly, tends to mirror the affective experience we see in many popular media (think: novels, theatre, and film).

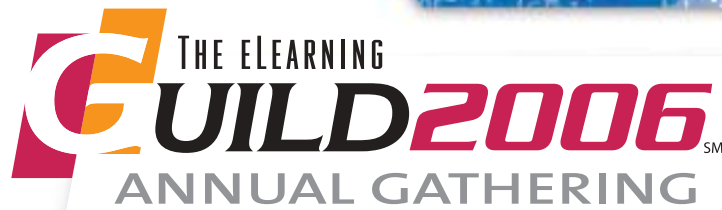
Further, James Gilmore, cited earlier, argues that the step beyond the experience economy is the "transformation" economy, where people pay for experiences that transform them. That, to me, is where we rise to the fore: creating new skills, or new attitudes, is what instructional design is all about, and to the extent we go beyond to include the emotional component and create experiences, we're the ones ready to capitalize on this new opportunity. Ready?

We don't need to go there yet. Let's start by explicitly considering, designing, and supporting the emotional components that help ensure the optimal learning outcome. We'll get engaged learners, and more effective learning. Once we get that down, reliably, and repeatably, we can do more. 

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Clark N. Quinn, Ph.D. has been innovating for business, education, government, and the not-for-profit sectors for over 25 years. Clark integrates creativity, cognitive science, and technology to deliver engaging and effective solutions to learning, knowledge, and performance needs. He has been responsible for the design of award-winning online content, educational computer games, and websites, as well as intelligent learning and performance support systems. He has served as an executive in online and e-Learning initiatives, and has an international reputation as a scholar and presenter. He currently works on behalf of clients through Quinnovation. Contact Clark by email at [clark@quinnovation.com](mailto:clark@quinnovation.com) or by



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(Editor's Note: Clark Quinn will present sessions on games, simulations and m-Learning at the e-Learning Producer Conference in Boston, April 18 through 21, 2006.)

Additional information on the topics covered in this article is also listed in the *Guild Resource Directory*.

### Sidebar 1 Bibliography

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