

Explainer 3: Learning strategies

This is Stephanie. She's watching a recording of a medical lecture, delivered by a top consultant. It updates her on some key developments in her field of practice.

She's not too impressed by the way the lecture is being delivered in a monotone drone, but she's keen to stick with it because the lecture is revealing some research findings that are highly relevant to her work.

She's sitting with a junior colleague who is complaining that it's all going right over her head but Stephanie doesn't have any such problem - she's an old hand and knows what she's talking about.

And here is Stuart. He's being taught how to operate a brand new, latest technology, fork lift truck.

Some of his mates who've been operating these things for years reckon they could work it out easily enough on their own, but Stuart's still a newbie and he needs all the help he can get.

Jason, the instructor, is very methodical. He has set some very specific objectives for the session and has demonstrated every aspect of the job really clearly. He watches while Stuart gives it a go and offers some useful feedback.

Jason's not going to finish until he's sure that Stuart's got the hang of it and isn't going to do any damage to himself or to the goods in the warehouse.

Amy is meeting with her coach, Brendan. Brendan specialises in working with executives like Amy to prepare them for interviews with the media.

He's helped Amy to clarify what skills she would like to improve in her media interviews and now they're going to give it a go in an all-too-realistic role-play.

Afterwards, Brendan will help Amy to reflect on what she did well and what still needs to be improved. He'll keep working with Amy until she's confident she can do a good job.

And finally here's Asif. He's finished a course on negotiation skills and is trying hard to put what he has learned into practice.

He has been watching some videos presented by expert negotiators and has got some important new ideas. He'll share those with his colleagues in their community of practice along with a posting that he's written himself, reflecting on a particularly

successful negotiation in which he managed to do just about everything according to the book.

His trainer, Miriam, takes an active interest and occasionally shares new books, videos and articles that she's managed to track down. Everyone is looking out for each other as they continue on their learning journey.

Stephanie, Stuart, Amy and Asif each experienced a very different strategy for learning.

In Stephanie's case this was *exposition* - the delivery of information by subject experts to their students.

For Stuart, this was *instruction*. Jason instructed Stuart in how to operate the new forklift truck, following a structured process that works really well for delivering core knowledge and routine skills.

In Amy's case, she was a participant in an exercise of *guided discovery*. Her coach, Brendan, set up activities from which Amy could gain insights and facilitated that process as best he could.

In the last case, Asif was involved in a process of *exploration*, drawing upon resources provided by his colleagues and by his trainer Miriam, who functioned as a sort of curator.

None of these strategies works for all types of learning and all types of learner. They all have their place, often in combination within a blended solution.

Fashions for learning strategies change, but your job is to select the right tool for the job based on the merits of the particular situation.