As Chief Learning Officers partner more closely with business units, they are seeking to directly enhance on-the-job performance of the executives participating in development programmes.

Learning and development professionals spend hours discussing what is the right content to include in any executive programme. Undoubtedly, the question is important; there is limited time spent in a programme, many options for content, and the choices are critical to the comprehension success the executives acquire. To illustrate, what does the marketing team need to be customer focused? How should new country managers work well with MBA students who are developing their understanding of business context.

But what about executives? Executives already possess essential knowledge and intimately understand the business context including how the competences the executives acquire. To illustrate: many options for content, and the choices are critical to the performance-oriented objectives of the participants. Thus the design of a learning journey that addresses the performance-oriented objectives of the participants is significantly different to a design that focuses solely on the content, through customisation of content and design.

Finally, executives learn best when their executive journey heightens self-awareness and personal reflection. Structured, periodic feedback from peers, and observations from the facilitator-coaches, provide insight and help executives track their effectiveness as leaders and team members. A multi-step development journey that emphasizes experiential application, reflection and repetition. Such programme design maximizes the opportunity for executives to ask questions of one another and benefit from the on-call support of skilled facilitator-coaches. The design also encourages building on the insights from one module with the learning from the next, building up a more robust understanding of the complexities, trade-offs and tensions that exist.

This is the entirety of the learning journey that addresses the performance improvement objectives of the participants is significantly different to a design that focuses solely on the content. It needs to directly address motivation, context, experiential application, self-awareness and personal development.

SMU Executive Development enables executives to be “Future Ready–Now”, equipping them with the knowledge, skills and confidence that managers and leaders operating in Asia and globally require today and will be increasingly relevant tomorrow.

Closely related to motivation is the preference for experiential learning. We use the doctrine “Hear, See, Do – Debrief” to define an integrated experience. Herein lies an opportunity to improve performance-based return on the investment in executive training. To illustrate, an experiential learning module might be designed around a strategically important issue, giving contextual relevance and insightful outputs that the business can enact.

Third, we need to pace the rate of development, typically a journey of time-efficient “bite-sized” modules in-person or virtually, with opportunities between modules for application, reflection and repetition. Such programme design maximizes the opportunity for executives to ask questions of one another and benefit from the on-call support of skilled facilitator-coaches. The design also encourages building on the insights from one module with the learning from the next, building up a more robust understanding of the complexities, trade-offs and tensions that exist.

To that end, an SMU Executive Development learning journey employs four principles that reflect the needs of executive learners.

First, and perhaps most importantly, executive programmes need to address motivation at the outset. Rushing headfirst into content discussions without the analysis and decision-making via case study may work well with undergraduates, and work well with MBA students who are developing their understanding of business context. But what about executives? Executives already possess essential knowledge and intimately understand the business context.

Second, we need to address the breadth of content with deep customisation of content and design. Good programmes need to foster motivation by emphasising the programme’s relevance to their context, through customisation of content and design.

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Building Executive Performance

SMU’s Steve Wyatt explains how SMU supports Executive Development

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Be empowered to make a difference. Be Future Ready–Now.