

Artifact 1: Experiential Learning Stakeholder Perspectives

A Design Thinking Approach

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Section 1: Context

Using a systems approach to design thinking situates creative problem solving within a specific context and looks for the causes of a problem instead of treating symptoms (Interaction Design Foundation, n.d.). A systems approach to design thinking could be used to advance experiential learning for learners within customized programs (noncredit, created for partner companies) at the Roux Institute. Our courses already require learners to complete hands-on learning activities that can be applied to their jobs. However, this learning does not always translate into the learner's day to day activities as managers are not typically directly involved in learning experiences. This creates a complicated, wicked problem as within a course there might be 20 learners, each with a different manager. These learners are all receiving different levels of support from their managers. Managers might not be aware of their report's new skills, how these skills apply to their daily work, how they can support and guide the use of new skills, how the larger team can benefit from these new skills or what the next learning experiences might be. In addition, each of these learners might hold different positions, work at different companies and have different levels of experience in the given topic area. A systems approach to design thinking is needed to address these many variables, to engage stakeholders and create experiential learning experiences that include managers and best serve customized program learners.

Section 2: Stakeholder Identification & Engagement

While there are many stakeholders involved in customized programs, one of the first stakeholders to engage is the Partner Contact, as they are the person that has insight into company needs and will be able to make introductions to Managers (Figure 1.0 outlines the different stakeholders and how they might be engaged). The Partnerships Team regularly meets with Partner Contacts to update them on new opportunities at the Roux Institute, to develop customized learning plans and to debrief learning experiences. These are often strong relationships and it would be fairly easy to engage in a discussion around how we can include managers in learning experience and support the continued

use of new skills. The Partner Contact might not be able or willing to share contact information for all managers, but they might be able to suggest contacting managers that they think would be particularly interested in improving the professional development experience.

Managers are the stakeholder group that we have the least experience with. A focus group would be a helpful place to start as it would allow us to collect feedback on what a successful learning experience looks like on their end and how we can better meet their needs. Short surveys during the learning experience would collect feedback on if we are meeting manager needs and what can be improved.

Faculty see Learners on a weekly basis and surveys are sent to them at the midpoint and at the completion of their courses. Weekly reflection questions show if learners are connecting what they have learned to their daily tasks and alert faculty if updates need to be made to course content. Survey questions could be used to determine if and when learners are using new skills and if they are facing any barriers.

Faculty teach and are also active practitioners in their field, they will be able to help identify how what is learned in the classroom can be applied in the workplace. Many of them also have experience mentoring or managing and will have best practices to share on how to involve managers in the learning process.

Figure 1.0 Stakeholder Engagement Plan

Stakeholder	Role Description	Engagement Plan
Partner Contact	Person that originally reaches out to the Roux Institute for a learning engagement, often a member of the learning and development team	During meetings, ask questions such as: • How many teams will be represented in this learning engagement? • Do you know who each learner reports to? • Would it be okay for us to contact any of these managers? • Are there any related communities of practice at your organization?

		• What is the performance review process? What is the cadence? • Are managers involved in professional learning plans? • How could we do a better job of involving managers in learning experiences? • Is it important to involve managers?
Manager	The person the learner reports to	During focus groups ask questions such as: • How involved are you in professional development plans? • What would make it easier for you to support reports in their learning? • What does a successful learning experience look like to you? • Are you a member of a community of practice?
Learner	The person in the customized learning program	Encourage reflection in class by asking questions such as: • How can you apply this to your current job? • What is your main takeaway? • What are you unsure of? • How frequently do you meet with your manager to discuss professional development? • Is your manager aware of the new skills you are building?
Faculty	Teach the course	During course design ask faculty for ideas on • Guiding questions managers could ask their reports • Reflection prompts managers can give their reports • Resources for managers to understand course content • How managers can support learners in using their new skills

Section 3: Community Engagement

The average customized program learner tends to be separated from the rest of the university community, they take one or two courses and then don't engage again. Part of this is because they are not given the opportunity to engage. Some additional ways in which these learners could be engaged include through:

- Invitations to on campus events

- Invitations to virtual campus events
- Inclusion in Student Interest Groups (currently only for graduate students)
- Invitations to multi-partner courses (courses open to multiple companies)
- Open house days where they can visit campus and learn more about the Roux Institute
- Networking events where they can meet other learners as well as graduate students, faculty and staff

Section 4: Stakeholder Roles

This experiential learning program cannot be enacted without the buy-in of partners, faculty and learners. If partners are not on board, we will be creating materials that will never be used and if faculty are not on board the materials will not be as effective. Learners are also important stakeholders as ultimately including their manager serves them in helping them to progress in their current positions, or to move up in their company. Figure 1.1 explores the role of stakeholders more in depth.

Figure 1.1 Stakeholder Roles

Stakeholder	Internal	External	Primary Stakeholder	Secondary Stakeholder	Notes
Partner Contact		x	x		Directly impacted by the project, regular contact with managers, learners and partnerships team.
Manager		x	x		Directly impacted by the project, this program is expected to move them from minimal (if any) contact with the learning experience to directly involved.
Learner		x	x		Directly impacted by the project, will be held accountable for using skills and best practices learned inside the classroom in their daily work.
Faculty	x		x		Directly impacted by the project, their expertise will be needed for manager support materials and courses might be requested more frequently if skill transfer is more successful.

Partnerships Team	x		x		Directly impacted by the project, manages any changes that affect customized programs.
Wider Roux Institute Community	x			x	May not be directly involved in the project, but will be affected by how the project progresses.
Wider University Community	x			x	May not be directly involved in the project, but will be affected by how the project progresses.

Note. Adapted from Donato, H. (2021, June 29).

Section 5: Obstacles & Opportunities

While there are many obstacles that may impact the creation of experiential learning experiences at the Roux Institute, none of them are unique to this type of experience. Stakeholders are already aware of them and in many cases, actively engaged in trying to develop more efficient processes.

Some obstacles are:

- Lack of databases and integrated systems: tracking learners and their programs can be very manual and time consuming
- Faculty might only teach a course once- manager support documents might need to be updated depending on faculty
- A manager might only send one learner to a course, it may be difficult to collect feedback and build rapport
- A learner might only take one course, it might be difficult to collect feedback and build rapport
- There are many people to coordinate: I don't regularly have meetings with partners, I may need to rely on my colleagues on the Partnerships Team to follow up with Partner Contacts and Managers

Opportunities related to this instance of experiential learning include collaborating with the wider university community and other campuses.

Some opportunities are:

- There is a push to grow the customized learning program- more resources will be available
- Team members are looking into integration of systems
- Engaging with the wider community, testing new ideas with a wide range of stakeholders
- Expanding programs to other NU campuses, and building upon the knowledge of colleagues

Section 6: Collecting Feedback

It will be necessary to create stakeholder specific means of collecting regular feedback on how the experiential learning experience is progressing, as each stakeholder will have a different experience with the program. One way to engage all stakeholders is to create a separate open feedback forum for each group. Within these forums the stakeholders can share their feedback in real time and we will be able to more quickly identify pain points and make any needed adjustments. Figure 1.2 gives additional details on the feedback collection plan for this experience.

Figure 1.2 Stakeholder Feedback Collection

Stakeholder	Role Description	Feedback Collection
Partner Contact	Person that originally reaches out to the Roux for a learning engagement, often a member of the learning + development team	• Open feedback forum • Develop a quarterly partner satisfaction survey to better gauge: ○ If programs are meeting partner needs ○ If they see a return on their investment ○ If there is evidence of learners using new skills ○ How we can better support them
Manager	The person the learner reports to	• Open feedback forum • Develop mid-point and end of program manager satisfaction surveys to better gauge: ○ If programs are meeting manager needs ○ If they see a return on their investment ○ If there is evidence of learners using new skills ○ How we can better support them
Learner	The person in the customized learning program	• Open feedback forum • Mid- program and end of program surveys to determine: ○ If programs are meeting learner needs ○ What obstacles (if any) they're facing

		○ If and how they have used their new skills ○ How their manager is supporting them ○ How we can better support them
Faculty	Teach the course	● Open feedback forum ● Mid and end of program debriefs: ○ What they think is and is not working ○ Thoughts on next steps for learners and managers
Partnerships Team	At the Roux Institute, manages the partner relationship	● Regular status updates and check- in meetings ● Formal debriefs at the midpoint and end of the experience

Section 7: Capturing Diverse Perspectives

Engaging stakeholders and collecting their feedback in a wide range of manners (see figures 1.0 and 1.2) gives multiple opportunities for information to be shared, in the way that is most comfortable for the stakeholder. Collecting information from different stakeholders also helps ensure diversity of information. All of these stakeholders will have different perspectives on what makes an experiential experience that folds managers into the program successful. As the population of stakeholders grows and diversifies it will be important to revisit learner, manager, and partner needs in order to make sure programs are still serving stakeholders. Existing resources on adult learner engagement and leading performance reviews can be used to fill in information gaps.

Section 8: Conclusion

A systems approach to design thinking is the creative problem-solving approach needed to determine what changes should be made to programs at the Roux Institute in order to include managers in experiential learning experiences. This approach is desirable as it allows for the many variables that are associated with customized learning experiences. Design thinking makes it possible to engage many different stakeholders and to start with their interests at the forefront of the design process.

References

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