Executive Interview

2021

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Senior Learning Architect
DelphianLogic Technologies

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DelphianLogic Technologies is the preferred learning solutions provider to Fortune 500 companies and global nongovernmental organizations. From custom learning content solutions to cutting-edge learning technology offerings, from being thought leaders who drive and define learning design trends to a champion of sustainable learning ecosystems, over the last decade DelphianLogic has grown to become an organization that leads the charge in all things learning.

About DelphianLogic Technologies

In 2020, DelphianLogic launched the DL 2.0 movement by rolling out a suite of new technology, design and business offerings to take their clients and partners into a new decade of learning transformation. These offerings include the first-of-its-kind Learning Content Lifecycle Management Solution, ContentCentral; the cutting-edge enterprise learning content delivery platform, LearningCentral; the Learning Business Enablement Solution, SpringPad; and, of course, DelphianLogic's very own human-centered learning design process, code-named Project Empathy.

Together, the offerings cover all 360 degrees of the learning industry horizon and cement DelphianLogic's position as a perennial change agent in the learning industry.

About Anjali Kolhatkar

Anjali Kolhatkar is a senior learning architect at DelphianLogic Technologies. With 14 years of cumulative experience in the learning industry as a learning consultant and instructional designer to Fortune 500 clients from around the world, Anjali now leads change and innovation in DelphianLogic's new-age learning solutions. A champion of the emerging practice of empathetic learning design, Anjali is a pioneer of DelphianLogic's proprietary human-centered design approach, having applied and perfected it over her interactions with DelphianLogic's clients.

About Rachel Cooke

Rachel Cooke is Brandon Hall Group's Chief Operating Officer and Principal HCM Analyst. She is responsible for business operations, including client and member advisory services, marketing design, annual awards programs, conferences and the company's project management functions. She also leads Advancing Women in the Workplace and Diversity and Inclusion initiatives, research and events. Rachel worked in the HCM research industry for 15 years and held several key management and executive positions within the Talent and Learning Research, and Performance Improvement industries.

RACHEL

I would love for you to share a little bit about your background and your experience, and your expertise.

RACHEL

Let's talk a little bit about instructional design. Most importantly, when you're creating or designing a program, why is the audience so important?

ANJALI

I started my career about 20 years ago initially. I started off as an educator and a clinical psychologist. I worked in the field for over 12 years before I moved into the corporate training field and now it's been more than 14 years that I've been working in the corporate sector. In this field, my experience spans across instruction, design, curriculum development, learning consulting. I've also been mentoring junior members of the team. Continuous learning is one of my key focus areas as well.

And in this span of about 14 years, I've worked on different projects, hundreds of projects with Fortune 500 companies, government, nongovernmental organizations, even social organizations; designed eLearning modules, instructor-led training programs, virtual training programs, videos, large-scale, complex design projects. It's been a good journey designing good learning for the cortex. I'm very keen on implementing this process across projects, events and logic, not only to enhance our learner experience but also to help them better their performance. This has been my key focus area of late at DelphianLogic and the company has been very supportive of our initiatives.

ANJALI

To design any effective and relevant training program, it's very critical that we know who our learners are going to be, because I believe they determine how we should present information and how much. They influence our decisions about content, about learning objectives, about learning strategies that need to be used. They help us to even identify and understand the gap and what the training should address.

If you look at our corporate learners of today, they're not limited to any one age group. We have Generation Y and Generation Z learners who have actually grown up with the Internet, grown up with technology, use multiple devices, and even a sizable percentage of Generation X learners have adopted technology and they have evolved as well. Our learners of today are modern learners who present distinct characteristics that we need to consider when we design programs.

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Most of these learners are extremely inquisitive. They usually have a low attention span, they process information very rapidly, they love to embrace technology. Really, it's like a love affair with their mobile devices. Most of them want bite-size information; they're very output-focused. They want just-in-time information. They're exposed to so many options of presentation and media, and they are actually becoming very virtual as well. We have to take these aspects of our learners into account when we design effective training programs because they want programs that really work for them. Otherwise, whatever we design, it's going to stick out like a sore thumb. I believe that if we have to design an effective and relevant training program, our audience, our learners, have to be in the center of the design.

RACHEL

Let's talk a little bit about the learner, and how do you balance the business objectives? Are needs to the learning content that you create with this within this new frame?

ANJALI

This is a good question. When our clients approach us with the requirement, there's the broad learning goals. They tell us why they need to train their employees; it's their perspective. At that initial phase, there is no research on data available on the real needs of our end-users. Very often, we see that there is a considerable gap between what business thinks their employees need versus what the employees actually want. On projects where time is not a constraint for us, and where there is room for us to be consultative, we usually hold discussions with our clients, stakeholders, and if possible, with end-users as well, in order to determine the learning needs. This helps us to use better design practices and come up with more learner-centric and user-friendly designs. This a fact of the industry; there's always a trade-off and more often than not, the gap remains. I think this is where it is very useful to take a human-centered design approach. It's like an overarching approach that we can apply and it has a great value in addressing this gap.

RACHEL

Can you describe what that approach is, and how you are using it in DelphianLogic; the elements of the human-centered model and bridging that with Design Thinking?

ANJALI

Over the years as instructional designers, we've all used different models and methods to help us in our design process. However, what we realize is that these approaches don't really allow for iterations and they are nonlinear.

Flaws or errors in design, they just cannot be corrected, or even offer insights or improvements.

We cannot actually add them to better resolution; just going back to our drawing board. That's where I believe the giant practices and Design Thinking approach becomes inspiring to work with, to create designs that really work very well for the end-users. What we've done at DelphianLogic is customize an approach by combining Design Thinking and Agile approaches. What we do is, we apply Design Thinking stages toward the solution design phase, and giant practices toward the developing phase. We have a three-phase process. In the solution design phase, we involve client stakeholders, a design team or development teams. We brainstorm to define the problems and we arrive at the best possible solution. Then you move on to a prototype phase, where we actually identify a minimum viable product, which can be prototyped and can be delivered to the client in a two- to three-week cycle. And then we develop and deliver different modules in short iterate of sprints and short iterative cycles.

RACHEL

Could you share an example of instructional design with us, please?

ANJALI

Recently, a global law client and a global organization was looking as part of their change-management program to implement, coincidentally, Design Thinking, as well as a giant practices. It was a companywide project, and they wanted to train different teams and different departments in implementing Design Thinking and the giant practices. How we set off is in our solution design phase completely focused on the Design Thinking approach, which involves a couple of stages like empathy, ideation, defining a problem statement; for example, prototyping and then trying out the solution. We went through all these phases within our solution design phases within the broader solution design phase. We started off with empathy. What we did in this phase, we gathered a lot of information about our end-users. In the typical approaches that we follow, we do an audience analysis.

The difference over here is we interact directly with the end-users. In typical traditional approaches, we interact with our stakeholders to understand our audiences.

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But here, we directly interacted with the end-users. We actually had a stakeholder. We interviewed these employees, these people, and gathered a lot of information about what the rules are. Why do they need the training? What was the attitude toward the subject? Are they interested in learning? What motivates them to learn? Do they have any prior knowledge about the subject matter? Do they have any skill sets? What is the preferred mode of learning? What technology they are comfortable with, how much time they're willing to invest in acquiring knowledge? What would they expect if they were to take a learning program, and so on? After gathering all this information, we came up with problem statements and we developed learner profiles, learning personas. We developed about seven learner personas and for each learner persona, we documented all the learning needs. We did this, of course, in collaboration with the client. This process allows us to interact with our stakeholders early on in the process and often in the process. Your own design teams, your development teams; members from all teams interact continuously throughout the process, which is a very good thing. We work really collaboratively.

Q RACHEL

Did you face challenges along the way? It sounds like it's very robust, with a lot of moving parts.

A ANJALI

Yes, there were challenges all along the way. One of the biggest challenges we faced on the project was time constraints. The client when they agreed to giving us a project, working with DelphianLogic, it was a 10-week commitment. However, at that time, the client hadn't even realized that the initial empathy phase would last for about a month. Forty interviews were scheduled. Looking into everybody's calendars, getting the time was extremely difficult, so that phase went on for a long time. But, fortunately for us, the client stakeholder, being really interested in human-centered design, was a giant coach. He was extremely cooperative and he understood the importance of spending that much time in the empathy phase to create a very good solution. He had that kind of confidence and faith, and understood the importance of time we spent on indexes as well. That really worked out for us, fortunately; time definitely was a constraint.

Q RACHEL

We see that often in any learning program or any project, especially where technology is going to be the original timeframe and then if they allowed the buffer. Would you say that you originally thought or had in mind from the stakeholder was about eight weeks? How much additional time did it?

A ANJALI

It was the interviewees; some of them were very guarded. They were not very open about their attitudes and feelings about the subject matter. So, we did not ask that the interviews progress. I also had to keep refining; my questions would be freezing them to actually get them to express their thoughts and needs, and feelings about the subject, because it's all about the end-users. Eventually, it is a design that we are creating for them. That was also a little challenging for us; we had to make sure that we are asking the right questions and rephrasing them to elicit those kinds of responses. That'll help us create better designs.

Q RACHEL

I think even if you had used a traditional approach, it would still exceed the expected timeframe. I think it's much better to have a better end result than to have something that's needs the actual timeframe, but not really the kind of goals in mind. How did you measure success?

A ANJALI

I believe our first measure of success was that a client who has worked with us for over a decade in a certain way, had this confidence to let us change the way we approached the design of this project. We really appreciated these little wins, like several stakeholders just not coming onboard and agreeing to us going ahead with this design process, but also being very enthusiastic about participating and contributing. If you really look at it in the end, one of the most tangible measures of success was in the numbers; one of the components of the prototype that was rolled out as part of the pilot, it was a role-based participatory workshop. It was designed to equip our participants with the required skills to conduct effective and result-oriented discussions with team members, and thereby manage teams effectively.

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This was a participatory workshop with an opt-in program for Scrum Masters for product owners or even delivery team members. The opt-in rate for this program has consistently remained 5-9% higher than the adoption rates for other opt-in programs in that organization. This was very encouraging and we're also encouraged by the fact that this rate has not dropped, even after more than four months of the program having been rolled out. Besides this, the overall learner satisfaction rate was also significantly higher than the organization average satisfaction index for any such kind of project management training programs. Overall, we were also very happy and stakeholders were also very happy. In fact, they were considering to rolling out the other practical activities as part of the learning paths that we created, based on this as a pilot.

ANJALI

Yes. When we were talking with our stakeholder, what feedback we got from a couple of them when we're talking to our main clients stakeholder was that people are actually interacting with each other. And there is a lot of peer interaction, where people get together, have discussions and to share their own ideas and experiences, and what they have been doing and how things are working for them when they've been applying the approaches. There is a lot of activity; all sorts of things are changing up, and the attitude toward the subject matter is also eventually changing. But, of course, this is going to take time. It's not something which will happen immediately in a few months or six months.

RACHEL

I see you measured the engagement and the opt-in of the adoption of the program. Did you also see other behavior changes?

RACHEL

What's new or what are some of your critical initiatives?

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ANJALI

As an organization, DelphianLogic is really looking to implement human-centered design processes on several projects in the coming years. However, our taking this design transformation process ahead is quite challenging. It's mainly because of a lack of opportunities that we have on projects because several of our clients' requirements have critical time-to-market imperatives and we really don't want to do this in a slap-dash manner. What we've decided is to perfect this initiative internally before the rollout onto other projects. For example, DelphianLogic the organization is currently going through a transformation. We are growing, restructuring and streamlining our processes. There's a lot of change management happening. We'll be considering this as our sandbox. This is where we are trying out. We're improving. We are perfecting our human-centered design processes. This is also one of our key focuses for 2022. We are trying to work it out within the organization internally before we can now start rolling it out to projects as well.

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