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## Customer-centered learning: GAP Matrix presentation

Aprendizagem centrada no cliente: apresentação da Matriz GAP

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## **Abstract**

**Objective:** to present a tool that is used as a compass in the professional learning process so that people can be able to deliver better results in their companies, jobs and, consequently, for themselves, contributing to economic development through education, employment and entrepreneurship. Materials and Methods: To validate the tool, a methodological research was performed using references from authors and scientists specialized in business, management, customer centricity and education. Results: the use of the tool provides the vision, the alignment, the practice and the continuous improvement of the knowledge necessary for the efficient execution of professional activities focused on what companies and especially clients demand, optimizing results and bringing meaning to professional learning. Final Considerations: technological changes, innovation and social changes, habits and consumption bring a new reality to people and the world of work. Alternatives are needed to assist us in the process of learning to learn, unlearning and relearning, so that we can capture all the value that this new world is generating and so that we are not left behind in the knowledge and development. The Customer Centricity Learning aims to be an efficient alternative.

**Keywords:** Learning. Customer. Education. Job. Entrepreneurship.

## Resumo

Objetivo: apresentar uma ferramenta que seja usada como bússola no processo de aprendizado profissional para que as pessoas possam ser capazes de entregar melhores resultados em suas empresas, empregos e, consequentemente, para si mesmas, contribuindo para o desenvolvimento econômico através da educação, do emprego e do empreendedorismo. Materiais e Métodos: para a elaboração da ferramenta foi realizada uma pesquisa metodológica utilizando referências de autores e cientistas especialistas em negócios, gestão, customer centricity e educação. Resultados: a utilização da ferramenta pode proporcionar a visão, o alinhamento, a prática e a melhoria contínua dos conhecimentos necessários para a eficiente execução das atividades profissionais voltadas para aquilo que as empresas e, principalmente, os clientes demandam, otimizando os resultados e trazendo sentido para o aprendizado profissional. Considerações Finais: as transformações tecnológicas, a inovação e as mudanças sociais, de hábitos e de consumo, trazem uma nova realidade para as pessoas e o mundo do trabalho. São necessárias alternativas que auxiliem as pessoas no processo de aprender a aprender, desaprender e reaprender, para que se possa capturar todo o valor que esse novo mundo está gerando e para que as pessoas não fiquem na retaguarda do conhecimento e do desenvolvimento. A Aprendizagem Centrada no Cliente se propõe a ser uma alternativa eficiente.

**Palavras-chave:** Aprendizagem. Cliente. Educação. Emprego. Empreendedorismo.



#### INTRODUCTION

The tool that you will access through this article, GAP Matrix, was created with a truly clear purpose: to make people happier and more fulfilled with their work, enhancing their ability to deliver results that generate value to others and to themselves. The GAP Matrix was based mainly on Customer-Centered Learning, an educational methodology focused on the development of technical and behavioral competencies. This methodology provides autonomy to execute a content curation and establish an individual development plan, aligned to the expectations of the customers who make the purchase decision.

It is imperative, in today's world of accelerated change, that the knowledge acquired is connected to the market, to the demands of companies, and to customers. Knowledge must be applicable and agile; it must make sense and empower people. It is necessary to learn by doing, testing and making mistakes, applying theory and practice in the search for better results in order to become competent in what one sets out to do<sup>1</sup>.

Any professional can become professionally obsolete if there is no adaptation to the new dynamics of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The forms of human relationships, work interactions, and business models are changing extremely fast, which requires a transformation in the format of teaching and learning. If professionals cannot keep up with these changes, they will remain in the background and never in the vanguard of knowledge<sup>2</sup>.

About the Fourth Industrial Revolution, Pires cites that it is potentiated by:

[...] unprecedented articulation of physical and digital resources and of a wide range of innovations that occur in the fields of biotechnology and the development of new materials. In this process, the advance of computerization, the cheapening of the cost of data treatment and storage, and the diffusion of

the Internet are the foundations on which the new society is being built.<sup>3</sup>

The formal education system has the challenge of reinventing itself to meet the demands of developing new skills for the 21st century; this adaptation will not necessarily take place only with the adoption of new technologies. It is essential to rethink the purpose of professional education - that which enables people to perform a productive activity - be it higher education, free courses, or any other format. There needs to be a greater connection with the people who will benefit from the use of our knowledge<sup>4</sup>.

Regardless of profession, age, gender, level of education, objectives, goals, or region, there is something in common when it comes to work: an organization's mission is to make other people's lives better. This goal is achieved by solving the problems they face in their daily lives, whether it is the search for better health, good nutrition, a vacation trip, a new house, or a change in profession<sup>5</sup>.

Individual effort connected to the effort of other people can make possible goals that would be unattainable by a single person. This combination is known as an organization, which can be, for example, a company6. The execution of work in such organizations should be purpose-focused, that is:

[...] in the general mission of any organization, which is "to satisfy needs of human beings". The satisfaction of these needs is the goal of any organization, private or public. The great problems of human organizations lie in our inability to fulfill this mission.

A group of people organize themselves to deliver a solution that solves another group's problem, where the first group gets paid for it. The people who have their problems solved through the work are known as Customers. In this article, the term "problem" is used to designate the needs and desires of clients that must be



met in order to enhance the ability of professionals to be paid for it. The more and better our clients' problems are solved, the more and better people will be remunerated for it<sup>8</sup>.

If people work for a company and do not understand what their part is in solving the customer's problem - who is also your customer - or perhaps, don't know what the needs and wants of the external customer your company serves are in fact, this article is the opportunity for these people to change their mindset<sup>9</sup>.

All learning to be useful must be able to solve a problem. Based on Edgar Morin<sup>10</sup>, quoted in the book Trends in People Management in the Knowledge Society, the authors argue that: "rather than the accumulation of knowledge, the differentiator is the general aptitude to deal with problems, as well as the ability to organize knowledge and give it meaning".

In this sense, the objective of this article is to present a tool that considers customer-centered learning called "GAP Matrix", which allows people to discover what makes sense in their knowledge development process aimed at the growth of their professional career and their life. The use of the tool as a compass, allied with the execution of knowledge and learning in practice, and the constant reflection on the results achieved, can generate benefits, such as time savings, pleasure in learning, professional and personal development, and create a cycle of continuous improvement and inputs for innovation.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is a methodological study that consists in the creation of a tool with the intent of optimizing learning with a focus on results. Anyone interested in understanding the context of their learning - why, how, and what to learn - as well as creating a learning path that improves the results of the knowledge acquired, can and should use the Matrix. Students can use the Matrix to optimize their education process, and professionals can use it to accelerate their development based on the knowledge valued by the market or to learn a new topic important for their career.

The GAP Matrix was established using management concepts and methodologies recognized as best practices in the business world. The steps of the Matrix and its references are:

- 1. Customer Focus: focus on customer problems also known as customer wants and needs based on the concept of *Customer Centricity*.
- 2. *Benchmarks*: search and assimilation of the best market practices in solving these problems, through benchmarks.
- 2.1 Diagnosis and Resolution: investigation of the client's problem through diagnosis and subsequent resolution of that problem.
- 2.1.1 Definition of the Processes, Tools and Indicators of the customer problem diagnosis journey.
- 2.1.1.1 Action Plan: definition of the Action Plan or Learning Plan from the Diagnostic stage;
- 2.1.2 Definition of Processes, Tools and Indicators of the customer's problem resolution journey;
- 2.1.2.1 Action Plan: definition of the Action Plan or Learning Plan from the Resolution step.

Item 2 and its developments were established based on the PDCA method - *Plan, Do, Check, Act* and the Management Tripod - People, Processes and Technology. References were searched in the areas of business management, education, and development of people through leadership and training, delimiting, with rare exceptions, the publication period to the last ten years. The research steps followed the same time logic as the sequence of steps for understanding the tool, as mentioned above.



**Figure 1** – GAP Matrix.



# **GAP MATRIX**

DEVELOPED BY BRUNO GARCIA ANTUNES

#### **BENCHMARK**

Internship / Job / Project Entrepreneurship Courses Internet Books Networking

ROCESSES / STEPS	TOOLS (METHODS, TECHNIQUES AND TECHNOLOGY.) What methods, techniques and technology are used in the	ACTION PLAN
What are the customer's problems? What information do you need to make sure you can meet them?	stages of diagnosing and solving the client's problem?	Based on the previous steps, establish your Learning Journ
	INDICATORS / RESULTS  What are the performance indicators that need to be measured to ensure the quality of your work?	

## **RESULTS**

#### How to fill in the GAP Matrix?

To start filling out the GAP Matrix tool, it is necessary to do a mental exercise: imagine your customer sitting in front of you with the desire to hire your services or buy your products to solve his problem.

What product or service would that be? This product or service needs to be as close to reality as possible. This is not the time to innovate or think of new ways to satisfy the customer. Think about how you or the market is solving the customer's problem today. This step is important so that you can establish your learning benchmarks in the Benchmark step.

Access to the best practices performed by companies or people of reference will give you the basis to answer questions such as: What are the processes that you must perform to ensure the perfect delivery of the product or service to the customer? What are the tools that will help you in the execution of the process? What are the indicators that will ensure the efficiency of the process?

What are the results expected by the customer?

For the complete and perfect filling of the tool, you should consider the Benchmarks as an important reference; this will provide conditions to establish an action plan focused on learning what will really add



value to your client. You will have in your hands an enormously powerful plan that, with dedication, focus, and discipline, can make you an above average professional.

The steps "Customer" and "Benchmarks" are established only once; they are the basis of the following steps. "Processes", "Tools" and "Performance Indicators and Expected Results" are steps that are divided into two distinct moments: they are initially completed in the diagnosis phase of the customer's problem and then in the execution phase of the solution.

## **Step - Customer**

What problem does your customer want to solve?

Does he want to build a house? Is he sick? Does he want to make investments? Does he want to have a healthier life? Does he want to have a wedding party? Does he want to sell more? Does he have a toothache? Does he need legal advice?

As cited by Oliveira *et al.*<sup>11</sup>, "In the last decades, organizations have been trying to understand customers' needs and desires, and this has happened because the customer has taken the central role in the buying and selling process". Regardless of what your customer's problem is, there are two phases you need to master to understand and satisfy his needs: diagnosis and resolution.

The diagnostic phase is when you understand his problem. What are the customer's requirements? What are their wants and needs? What are their pains? What are the emotions involved in this problem? How can you help him solve this problem? This is the phase where you conduct an analysis, create a plan, and/or design a project.

In the resolution phase, you will act to solve the problem identified in the diagnosis phase. Here you will

execute what was analyzed, planned and designed together with the client, delivering what you promised. Therefore, it is particularly important to ensure the perfect alignment of expectations between you and the client in the diagnosis phase, as this can compromise the resolution phase.

## Step - Benchmark

This is the moment when you identify the referential. These are people or organizations that have already walked the path you want to follow and can teach you the mistakes and successes they have made. Learning from those who have already done it and obtained results will save you time and generate high value learning

According to Mendes Neto<sup>12</sup>, "benchmarking is an organizational management tool that brings alternatives to improve processes, products, and services in search of market excellence. This improvement seeks to increase the performance and competitiveness of companies by learning the best practices in the market<sup>13</sup>.

What is the possibility that there is already a company or person that is currently focused on solving the same customer problem that you are? This possibility is exceptionally large. We are not analyzing here the companies' Business Model innovation, the focus in this step is to identify the best market practices so that they can be your learning reference.

Some important questions need to be answered: Which companies are market leaders solving the same problem you want to solve? Which companies or people are references in technical knowledge when solving this problem? Which companies or people are recognized by the market as having the best practices in a certain activity?



## **Step - Processes**

According to Falconi<sup>7</sup> process is "a sequence of added values that results in the final product (internal or external)". This is the moment where you should align your learning process. This is where a logical sequence of steps to solve your customer's problem should be established.

Imagine that your customer is sitting in front of you, what questions should you ask to understand his problem? What information do you need to have to ensure that you are able to serve the customer?

According to Amarilla and Neto<sup>14</sup>, "the detailed view of processes is important to understand the flow of tasks in the business process". Still according to the authors, it is necessary to "design your processes to better serve the customer".

Based on the information and knowledge acquired through the Benchmarks, you should complete the step-by-step diagnostic phase and then the resolution phase. As you complete and apply the steps of the GAP Matrix, feeding back into the tool with your new learnings and experiences, your ability to identify best practices and propose innovations increases.

## **Step - Tools**

In the Tools field, the methods, techniques or technologies that can help you do your job must be established. Each area of activity has its tools that are already used by professionals in the area and that have proven their effectiveness in the search for better results.

These tools can be, for example, software, such as spreadsheets, a method for measuring concrete strength, a technique for extracting a tooth, a management method, or a Strategic Planning tool.

## Step - Performance indicators and expected results

Performance indicators are parameters that demonstrate, through quantitative and qualitative results, whether processes are being carried out efficiently. These parameters can be used as references that indicate which results should be achieved. They allow the measurement of results, helping in the analysis of actions and in decision making. Sá<sup>15</sup> addresses the relevance of the use of monitoring and verification resources, "[...] such as indicators and their metrics, which enhance the effectiveness administrative and knowledge management, raising the company's levels of effectiveness".

Some important questions need to be answered: What are the performance indicators that need to be measured to ensure the quality of your work? Which ones represent your customer's needs and desires? Which ones demonstrate that you are creating value for your customer? Which ones measure the main variables of the process: time, money, quality, and quantity?

## **Step - Action Plan**

In this step, you define a logical sequence of learning that makes sense and that will ensure your knowledge is up to date, interconnected, and aligned with industry best practices, optimizing your ability to deliver consistent results for your client. You will learn what really matters to raise your level of results delivery. What should you learn to improve your client's satisfaction and results, and therefore yours as well? Amidst so much information that can sometimes contribute to leaving us lost in our career development, this action plan will be a guide.

#### DISCUSSION

When analyzing the organizational environment, one notices the prominence of companies



that adopt customer-centric strategies, known as Customer Centricity.

Evaluate the essence of the performance of the new generation of leading companies and note how these organizations have taken this vision to its ultimate consequences, raising the level of customer relationships to a level never witnessed. <sup>16</sup>

For many years, companies created products from the inside out, that is, based on their competencies and capabilities, they took charge of creating products and services and then convinced their customers to buy them. In today's world, where the customer is better informed and has more options for solutions and brands, he becomes more demanding and wants these solutions to be customized. To keep up with these changes, it is now necessary for companies to create products and services from the outside in, by deeply knowing the needs and desires of their customers. Organizations that use this strategy have a greater ability to create superior value for their customers through deep insights generated by connecting with those customers.

People and organizations:

[...] They can no longer spot the best opportunities, attract the best customers, or compete most effectively by looking only from the inside out. Products and processes, [...] need to start and orbit around the customer.<sup>17</sup>

Understanding customer behavior, their needs and desires, what problems they want to solve, and from there taking charge of developing creative, assertive solutions that make the customer's life easier, should be the focus of people's professional learning18; one must take the focus off oneself and put it on the customer. The exercise of self-knowledge and the search for a purpose must be used to deliver the best version of people to the client and not to themselves. Improving the lives of the people around us becomes the cause;

reaping the benefits of this in our careers becomes the consequence<sup>19</sup>.

Having empathy and love for others is a process of personal evolution; in business it becomes a criterion for survival. Therefore, for knowledge development to make sense, it must be focused on understanding and solving our customers' problems. Therefore, the term Customer-Centric Learning.

The search for more effective actions that generate better results for customers and other stakeholders requires mature organizational management: "Regardless of the organizational area, it is the management tripod that sustains a company: people using technologies and processes to achieve results "20. The management tripod is one of the bases for the construction of Customer-Centered Learning. People and their development are the finalistic objective of this proposal. The technology, the processes, and their performance indicators are support steps to conduct the necessary learning to achieve better results in the career and, consequently, in personal life.

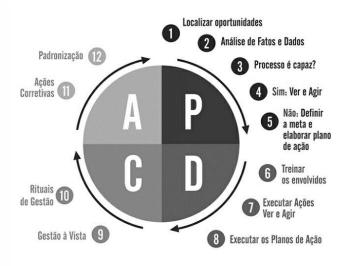
The GAP Matrix is intended to be a tool for continuous learning through the diagnosis and resolution of customer problems. To consolidate the vision of continuous improvement and some of its developments, customer-centric learning also has its bases in the PDCA (Plan, Do, Check and Act) method of management, a cycle with 4 major steps: Planning, Execution, Verification and Action. The PDCA Cycle:

[...] is a methodology that has as its basic function the aid in the diagnosis, analysis and prognosis of organizational problems, being extremely useful for problem solving. Few instruments are as effective in the search for improvement as this method of continuous improvement, considering that it leads to systematic actions that speed up the achievement of better results [...].<sup>21</sup>



According to Godoy and Bessas6, PDCA is a method for identifying and capturing opportunities, as per figure Z.

Figure 2 - PDCA Cycle.



Godoy and Bessas, 2018.

To identify the problem to be solved, it must first be understood. This is the diagnosis step in the GAP Matrix that, in the PDCA, would be equivalent to the Planning step. After understanding the problem, the customer's needs and desires, the search for a resolution begins, the execution of what the customer demands; in PDCA this is the execution stage. Other important points are the performance indicators, which monitor and inform whether the actions are achieving the expected results - Verification Stage - and the Action Plan: a series of actions to be carried out in search of continuous improvement.

The construction of the tool presented here and its stages, as well as the references researched, were based on the following reflections:

1. The current scenario of education, the competencies required by the market, and the process of learning and development of these competencies by people were analyzed. Authors with practical and contemporary proposals were researched: Ram Charan, Paula

Laudares, Paulette Melo, Victor Ferreira, and Ana Paula Gomes.

- 2. We sought to identify a learning objective that would focus this process and enable the creation of a unique tool that could be used by anyone, regardless of their area of training, contributing to a learning process with greater capacity to deliver better results using the knowledge acquired. The goal identified was to satisfy the customers' needs through the solution of their problems. In accordance with this objective, the rise of the term "Customer Centricity" was observed in the literature, with the authors Sandro Magaldi and José Salibi Neto as experts on the subject and references in this research.
- 3. The solution of the identified problems was divided into stages in order to facilitate the learning process and;
- 3.1 Define crucial points in the learning process, based on the best practices of companies, to ensure improvement in the ability to solve customer problems.
- 3.2 Establish an action plan that could also be called a Learning Plan, based on the completion of the previous items.

PDCA and the management tripod are used by companies as methods of continuous improvement and support for problem-solving processes. The main authors on this subject are Vicente Falconi, Raimundo Godoy, Cláudia Bessas, Neuza Chaves and Ana Paula Pacheco. Because this is a new theme, the rise of the customer to the center of business, and also because of the constant change in the discussions about business and management models, most of the references presented here are from the last 10 years. The authors and materials were selected based on their professional background and social and intellectual relevance to the topics addressed.



Professionals who do not develop competencies aligned with the new market demands run the risk of becoming irrelevant to customers<sup>22</sup>. The new economy based on transformations, such as the digital one, has demonstrated the need for continuous learning that gives people autonomy and teaches learning how to learn and unlearn<sup>23</sup>; learning ceases to be mass learning and becomes individualized<sup>24</sup>. The search for knowledge should be the search for learning how to be useful to people<sup>25</sup>.

One of the main motivators for the creation of the tool presented was the absence of something similar in the literature to help people perform content curation, especially in a world with information overload26. There are methodologies for personalizing learning, focused on the individual, that address the "How" and the "What" people should learn. However, these are defined based on factors external to the individual, rather than internal. People can choose what to learn, but within a limited number of options that are predefined based on generic factors - based on the average.

The learning process must give the individual the autonomy to also define the "Why" to learn, in addition to ensuring that the knowledge is always aligned with the demands and evolutions of the market and society in real time, absorbed at the source. The methods used to develop the GAP Matrix brought the vision of customer focus, continuous learning, problem solving, and good market practices, among other aspects, to present a proposal with social value and relevance to the current scenario of education and work. The tool should be used in greater volume and in different scenarios to enable evolutions in its proposal.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

After analyzing contemporary themes in the literature, it was observed the need to create tools that

focus on the learning process, effectively meeting customer demands. The combination of validated methods, mental models, and reference tools gave rise to the GAP Matrix that met what it set out to deliver.

The reader may be asking himself: what about innovation? What about process automation? What about the use of *Business Intelligence*? What about new business models? Initially, professionals should focus on understanding the customer; think about the fundamentals of business and how the people and organizations of reference, which have the best practices in the industry, operate. Based on the knowledge of the processes, competencies, and technology involved in the creation of a product or service, as well as the understanding of the client's needs, desires, and behavior, people will have a better foundation to generate the innovations demanded by the market.

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