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Learning by Prerequisites

Learning skills in the correct order is critical to concept comprehension

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Prerequisites

prerequisite

noun [C] • formal

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something that must exist or happen before something else can exist or happen:

We all are familiar with prerequisites from school. You had to take Spanish 101 before taking Spanish 102. You had to do this because there were concepts from Spanish 101 that you needed to understand before building on them in Spanish 102. Seems like a pretty good idea to learn one thing before another. Why do we not carry the concept of prerequisites over into the corporate world?

Often in corporate training Spanish 102 is taught with the employee expected to fill in the gaps on their own. This leads to slower learning rates and overall decreased concept comprehension.

New employees are often hesitant to ask questions when missing key prerequisite knowledge on how to do tasks at a new company. They go on in their roles knowing they have large gaps in knowledge, but are too afraid to ask for help, thinking people will look down on them.

Even worse, some companies have a sink-or-swim onboarding philosophy where new employees are expected to learn things on their own or fail at their jobs.

Having a system that can take brand new employees and teach them their role-specific skills in the correct order is critical to overall concept comprehension and a successful hire.

GainKnowHow recognized the importance of prerequisites when learning complex concepts and developed a platform for people to learn skills in the correct order. As you will find out there are many benefits to ordering skills by prerequisites.

Case Study

The new manager's unwarranted worry

A new manager is hired. He has a great resume full of successful past roles. He is onboarded and runs a team of developers. He is given high-level documentation on the new company's features and requirements. As a new manager, he draws from past roles to make decisions on his new team, and in the beginning, things are running fine. He says the correct things in meetings and has the confidence to develop the next key feature.

However, as work progresses on the new feature there is a growing communication disconnect between the manager and other members of the team. As the feature is being developed and requirements are being met, everyone but the manager is happy with their progress. The manager is worried that the feature will not be completed, but everyone else seems not to be worried.

What is the disconnect between the new manager and the team?

The developers have been releasing code the whole time through a continuous release cycle. The feature was deployed but is behind a "feature flag" that only displays it when specified. This is the process of how features have been developed at the company before the new manager was hired. The new manager assumed features were released like how his previous company did through a waterfall version release of new code. The new manager did not know about the "feature flag" and never saw the feature's progression.

Once this disconnect was identified everyone was on the same page again about how features were released and the manager was reassured the feature was progressing.

The disconnect was a missing prerequisite in the feature development documentation. The manager was given high-level documentation of feature requirements, but was never given the prerequisite knowledge about development with "feature flags".

Having a knowledge base that stores skills by prerequisite would have made sure that all lower-level prerequisites were met before delivering high-level concepts.

The Advantages of Prerequisite Learning



Quicker Skill Learning

Presenting advanced skills before the basics slows down overall learning because the learner needs to fill gaps in their concept knowledge.



Identify Skill Gaps

Identifying gaps in an employees skills is critical to increasing performance. Also, identifying skill gaps across an organization better informs management on where to spend resources to meet skill requirements.



Change Management

As an organization grows its skills change. How do you communicate these skill changes across your organization? By ordering skills in a prerequisite chain, employees receive targeted notification on when a skill changes or a new skill is introduced in their prerequisite chain.



Clear Career Progression

It may not be clear to an employee or managers where an employee needs to grow. By organizing a company's skills by prerequisites a clear skill progression can be established. If an employee strives to level-up to a manager, they can easily see what skill are needed to achieve the promotion.



Reduced Risk

Documenting your organization's skills through a prerequisite tree better ensures your organization runs how you desire. Clearly calling out how a skill should be done makes sure rouge processes do not develop that increase company risk around quality or performance.



To keep a competitive edge, effective skill training through prerequisites is critical to an organization's growth.

Conclusion

Modern growing organizations need to establish clear processes to maintain repeatable success. Simply throwing advanced documentation at employees will create unknown knowledge gaps across your organization, leading to inconsistent results.

Organizing your processes by skill **prerequisites** ensures everyone at your organization is on the same page. Once you have strong process cohesion, your organization can repeat success and grow.