

Digital Tools in Service Competence Development – Case: Learning Verbal Judo Digitally

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory paper focuses on the use of digital tools in service competence development. A digital training package about verbal judo (VJ) was tested using the diary method as 24 undergraduate students were asked to evaluate a VJ digital training package. The training package was created by Mielenrauha Ltd., which is an established company that specializes in security and conflict management training both in Finland and abroad. Overall, the respondents perceived the digital training package format as positive. Its ease of use and freedom from time and space were seen as positive elements that fit well with the general turbulence and lack of time in our society. The respondents were especially appreciative of the video elements, which received the most positive comments out of all the content elements. The respondents also considered it important to receive personalized feedback about their learning outcomes. Therefore, it would be extremely valuable to be able to include participants' own experiences in the training framework, although this kind of personalization is technically challenging. The general outcome of the study indicates clearly that digital training packages are rapidly gaining in popularity. Therefore, more research in this area is needed.

KEYWORDS

Digital Tools, Service Competence, Verbal Judo, Service Competences, Demanding Customer Encounter

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1. INTRODUCTION

The general aim of this paper is to focus on the use of digital tools in service competence development. As the paper is a continuation of the exploratory paper titled “Verbal Judo in Demanding Customer Encounters” (Kokko and Mäki 2009), the explicit service competence studied is the use of verbal judo (VJ) at work. VJ is an interpersonal technique that is used in police force training in the United States (US). The technique was developed by George Thompson based on his experiences as a police officer and professor of English. The training system focuses on using predetermined steps, using scripted phases, offering responses that deflect insults, showing and expressing empathy, and gaining compliance through personal appeals (see Kokko and Mäki 2009; Thompson and Jenkins 1993; Johnson 2004).

In practical terms, this paper investigates how well a digital tool can be used to increase personnel’s VJ competence. Based on this single VJ training package, a more general discussion is carried out about the use of digital tools in competence development. The aim of this paper is to explore the benefits and challenges of digital training platform, particularly in a context of demanding customer behavior.

Digital tools are rapidly gaining in popularity due to their low costs and to the fact that they can be used regardless of time and place. At the same time, the need for service competence development is rapidly increasing. This is partly because the personnel turnover in many service branches is increasing and partly because service offerings are becoming more developed and are heading in a more complex and versatile direction. This increase in complexity automatically means that there is a growing need for personnel guidance and training. Many positions in service companies are also perceived as temporary, leading to a constant flow of new and inexperienced workers.

Service competences create the foundation for all company actions, and they can be defined as “the skills, knowledge, personal characteristics, and behaviors required to effectively perform in a job” (Lucia and Lepsinger 1999 cited in Van Sickle and Schaumleffel 2016 p. 39). Service competence development is a strategic activity in all companies. Bergenhenegouwen et al. (1997 p. 57) state that “working systematically and structurally with (personal) core competences gives the organization considerable strategic power”. One can also argue that the need to develop service competences is constantly growing, as “a fundamental challenge is

both the increased complexity of the value proposition and the customer's needs, which place new demands on the competence set needed by the sales function in general and the individual salesperson in particular" (Kindström et al. 2015 p. 384). The emotional aspect of service competences is quite often outlined as follows: "Service firms should be more concerned with the actual display of emotionally competent behaviors by employees, because employee behaviors vary across encounters. A customer perspective of employee emotional competence is useful, as customer perceptions of employee performance are crucial predictors of satisfaction and loyalty" (Delcourt et al. 2017 p. 72). VJ is often used in situations that can be characterized as emotionally charged. This fact underlines the importance of this specific competence, as the outcome of these encounters is decisive for the entire customer relationship (Delcourt et al. 2016).

Digital tools are widely used in modern organizations. There are several reasons for their popularity. One of them is 24/7 accessibility, as they can be made accessible to the workforce throughout the day. Digital tools can be used to derive benefits from an improved pedagogy, as they may include elements of gamification, which is perceived as enhancing learner engagement and improving retention. Digital tools also enable instant contact with staff from all over the world, and the costs are minimal in comparison to face-to-face training.

Digital tools have also been criticized. The most common comment relates to the fact that it is difficult to verify the real activity of the person using the tool. In some cases, even the identity is never verified, which opens doors for the use of straw men. Another somewhat frequent comment is that because they lack the human factor, digital tools are not effective in creating a bond between the trainer and the trainee. However, despite the critical comments, digitalization and digital training packages are becoming more frequent at an increasingly rapid pace. In the following section, service competence development and digitalization are discussed briefly.

2. SERVICE COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT AND DIGITALIZATION

The term "competence" is relatively new, as it first appeared in an article authored by R. W. White in 1959. White (1959 p. 96) defined the term as "the ability of an individual to do a job properly." Most scholars see competence as "a combination of practical and theoretical

knowledge, cognitive skills, behavior and values used to improve performance or as the state or quality of being adequately or well qualified, having the ability to perform a specific role” (Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1980).

Competences may be applicable to all employees, or they may be position- or person-specific. Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1980) have introduced a nomenclature for the levels of competence; however, the presented hierarchy should be seen as indicative only. It gives only a general understanding of the different levels but does not enable an accurate definition of each category:

1. Novice: engages in rule-based behavior—strongly limited and inflexible
2. Experienced beginner: incorporates aspects of the situation
3. Practitioner: acts consciously based on long-term goals and plans
4. Knowledgeable practitioner: sees the situation as a whole and acts based on personal conviction
5. Expert: has an intuitive understanding of the situation and zooms in on the central aspects

Competences have gained a great deal of interest because of their usability in training and development. Competences help us to focus on the skills, knowledge, and characteristics that have the most impact on job effectiveness. Further, competences may help us to ensure that training is aligned with organizational needs.

Digitalization is quite often seen only as a new channel. However, one should be very clear that in training, digitalization is based on a completely new kind of pedagogical approach. Bransford et al. (2000) present two views of modern technology: Based on the romantic view, the mere presence of modern technology will enhance student learning and achievement. The opposite of this is the pessimistic view that money spent on technology and time spent by students using technology are money and time wasted (ibid. p. 206). Further, Bransford et al. (2000) argue that technology can be a great tool but that it cannot just exist and, thereby, positively affect learning and achievement. To create effective learning environments, Bransford et al. recommend that we take four important issues into consideration (ibid. pp.

212–220): 1) Effective learning is always learner-centered; we need to consider the learner’s motivation, experience, and misconceptions; 2) effective learning is knowledge-centered; we need to focus on key concepts and mastery; 3) effective learning is community-centered; we need to establish a community and connect it to the real world; and 4) effective learning is assessment-centered; we need to monitor both student and trainer progress and to be ready to adjust learning strategies based on student feedback.

3. A CHALLENGE IN SERVICE SETTINGS: DEMANDING CUSTOMERS

Service channels have changed radically in recent years. Numerous traditional service providers have created multichannel systems by introducing, for example, technology-based self-service channels. These solutions enable customers to “produce a service independent of direct service employee involvement” (Falk et al. 2007). We can conclude that in a multichannel service context, active customer participation is an essential prerequisite of successful service delivery.

One segment that has been ignored is misbehaving customer groups. As long as these encounters are perceived positively by both parties, there are no problems; however, when either or both parties perceive the encounter as not fulfilling their explicit or implicit expectations, it becomes a demanding customer encounter. The general understanding today seems to be that an increasing number of frontline personnel in service companies confront demanding customer situations on a regular basis.

All research also indicates that frontline service personnel face demanding customers regularly. The trend seems to be that an increasing number of service areas need to cope with challenging customer groups. In general, a customer encounter is considered demanding if either or both parties perceive it as not fulfilling its implicit or explicit expectations (Kokko and Mäki 2009 p. 215).

According to Reynolds and Harris (2006), the majority of the research related to customer and company interactions is based on the assumption that customers act in both a functional and a well-mannered way. This approach differs somewhat from the reality. Customers and their behaviors vary. Customers can and do act in a well-mannered way or may even be like friends (Goodwin and Gremler 1996). Conversely, customers can be very demanding, and

they may act aggressively, complain illegitimately, or even behave as if they have come “directly from hell” (Harari 1996). It is fair to argue that norm-breaking, deviant behavior is relatively common. Reynold and Harris (2006) report that in the United Kingdom, front-of-store assistants are subjected to verbal abuse once every 3.75 days, to threatening behavior every 15 days, and to acts of violence every 31 days. In Finland, approximately 5% of all employees face threatening or violent work-related encounters annually (Heiskanen 2004). The trend seems to be getting stronger, and new service employee groups will most likely face a growing number of demanding customer situations.

4. THE VERBAL JUDO APPROACH TO DEMANDING CUSTOMER ENCOUNTERS

One of the interpersonal techniques used in police force training in the US is the VJ system. Developed by George Thompson based on his experiences as a police officer and professor of English, this training system focuses on using the following communicative means: (a) using predetermined steps, (b) saying scripted phases, (c) offering responses that deflect insults, (d) showing and expressing empathy, and (e) gaining compliance through personal appeals (Thompson and Jenkins 1993; Johnson 2004). In the US, the VJ approach has predominantly been used in the police force, whereas in Europe, the method has been applied in other services as well.

The VJ framework contains certain principles and characteristics that distinguish it from other more traditional methods aimed at handling negative and demanding customer situations in the service industry. VJ has its roots in the oriental martial art judo, which has its origins in Japan in the late nineteenth century. The word itself means a *gentle way*. The philosophy behind judo emphasizes gentleness, softness, suppleness, and even easiness. Judo is characterized by the indirect use of force and the redirection of the opponent’s force. The word “judo” also has a more spiritual meaning—*road* or *bath*—which points to it being a philosophical way of life that encourages its practitioners to seek higher levels of skills and harmony of mind in all areas of life. Inspected from this philosophical angle, VJ fits well with the worldview of the services marketing framework: respecting opponents, using indirect actions to influence others, and engaging in a search for mental harmony. It is a well-known fact that the mental states of both service employees and customers have clear effects on

service level and output (see Kokko and Mäki 2009).

VJ trainers typically have extensive backgrounds in both martial arts and the police force. They can most likely demonstrate a larger variety of challenging situations than persons who have not faced and solved a number of verbally or physically hostile situations. Furthermore, the main principles of VJ have been used and tested in daily police work in the US, where demanding customer situations often take more extreme forms than in other more typical service industries (see Johnson 2004).

In short, VJ addresses two larger areas of frontline service work. 1) It strongly highlights the use of empathy in demanding customer situations. As a philosophy, it is relatively strict in demanding customer management; frontline service clerks are encouraged to show empathy toward all customer types, even extremely demanding customers. In other words, service personnel have to pay a price in order to successfully manage demanding service situations. This price means not showing their own (most likely) negative feelings in service settings and sometimes being willing to swallow their pride. 2) The VJ approach addresses, and coaches in, the use of nonverbal communication elements in service settings: eye contact, body movement, the use of hands, facial gestures (smiling, eye contact), and tone of voice. These elements are to be used in ways that avoid portraying hostile images to customers. On the whole, VJ is a system with three explicit goals: 1) developing mind–mouth harmony, 2) enhancing professionalism, and 3) improving personal efficiency by increasing performance level (Thompson and Jenkins 1993 pp. 18-19).

We have conducted two studies related to the impact of VJ training on service personnel's actions, feelings, and performance in frontline service encounter situations. The first study focused on the general effectiveness of VJ training in two industries—the cruise line and retail industries. The latter study had a more specific aim, as it focused on the effectiveness of VJ training on frontline service personnel's stress levels (see Mäki and Kokko 2013). Both studies indicated positive results related to the VJ concept. According to the results of the first study, the VJ training participants felt that their capabilities to confront misbehaving customers clearly increased. The second study indicated a lower cortisol hormone level among the service clerks who had taken part in VJ training. This result was attained by measuring the study participants' levels of cortisol hormone (stress hormone) and by

conducting interviews (see Mäki and Kokko 2013). In this third study, the training has been conducted in digital format and has been tested from a more general viewpoint.

Service management literature has covered well misbehaving customer theme (see Gursoy et al. (2017)). The focus has been on the categories and types of misbehaving customer groups. Very few previous studies have garnered empirical data that offers insight into the proactive and reactive strategies, tactics that managers employ when dealing with misbehaving customers within their firm (see Harris and Daunt 2013), and there is a lack of studies dealing with front-line service personnel's capability development in misbehaving customer encounter situation. The current study intends to contribute to this research gap.

5. CASE PRESENTATION

Mielenrauha Oy/Peace of Mind Ltd. is the biggest service provider in Finland and is one of the biggest operators in Northern Europe in the field of crime prevention, threat assessment, and threat management. It also offers educational and consulting services related to demanding customer encounters. Mr. Totti Karpela, the CEO of the company, is the leading VJ instructor in Europe. The company operates in Finland and Hong Kong.

To develop its service offering and better fulfill customer needs, the company had to extend its VJ course selection to a digital platform. A virtual VJ training package offers cost-effective and versatile learning solutions to many service companies. For example, a national, multiunit retail chain may find it challenging to gather personnel physically in one place at a certain time for learning purposes. In addition, the cost of this kind of arrangement is high. Digital training solutions offer a cost-effective method of increasing frontline service employees' competences in dealing with demanding customer encounter situations effectively. In general, successful e-learning implementation relates to the individual characteristics of a learner. These characteristics are, for example, general motivation, technology readiness, and better computing skills (Sawang et al. 2013).

The VJ digital learning package consists of different elements, such as text, pictures, short videos, and questions measuring the learning results. The digital learning solution also includes gamification elements in order to keep the participants' interests at a high level throughout the course.

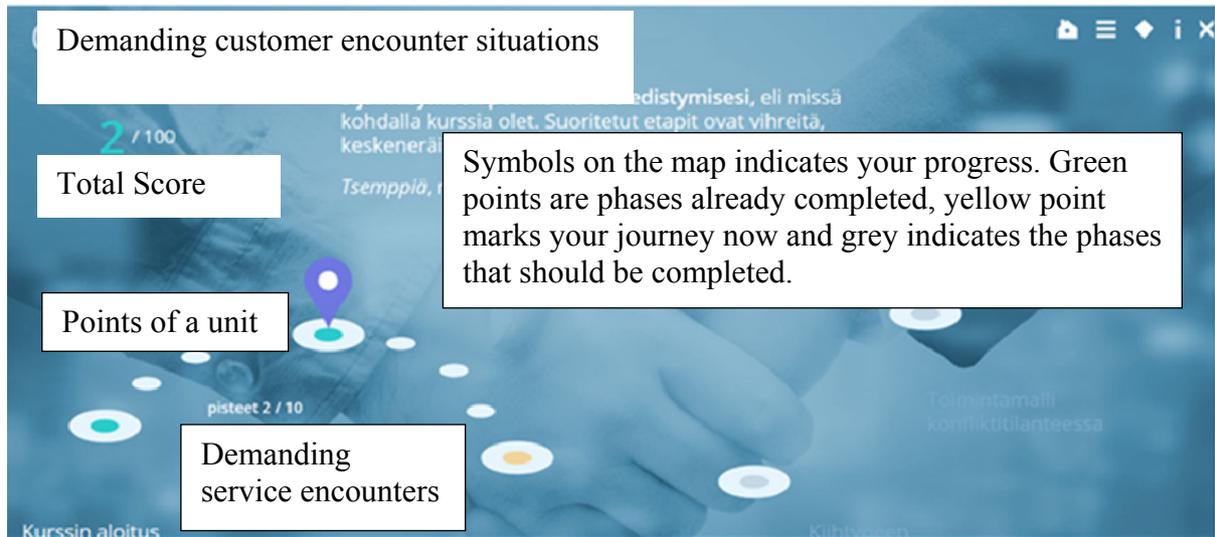


Figure 1. The User Interface of the Digital Learning Platform

The digital package consists of six independent educational themes and entities. These individual units are represented in a form of service blueprint of a customer journey. The journey is visualized with rounded marks in the user interface. The course participant studies each entity separately and she/he will get feedback in form of points separately from each unit.

Each of the six independent study units (marked as rounded figures in Figure 1) has about 10 subsections, each of which focuses on a specific issue related to serving demanding customers. Each subunit includes text, short videos, and diagnostic questions in order to guarantee immediate feedback. The length of each video varies from half a minute to about two minutes, and each independent unit consists of between one and three of these videos.



Figure 2. Video Section of the Subunit

Typically, each independent study unit begins with a short video in which the specific issue is discussed. The main points of the video appear in the left-hand unit of the interface. Thereafter, diagnostic questions appear in the user interface. In some subunits, open-ended questions are asked in order to relate them to participants' own organizations, experiences, or opinions about serving demanding or misbehaving customer groups.

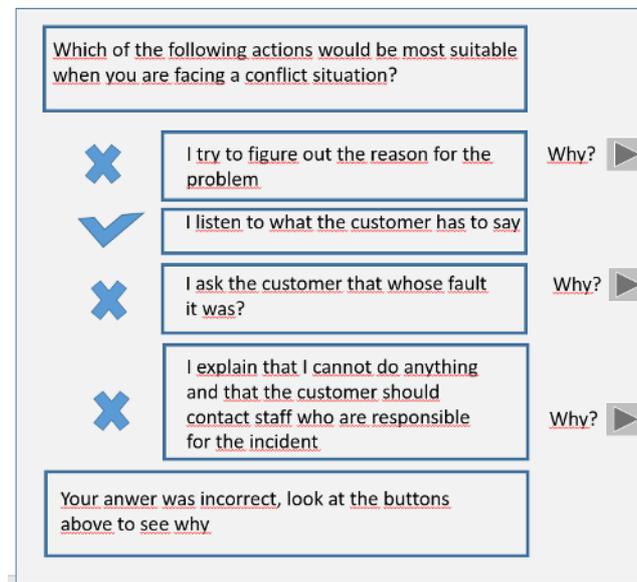


Figure 3. Diagnostic Question-and-Answer Section of the Subunit

In summary, the digital learning environment offered by Peace of Mind Ltd. is a versatile and cost-effective platform for increasing participants' competences in dealing with demanding customer encounters.

6. METHODOLOGY

In this study, the data collection design was purely qualitative. Twenty-four undergraduate business students were recruited to take part in the study. The participants were asked to go through the digital learning process and write about their digital learning experiences in diaries. Altogether, 54 pages of diary material were collected. The digital platform under investigation, as well as services in general, can be viewed as processes (Edvardsson 1996; Turner 1994). Therefore, the participants were asked to at least evaluate the following

characteristics and practical elements of the digital learning package: 1. expectations and motivation, 2. content-related attributes of e-learning, 3. user interface, 4. video elements, 5. text elements, 6. voice and sound, and 7. exercises and learning feedback. Moreover, the participants were asked to write down their thoughts about their overall satisfaction, perceived learning, and perceived competence development. Expectations play an important role in how services are experienced (see Grönroos 2000). Hence, dimension also plays an important role in the digital training service product. In practical terms, all the recruited participants wrote in mini diaries about their experiences, feelings about the platform, and thoughts about their own learning during the digital course. Diaries have the ability to capture the particulars of experience in a way that is not possible using traditional designs and permit the examination of reported events and experiences in their natural, spontaneous context (Radcliffe 2013). The diary method suited well for our aim to gather spontaneous and instant reactions, feelings and comments related to all learning process phases.

Several authors (see Swartz 2000; Zeithaml et al. 1996) have underlined the importance of customers' activities during and involvement with service production. This phenomenon can be defined as customer participation in service production. Customers can also act as co-creators of value during the service production process. Within this perspective, customers, who collaborate with and create value for companies, were viewed as an operant resource (see Lusch et al. 2007). Both of these viewpoints underline the importance of customer actions in service settings; hence, the recruited participants were advised to evaluate their own activities during the test period. In most cases, the aim of diary research is to obtain data that are close to how people perceive their own behavior (Vermaas and Wijngaert 2005). Moreover, the insights that diary research provides can help digital service providers to develop their services to better fit the needs of their potential customers (see Vermaas and Wijngaert 2005; Mäki and Kokko 2017). We can conclude that the diary method has the potential to capture customers' experiences during digital learning. The data analysis follows the questionnaire structure and themes, which were derived from the theoretical discussion of the study. The actual coding was done according to different practical elements of a digital learning package and by theoretical framework. This kind of approach is recommended in order to avoid a surplus number of formed data categories (Miles and Huberman 1994).

7. FINDINGS

Successful e-learning implementation always relates to the individual characteristics of the learner (Sawang et al. 2013). These characteristics are, for example, general motivation, technology readiness, and better computing skills. Authenticity also plays an important role; it is defined as “tasks that are relevant and useful to the real world and provide learners with a scenario to identify the questions and activities that are logically related to the scenario.” (Ibid, p. 65) Intensive e-learning environments tend to be developed based on the institutional and practical needs of domain knowledge and skill transfer with limited and decisive content and educational strategies (Clark and Mayer 2008). In addition, the learning environment gives learners little flexibility to apply their own experience and knowledge. A case-enhanced learning environment will be more accessible and flexible because learners with various levels of knowledge and experience can work in the case-enhanced learning environment (Hye et al. 2012). The major findings in this study are derived from the diary material. The findings are presented according to the research topics and the theoretical framework. All the quotations are from the respondent diaries.

7.1 Expectations and Motivation

Expectations play a significant role in the potential success of service delivery. They influence both the overall quality experience of the service and the image of the service product (Grönroos 2000). Expectations can be characterized as both general and specific. The latter expectation type relates to the course length, the user interface, and the visual attributes of the e-learning platform.

“Nothing specific, because I have not participated in an e-learning course before.”

“As easy as possibly to use.”

“Colors not too bright; I don’t want to watch bright colors on the screen if the course will last long.”

“I expect the course to have interactive elements because reading only theory can be boring . . .”

“As practical as possible.”

“Good tips and advice on how to handle difficult situations.”

“The course should be compact and not too long.”

The practical approach was highly appreciated by the participants. If theoretical issues are raised, they should be tied to the practical examples, which can then be applied to the service encounter situations faced by the course participants.

“I expect the course to handle theory in light of different examples so that the participant can choose how to act in a certain situation.”

“I want to get good practical tips from this course.”

“I expect easiness and lots of game-like elements.”

“I prefer a course that is as practical-oriented as possible.”

Learning new competences in various service settings is naturally the major aim of this kind of training package. The digital format seemed to function well. New skills can be learned more easily using various types of materials.

“You have to feel the situation. Only reading about it will not contribute to learning.”

“I want to have something else from this course than just the theory.”

“Something new and fresh—not just videos.”

Some expectations were fuzzy in nature. Fuzzy expectations have been discussed among academic service management researchers. Grönroos (2000) divides expectations into three independent categories—namely, implicit, explicit, and fuzzy. The third expectation type seemed to appear in this case study.

“ I have a somewhat sour attitude to this kind of short digital course . . . you do not have enough time to concentrate on any specific issue with this kind of course format.”

“It is difficult to say what I expect, because I do not know much about the content of the course. I have been working for quite a long time in the customer service field, so I have faced many demanding situations.”

“It is difficult to think about what to expect, because I do not know the content of the course . . . Hopefully, I will get some practical advice about how to deal with demanding customer encounters.”

All in all, the expectations were mainly targeted at quite practical issues like content issues and user-interface issues.

7.2 The Content-Related Attributes of e-Learning

The e-learning package under investigation has different contextual units. These include short videos, texts, animated pictures, and audio as structural elements. Moreover, the participant is asked diagnostic questions, and each subsection includes a score based on his or her answers.

7.3 User Interface

“I’m afraid that I’ll face some difficulties with the course because I typically mess up with computers.”

“The path type of interface was very good. It was easy to follow, and you knew all the time how much of the course was left.”

“Looks a bit old-fashioned . . . like PowerPoint.”

“The interface seems to be quite good, although I would have added more instructions about how to proceed. Also, a big ‘start here’ button would work out well.”

“I would prefer more colors.”

“The platform is very clear, as you can always go back to the instructions.”

7.4 Video Elements

In general, the video content was evaluated as positive. This content element seemed to

raise more interest and comments than the text or animation elements. The video elements section received the most comments of the entire digital learning platform.

“The video has a good structure, good examples, and a compact presentation of the situation.”

“In all the sections, there is a video at the beginning. That is good.”

“The speech and tone of the presenter were clear and smooth; it was easy to listen to him.”

“I learn better by watching than reading. I think some additional texts could be presented in a video format.”

The location of the video clips on the digital learning platform was also commented on. The beginning of the training and the subsections seemed to get positive feedback from the participants.

“It is a good idea to start the whole course with a video and also explain who the person talking is.”

“After the first video, I felt welcomed to the course, and my interest in the course remained high.”

A relatively small number of the video-related comments were negative. However, some critical comments were expressed.

“The videos were somewhat short, and the constant need to remember things (from the videos) was difficult.”

“The short, individual videos generated a somewhat fragmented feeling.”

7.5 Text Elements

The course participants made only a small number of comments and observations related to the text elements.

“I don’t feel like reading the text.”

“At this point, I feel that there is quite a lot of text included in the training. Could the amount of text be less?”

“In some phases, there is too much text . . . makes it a bit dull.”

“The graphics were outdated.”

The text columns themselves did not elicit any comments. However, whenever the text elements had a clear connection to the video elements, the structure was perceived as a good solution.

“I liked that the main points of the video were written on the left-hand side column of the interface.”

7.6 Voice and Sound

Tone of voice is generally a critical element in face-to-face service situations. In digital service products, such as that used on this digital training platform, voice and sound are also attributes that have an impact on the overall learning experience. The use of sounds and music created mixed feelings.

“At first, I was scared when the music started to play so loudly.”

“Placing music just before the concluding test is not a good idea. Also, the music is too loud if you use a headset.”

“Very clear and businesslike voice. I also liked the music.”

7.7 Exercises and Learning Feedback

The digital course consists of several short exercises. Some are tied to the participants’ own experiences, and some exercises relate to the participants’ prior service experiences. Some exercises act as diagnostic feedback on the course contents.

“The course enhanced learning.”

“It was nice to have different kinds of exercises.”

“Open-ended questions are OK, but how many will answer them?”

“It was possible to skip open-ended questions. On the other hand, someone who is really interested would most likely answer them as well.”

7.8 Overall Learning, Competence Development, and Satisfaction

Learning and competence development can take place in several ways. Over the past few decades, education researchers have defined several frameworks and models for learning. Besides actual learning, we always have to assess competence development and customer satisfaction.

“At least I learned something.”

“The course was OK as a whole.”

“In general, a compact and good entity.”

The diversity of the material seemed to be an asset. The mixture of text, videos, speech, and different kinds of exercises was appreciated by the course participants.

“It was nice that there were different kinds of assignments—not just multiple choice-questions.”

“More visual elements like infographics and colors.”

“The videos were excellent.”

“Fewer text elements, please.”

Practicality, ease of use, and general ability to give new insights were key factors for those who perceived the course as positive. Exercises have to be carefully constructed so that they provide direct feedback to participants. The grading system also has to be clear.

“I would prefer more real-life examples.”

“Questions where all the answers are right do not make sense.”

“I never really understood the grading system.”

“Compact and good entity in general.”

“Some of the questions were quite obvious.”

The suitability and use of the training package are highly dependent on the participant's level of expertise. It became quite obvious that due to many of its elementary contents, the course package is suitable for people with little customer service experience. In other words, the standard could be raised higher. In general, the findings highlighted the importance of visual elements over text. Moreover, constant feedback and clear connection to participant's own service environment or experiences were appreciated.

8. DISCUSSION, MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The current study contributes to understanding how digital tools can be used in competence development. All in all, the study shows that there is a great deal of potential in this area. The findings indicate that all content elements are important, with video content being most important. The findings also offer strong support for the fact that digitalization will become more and more common in personnel training. This change will be rapid in nature.

The findings also indicate that direct learning feedback is vital. This underlines the need for mutual communication and the possibility to reflect the study contents through the learner's own experiences. In other words, the training packages should take a more personalized direction. Possible technological developments (i.e., in artificial intelligence) may further this aim in the near future. However, personalization is a challenge, as practically, it means that training packages should be dynamic rather than static in nature (See Kokko and Moilanen 1997). A personalized approach may also be the key to providing training to learners who represent different levels of competence (see Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1980). There is also a growing tendency among learners to become bored, which can also be partly dealt with by offering personalized content.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how well a digital platform can act as an educational approach to develop participants' capabilities to confront demanding or misbehaving customers within Verbal Judo method.

Managerially, it is vital for training packages to be under continuous development. Rapid technological development should be taken into account. For the customers, general usability, easiness, and clear logic seem to be the key issues. It is vital that customer participation not be neglected. Therefore, undertaking developmental activities with the customers is strongly recommended (see Mäki and Kokko 2012).

All in all, the study results indicate that learner expectations and perceptions are by nature fuzzy and partly contradictory. This means in practical terms that all development should target higher levels of flexibility and adjustability. Instead of being purely static, future training packages will most likely be more dynamic in nature. Therefore, in conclusion, we can state that the present static approach will not be sufficient in the future. There is a great need for technological and content-related innovations in order to guarantee a higher level of personalized, user-specific elements, which are capable of moving us to the next level of training packages.

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