

I see too much emphasis on easy learning...difficult learning really is worth the effort!

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After 34 years in the helping people to learn business I still love the role of nudging people to develop potential and to achieve more, quicker than if left to themselves.

I want to share a very powerful insight, that took me years to realise, and that guides me directly in all my current work, whether with groups or individuals.

Basically, we who help others to learn, need to realise that easy learning however accessible and useful, is far less valuable than difficult learning.

Easy learning typically requires minimal effort to master and is very often made clearly evident without the need for a lot of time or energy. Easy learning usually demands relatively low levels of facilitation skills, or maybe requires no help at all.

Difficult learning is very different. Difficult learning requires effort many are not prepared to invest; usually takes more time than most are prepared to wait, and needs either self-direction few have the capability to use, or external facilitation few developers have the competence and skills with which to assist.

The fruits of difficult learning often take a lot of time to show, and require a resilience I rarely see, as the most difficult learning is not gained without setback, exposure, and even the real risk of complete failure.

Thus difficult learning can be a really tough undertaking, now here's the rub, it can also be the route to very seriously increased capability, long term embedded personal competence, and very significantly valuable organisation payback.

It's hardly surprising that easy learning is so much more often seen. Easy learning is more likely to suit groups of people on seemingly cost-effective events being told the same thing, although they all have unique and different needs, motivations, circumstances and levels of interest.

Easy learning can be naturally more appealing to those that lead or facilitate, as the exposure to risk of failure is low, as is of course the value of the outcomes if any.

Difficult learning may mean commercially damaging outcomes for the external facilitator, with 'will I ever work there again?' consequences. The consequences of failure to achieve difficult learning can be more harmful to a shortened career of the internal developer.

Difficult learning requires a sponsoring organisation or individual to have clarity about the obstacles ahead, to be realistic about the investment of time and very often money, and of the effort needed to achieve unusually impressive outcomes.

As a result...too little time spent on helping individuals make seriously useful, high value contributions to their own and their organisations' capability to do challenging things better, and be more prepared for a future that is never any easier than the testing past.

My realisation of the differing nature of easy and difficult learning has led me to drop all of my work on the one and concentrate fully on the latter.

For some time I have focused only on the hard graft of working with individuals grappling with complicated, energy consuming, truly significant issues.

I thoroughly enjoy working intensively with very capable, motivated people who value my help in achieving high value, tough outcomes and who are prepared put in a lot of effort to overcome bigger obstacles than most ever face.

Conversely, I avoid telling bored, sneakily texting, 'rather be anywhere else than here' rows of people stuff they feel they already know.

Fair enough, as an independent developer for the past 23 years I can more easily choose the work I take on.

I have come to realise that to be a meaningful helper to those engaged in difficult learning, I must restrict myself to as a small a number as it takes to genuinely understand the ever changing dynamic of their specific challenges.

To be honest, I have a problem with those who are coaching what I consider far too many people at one time – putting commercial gain over value of support.

So, I invite you to consider the nature of your own work, and to weigh up the clear pros and cons of the most appropriate easy/difficult learning mix.

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