

td
at work

TIPS, TOOLS & INTELLIGENCE
FOR DEVELOPING TALENT

MARCH 2025
ISSUE 2503

Models to Map the Learner's Journey

Iuliia Algasova



atd

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

MODELS TO MAP THE LEARNER'S JOURNEY

How Mapping Works.....	2
Components	3
Types of Learning Maps	4
The Building Process	5
Change Management Use Case	9
Conclusion	10
References & Additional Reading	11
Tools & Resources	
Worksheet: Learner Journey Map.....	12
Template: Learner Journey Map	15

Need a trainer's lifeline? Visit td.org/TDatWork.

Printed in the United States of America.

For help or inquiries about your subscription, please contact Customer Care at 800.628.2783/703.683.8100 (international).

TD at Work (ISSN 2373-5570, Electronic ISSN 2373-5589, ISBN 978-1-960231-84-0, eISBN 978-1-960231-85-7) is published monthly by the Association for Talent Development, 1640 King Street, Alexandria, VA 22314. *TD at Work* is available for subscription in print or digitally. ATD national members receive a digital subscription to *TD at Work*, plus archive access, as part of their membership dues. The subscription rate for the Monthly All-Access (12 print and digital issues, plus archive access) is \$129 (ATD national members) and \$179 (national nonmembers). The monthly digital subscription rate for 12 issues is \$109 (nonmembers). Periodicals postage paid at Alexandria, Virginia, and additional entries. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *TD at Work*, 1640 King Street, Alexandria, VA 22314. Claims for replacement of subscription issues not received must be made within three months of the issue date. Copyright © March 2025 *TD at Work* and ATD. All rights reserved. No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means—graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, or information storage and retrieval systems—without the express written permission of the publisher. For permission requests, please go to copyright.com, or contact Copyright Clearance Center (CCC), 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923 (telephone: 978.750.8500, fax: 978.646.8600). ATD Press grants permission for the material on pages 12–15 to be reproduced for personal use.

AUTHOR

Iuliia Algasova

Iuliia Algasova is the head of an e-learning department at EPAM Systems. Algasova has eight years of experience working in instructional design and L&D. She is one of the Learning Guild's 2023 Thirty Under 30 leaders. Algasova has spoken and shared insights at major industry events such as Learning 2023, HR Tech Solutions 2024, Stanford's InnovateEd, and DevLearn 2024.

Content Manager, Instructional Design

Bianca Woods

Editor, *TD at Work*

Patty Gaul

Managing Editor

Rachel Pelovitz

Senior Graphic Designer

Shirley E.M. Raybuck

When designing a learning solution—whether it's a course, training session, or academic program—L&D professionals need to focus on many things at once. Consider, just for a start, the learners and their pain points, gaps, and preferences; the objectives, ranging from program level to course level to task level; content and formats; trainers, tools, and technology; and communication plans. Even when the process of designing and developing learning solutions is smooth, components still fall through the cracks.

You can include all aspects by mapping out the learner's journey and viewing the big picture. That process establishes connections, predicts learner reactions, anticipates challenges, and reveals missing pieces. Such maps not only enable L&D practitioners to visualize a learner's journey but also to create a learning strategy, plan a skill adoption, change a delivery model, and revamp a department. They bring the design to life.

In this issue of *TD at Work*, I will:

- Provide an overview of learner journey maps.
- Showcase examples of mapping techniques.
- Describe key components.
- Explain how to improve learning design.
- Detail a change management use case.

How Mapping Works

Visualizing concepts is a practice as ancient as humanity itself. From the earliest cave drawings to modern digital visualizations, humans have used images to explain phenomena. Map creation is one of the most widespread and universally understood visualization techniques.

At its core, a map's purpose is to help orient and guide. Historically, maps identified locations of vital resources, outlined geopolitical boundaries, or navigated transportation systems. Whether to avoid danger or locate necessities such as food and water, humans used maps to provide a practical understanding of their surroundings. The archetypal need to plot a route to that which a person seeks is why maps represent any journey, real or metaphorical.

There's no limit to what L&D staff can put on a map. For example, you can plan how learners will graduate from novice to intermediate proficiency, demonstrate how an individual lesson starts and ends, predict how learners will feel and act at each stage, or imagine how participants will manage work and studying at the same time.

The process is simple. First, you need a place to put your map, such as a sheet of paper or a digital whiteboard. Next, define what kind of journey you are visualizing. Establish a starting point (point A) and a desired destination (point B). Then, determine the critical steps to progress from point A to point B. Recognize any potential interactions along the route.

For effective mapping, consider the relationships between different locations or stages within the journey. How do the phases connect? Are there any obstacles? What about alternative paths that offer different advantages or challenges? By exploring those questions, you will create more than a map—it will become a dynamic tool that not only depicts a journey but also offers a chance to think more deeply and improve the overall learner experience.

Four Benefits of Mapping

You may ask yourself: "Why would I use learner mapping? I understand how these processes work. Why would I spend time visualizing?" The answer lies in the numerous benefits that mapping offers.

Provides clarity. Visually laying out the components of a journey or process enables L&D professionals to more easily comprehend the relationships and dependencies among different elements. That clarity can lead to more informed decision making because you have a better picture of the entire landscape and can identify less obvious opportunities or challenges.

Helps you reflect. I once had the idea of a mentoring program for busy learning creators. I was confident it would be perfect. But once I put my plans on a map, identified learner reactions, determined the time to complete each exercise, and realized how the modules' intensity differed from week to week, it became clear that I needed a different approach. Mapping gives you an objective picture of a project and becomes a source of healthy critique.

Eases communication. Introducing a new team member or transferring project responsibility to a colleague usually involves a significant time investment. You must create copious training documents and job aids and conduct numerous meetings to explain the initiative. A well-constructed map, however, serves as a universal language. It clearly outlines the process and shows interaction points. It enables you to quickly explain concepts to individuals with different expertise or perspectives. It is a focal point that facilitates discussion, ensuring everyone is on the same page and working toward the same goals.

Encourages collaboration. The process of creating a map is engaging and facilitates creativity. Staff can work simultaneously, discuss ideas, move priorities to new locations in the journey, and ascertain whether the journey they construct will work as they expect. Such a collaborative effort fosters a deeper sense of involvement and ownership among participants.

Components

Map components exist within two groups: scope and elements.

Scope

The scope of the map outlines where the experience starts and ends. Identifying the map's scope is one of the first exercises in the visualization process. There's no right or wrong way to define it. Present the scope as a timeline or a collection of stages, scenarios, or nodes. For example, for a network-like map (see Types of Learning Maps section), the scope can be all learning experience items within L&D's influence such as content, facilitation, accessibility, and timing. In a grid-like map, the scope is usually the horizontal axis, but it can vary its position in scenarios and network nodes.

If you are mapping the stages of a learning journey, try narrowing the scope to just one activity and its outcomes or use a broad lens, such as participants' commute to work, as the start of a larger journey map.

At its core, a map's purpose is to help orient and guide.

Elements

Think of the map elements as the focus. Is the goal of the map to see how students would react to the learning experience? If so, include their feelings and actions. Or do you want to determine whether the learner has enough L&D support at each stage? In that case, incorporate organizational touchpoints and support activities.

There are two types of learning map elements: learner perspective (What are they feeling and doing? How are they doing it? What outcomes should they achieve?) and organizational perspective (How do you deal with learner feelings? What are you proposing? What media will you use? How do you plan to assess results?).

Technically, no maximum number of elements is standard, but it's best to narrow your choices to no more than seven to gain the most effective insight into how they interact. When choosing what to visualize, always start with a *why*.

Learner perspective

- **Feelings.** The range of emotions the learner experiences at different stages or in response to various elements
- **Actions.** Specific activities or behaviors in which the learner engages as a result of their feelings or to further their understanding of the subject matter
- **Results.** The measurable learning outcomes or objectives that the learner must achieve by the end of the experience
- **Role.** The capacity in which the learner interacts with the learning material or environment such as being a learner, observer, visitor, or experimenter or varying between active and passive participation
- **Involvement.** The degree of the learner's engagement and participation, quantified on a scale (for example, from 1 to 5) where higher numbers indicate greater involvement
- **Magical moments.** Elements of the learning experience that the learner finds particularly enjoyable, inspiring, or fulfilling that leave a lasting positive impression
- **Miserable moments.** Aspects of the learning experience that cause the learner dissatisfaction, frustration, or disengagement

Organizational perspective

- **Touchpoints.** Interactions or points of contact between the organization and the learner that facilitate the learning delivery
- **Tools and media.** The various instruments and platforms that deliver content and engage the learner
- **Communication.** Methods and strategies that convey information, provide support, and maintain engagement with the learner
- **Trainer actions.** Specific actions and strategies educators or trainers use to guide, instruct, and support the learner throughout the learning process
- **Friction.** Challenges or barriers within the learning environment that hinder the learning process or learner engagement
- **Opportunities.** Potential areas for growth, improvement, or innovation within the learning programs or strategies