



10 features of great compliance training

And how to make yours
more effective

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Human-centred learning design	1
Well-spaced, well-paced learning	2
Role-relevant training	3
Organisation-relevant training	4
Clear learning pathways	5
A 'test first' approach	6
Empowered L&D teams	7
Creativity that cuts through	8
Learning with a clear motive	9
Learning offered at the point of need	10
A lesson from Fujitsu	11

Good, effective compliance is complicated.

Yet it's still a simple tick-box exercise to many. In spite of the millions invested in training, The Financial Conduct Authority issued fines valued over £53mn in the UK last year. The Health and Safety Executive imposed almost £36mn in fines. If effective compliance was as easy as putting everyone through the same annual sheep-dip, this wouldn't happen. So what can you do to get your compliance earning its keep?

With over 25 years in digital L&D we've seen the approaches that work, engage people and make an impact. That's what we're sharing here – 10 features we think go into successful compliance training.

Be mindful of the broader context – the best impact of any learning and training is going to be felt in organisations with healthy compliance climates. These are places where human needs, organisational culture and the learning infrastructure are harmonised (and hey – that's a whole other guide). But nothing should stop L&D teams exploring these 10 features. There are plenty of gains to be had in applying these approaches right now and we hope you are inspired!

Human-centred learning design



We tend to forget – so make it memorable. It's human nature to lose most of what we learn. Ebbinghaus's famous Forgetting Curve captures just how prone we are – we can forget up to 50% of what we've learnt within the day and up to 90% within a week. Memorable learning relies on a combination of factors – like storytelling and actionable learning – but to stand a chance of being remembered it should be as light as possible, to avoid cognitive overload

A line graph illustrating the forgetting curve. The vertical axis is labeled 'Percentage Recall' and ranges from 0 to 100. The horizontal axis is labeled 'Time (Days)'. A red curve starts at 60% recall at 20 minutes, drops to 33% after 1 day, and further to 25% after 6 days. The data points are labeled: '60% - 20 mins', '33% - 1 day', and '25% - 6 days'.

Time (Days)	Percentage Recall
0 (20 mins)	60%
1	33%
6	25%

Well-spaced, well-paced learning

Very often the attitude to compliance – that it's just 'something to get out of the way' – inspires the 'one and done' approach. But we know that a single, heavy dose of training doesn't work. Instead, we should create bite-sized interactions, ideally tailored to our needs, that enable us to steadily build and retain our compliance understanding.

Keep it short and sweet – aim for 20 minutes as the maximum duration for learning. After this length of time, our attention is compromised.

Don't repeat, but do re-cap – after a break use the return to learning for a light re-cap. The retrieval of information is part of learning, so prompting learners to, for example, 'remember what happened when...' is a gentle way to re-connect the brain with memory.

Use breaks to 'practice' learning – if longer breaks are built into learning, it's a good opportunity for people to apply their learning between sessions. For example, a module could end with a challenge that asks learners to apply something they have learned in the coming days. The next module could prompt them to reflect on that, or record what they've done. It creates a thread between sessions and that valuable act of 'retrieval' comes into play too.



Role-relevant training

The temptation to approach compliance training as if 'everyone needs to know everything' means it falls at the first hurdle. Compliance teams need to know everything, but most people just need to know what's relevant to their role and what they should do about it. The principle that 'less is more' really proves itself here!

Answer two key questions – as learners, we want compliance training to answer two questions: what do I need to know? and what do I need to do? Keep focused on this as you shape content and use it to bring discipline and create something digestible, relevant, actionable.

Gather authentic, relatable examples – invite employees to contribute to content with good examples of compliance at work in their role. You could create vox pop videos, or branching scenarios, or simple written accounts – however you use the content, aim to paint a varied but true picture of compliance at work through a number of roles across your organisation.

Show everyone the part they play – with company-wide compliance training, there is often an additional challenge: where a role doesn't have a clear compliance remit, people can assume it's not their problem. As a baseline, people should understand their part in contributing to a healthy compliance culture and upholding the values of the organisation they're part of.



An illustration on the left side of the page shows three people (a man and two women) from behind, looking up at a large target with concentric circles. A beam of light shines from the target down to them. The background is dark blue with a large, stylized, multi-colored shape (red, orange, and blue) that resembles a target or a large letter 'A'.

It would be useful if one size did fit all, but it doesn't. Every organisation is nuanced and unique. The challenge with off-the-shelf solutions, or content that doesn't reflect the nuance, is that it will only ever deliver an abstract, theoretical lesson. For compliance training to really work, it needs the clear, relatable context of your organisation.

Align with strategic goals – L&D has a vital role in getting organisations closer to their strategic objectives, and compliance is part of that, whether it's regulatory, corporate or ethical compliance. Make clear the connection between the training (for example, anti-harassment) and the ambitions of the organisation (for example, achieving Great Place to Work status, or diversifying the workforce).

Use a relevant approach – what approach would work well for your people, the way data tells you they like to learn, or the work setting? For example, could the competitive spirit of retail make a compliance leaderboard a smart way to boost completion? Think about how you could tap into the culture or character of your organisation to get a head start on engagement.

Use language and tone that feels familiar – any learning experience should feel like it's come from the organisation learners are part of. Use terms in training that match the language of the workplace and let your organisational personality and tone of voice come through. It's an important way for organisations to better 'own' compliance.

Clear learning pathways

Define what it is your people actually need to learn and action. Remember our tendency to feel cognitive overload, and to forget most learning within a few days. Let that guide you – all content needs to add genuine value.

Break it down – ‘deconstruct’ the learning, breaking it down into its smallest yet still tangible pieces, like self-contained micro modules. These are the individual blocks that now form your curriculum or framework.

Create meaningful pathways – take these blocks and group them under broad but actionable titles. Understand what is ‘core’ and should be a path everyone takes, then consider how you might use your LMS to define pathways that are role-specific. Use these blocks of learning to build a compliance training experience that starts with a consistent core for all, then add detail on a need-to-know basis.

The more personal, the better – of course it’s not just our role that helps define what we need to know. Differentiation can be driven by all sorts of factors that should end the annual, repeated sheep-dip of cumbersome compliance training. Take tenure as an example. How many times has an individual been through a cycle of compliance training? Someone who’s been in post for over five years is going to need a different approach to a new hire, or a relative newcomer, so build that pathway differently.





A 'test first' approach

Personalisation is a game changer. Diagnostics are a great place to start, enabling training to focus on where there are gaps in knowledge. Vital to 'meeting learners where they are', this approach can do a lot to encourage engagement. Learners feel understood (you get my learning needs), their time is respected (you're sharing just what I need to know) and the training is applicable to their work, environment and experience (so I can act on what I'm learning more easily).

Test first to personalise – this is a powerful starting point that differentiates between the learning requirements of competent, experienced staff and new starters. Establishing the competence and confidence of learners should drive the learning pathway that follows.

Test first to prove the need – a diagnostic test gives learners the chance to understand their own needs more clearly. We often assume we know more than we do – or at least as much as we need – until that knowledge is put to the test. If a diagnostic proves a gap in knowledge, it can be a powerful motivator to learning.

Diagnostics can tell us more, too – study the outcomes of diagnostics to identify any common themes or emerging trends. Are there any lessons as to how you can make further improvements to the learning experience? Are there common gaps in knowledge that point to a gap in the training?

Empowered, effective L&D teams

Good compliance training is led by good L&D teams. The unsung heroes of compliance culture, it's competent, empowered L&D teams that drive healthy attitudes to learning and continuous improvements to the learner experience. So when it comes to compliance training, what three things can L&D specialists do to ensure the best outcome?

Steer the input of subject matter experts – SMEs are vital to a quality outcome. L&D project owners can really encourage this by setting clear parameters to content and encouraging support for the vision and ambition of the learning. At the very least it's good to have SMEs who recognise the need for digestible training that focuses on 'what people need to know' and 'what people need to do'. Try to garner support for the 'less is more' principle!

Leverage the data – use data to explore and understand what works, what fails, what will this change? If learner feedback or other data is available it's really helpful to share it with your provider, so we can work in a way that recognises and responds to evidence of impact. It could help persuade SMEs to work to your content criteria too.

Share a marketing plan – how learning is shared can make or break how it lands, so it's useful to know how this is going to be marketed to your internal audiences, where people will find it, when and how they will be pushed or pulled to the learning. Talking about this early gives the whole team good context for the learning design.



Creativity that cuts through

Compliance training often plays it safe, driven by the perception that simple solutions better satisfy the regulator. But to meet regulatory goals, training must engage. Creativity is key to that – and a creative approach starts with a human-centred response. So what works?

Gamification and game-based approaches work – the power of play is that it engages, provides a safe space to get it wrong, and to apply learning from mistakes to get it right. Features such as rich feedback or scoring can boost repeat engagement and give us some sense of where we need to improve.

Storytelling works – transforming compliance into stories is a powerful way to engage, moving from text to more dynamic formats like video, animation or audio. Stories use jeopardy, relatable characters and scenarios or cautionary tales to create an emotional hook and memorable connections. As Nick Shackleton-Jones wrote, “emotion IS learning.” Using first-hand accounts through compelling media adds a powerful ‘lived’ perspective of policy or its impact, leveraging our natural human instincts to listen to and learn from others.

Your brand should shine through – the employee experience should live and breathe your brand, from the moment they are welcomed (or before, in preboarding). New hires often face a whirlwind start, with the average corporate onboarding involving more than 50 interactions, from form-filling to mandatory compliance training. Give compliance training the creative space to become a brand asset – one that upholds your reputation and showcases everything your organisation stands for.

Learning with a clear motive

Compliance training needs a good answer to the question 'why do I need to know this?'. All successful learning design starts with clear learning objectives, and it's good practice to let learners know what this learning will give them. It's vital to define what we call a 'powerful why'.

Define the personal motivation – what will be easier, better, smoother, faster for people, because of this? The key is centring the learner, not the learning – think about the personal pay-off: you give your time and attention, you get _____. So it's vital to understand pain points from a human perspective, not just an organisational one.

Define the wider benefit – we're also motivated by broader consequences, but often still human ones. Creating the sense that we have a team role to play in upholding compliance is motivating. Just as group think can be a detractor from compliance ('I break the rules because we all break the rules'), it can be a powerful motivator, too. Compliance training is about playing your own crucial part in delivering a team effort.

Show progress – the need for motivation continues throughout learning, so giving people the sense they are making progress helps sustain motivation. Every little helps, from a simple progress marker or map to show how far learners have come and have remaining, to quizzes that give a sense of achievement (and of what is left to learn).



Triggers

What will trigger learners to make changes to their behaviour?

Ability

What knowledge or skills do learners need in order to be able to change their behaviours?

Motivation

What is going to motivate learners to actually make changes to their behaviour?

Remember that compliance training is about shifting behaviours and creating healthy habits. BJ Fogg's behaviour model is a useful reference for the ingredients of a 'powerful why': understand what brought people here, deliver the training which creates ability, and motivate the application of that ability.



Learning offered at the point of need

Even if the learning design is great, learning delivered 'just in case' can feel like a waste of time (and very often leads to the dread question that becomes a mental barrier to our learning – 'why do I even need to know this?'). Good things happen when our access to learning is driven by need – it creates huge pull, a clear motivation and heightened engagement.



Exploring the real need – we can create learning experiences with real purpose, if we experience the function or process in question, to help understand true pain points and genuine need. Often learning driven by policy or process doesn't appreciate how that is implemented – speaking to learners about what really challenges them can transform compliance, because it responds to real, felt need.

Learning offered at the point of need – this approach overcomes so many of the barriers to engagement, and learning can also be put into practice immediately, increasing the chances that it will stick. This approach is either about timely delivery, or organising instant access to the learning, so we use the LMS just as we've all grown used to being able to use Google when we have a burning question.

Good tagging is a must – getting the balance of searchability/specificity is no mean feat, and part of what makes LMS library management a genuine skill. While much easier said than done, tagging is essential to enabling learning on demand.



Motivating learning – a lesson from Fujitsu



Fujitsu's approach to occupational health and safety compliance has helped to drive 94% completion of the training. Now the quality assurance team is changing the way it delivers, too.

Fujitsu's leaders share their commitment to meeting learners' needs.

Governance Manager: Historically, in an audit where an employee cannot demonstrate their awareness of the Quality Management System a non-conformity would be raised, and the employee would be required to attend quality training as part of the corrective action plan. Six months later, an effectivity check was conducted to ensure the corrective action was taken and is in place. But this reactive approach is time-consuming and does not necessarily 'enable' the employee. In future, to complement the roll-out of our new quality training, we will be asking auditees to conduct the course in advance of their audit, to make it more contextual and to enhance their overall experience and knowledge.

Governance Director: We've done lot of groundwork to understand the information people genuinely need to know, and to make it personalized and role-based to increase relevance. For example, engineers don't need to know the detail of ISO 9001 or ISO 20000 standards; they do need an understanding of the Quality Management system, how to find it and when to use it. Our objective is to enable and empower employees with the relevant knowledge for their roles, supported by training, to drive better adoption and understanding.

Governance Manager: Exactly – and we don't want auditees to feel as if we're looking to catch them out! We want to make compliance part of their everyday activities and for it to be seen as a positive, constructive force in their work.

Governance Director: That's right – we want all employees to have a 'quality mindset'. This training raises the questions and provides the answers to 'Why is quality important to my role? When is it important to consider quality? What is the impact to the company of poor quality?' in context, and in a relevant, relatable way.

These are simple, smart touches that will make real impact. The distance between what Fujitsu's staff are learning, and the work they do is narrowed because the team has designed the learning to be applied. And vitally, by offering learning at the moment it's most needed – pre-audit – the team both motivates engagement and synchronises learning with learner priorities.

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