Improving an existing design

Evaluate and improve your existing design

Hold your training up against the seven principles. You'll quickly see where the biggest gains are, without starting from scratch.

S M A R T E R

Overview

Who it's for	Goal	Time	Format
Anyone who wants to make an existing learning design or training material more effective.	Test and improve your design with a few targeted quick fixes.	15–60 min	Individually or as a team.

In short

Take a training that already exists: your own design or a programme you buy in. Lay out the seven WHAT and WHY cards in front of you and decide for each principle whether it's in there, partly there or missing. Then look through the HOW cards for interventions that fit the weak spots. Can't find a suitable approach? Discuss as a team what would work in your context.

Don't end up with a list of twenty good intentions. Select no more than three interventions that you will actually put into practice. The result is a revised session plan or a sharper briefing for your (external) trainer.

Good to know

You don't have to work on all the principles at once. That can be overwhelming. Choose where the impact is greatest and start there.

What you need

- 1 SMARTER deck (see step 1)
- The session plan or slides of your training (see steps 1 and 6)
- The SMARTER scan worksheet [DOWNLOAD LINK] (see step 6)

How it works

1 Preparation

Lay out the letter cards in a row so they spell the word SMARTER. Under each letter, place the WHAT card, the WHY card and the stack of HOW cards for that principle. Put your session plan or slides in front of you too.

2 Quick assessment

Read the WHAT and WHY card for each principle. Ask yourself: what am I already applying? What not yet? Then give each principle a colour: green (clearly there), orange (partly or by chance) or red (missing). For each principle, write one sentence explaining why.

Tip

Torn between green and orange? Choose orange. A picture that's too rosy won't lead to any improvement.

3 Choose HOW cards

Browse the HOW cards of the orange and red principles. For each principle, choose two cards that suit your target group and context. Nothing suitable? Brainstorm your own application and write it on a sticky note.

Working in a group? Let everyone choose individually first, then discuss together which principles you want to build in more.

4 Impact × effort optional

Finding it hard to prioritise? Draw a 2×2 matrix: impact on the vertical axis, effort on the horizontal axis. Place each card you chose in a quadrant.

From the "high impact, low effort" quadrant, choose no more than three cards. These are your interventions.

Why no more than three?

If you try to improve ten things at once, usually nothing changes. Three interventions are something you can carry out and evaluate.

5 Make it concrete

Rewrite each intervention as an action plan: what happens, when, for how long and who does it.

Don't say: "build in more repetition".
Do say: "At the end of the workshop, participants answer three questions in a short quiz. The trainer discusses the answers before wrapping up."

6 Record it

Note the three interventions on the worksheet. Add them straight away to the session plan, slides or briefing. Put the cards back in the deck.

External training?

Use your three interventions as questions for the provider: "How do you make sure that ...?" The answer tells you a lot about the quality.

Follow-up and next steps

- After the session, evaluate with the trainer which intervention worked.
- Repeat the scan after two editions. What was orange may have turned green by then, and your attention moves on to the next principle.

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