

THE EVOLUTION OF WORKPLACE LEARNING

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LEARNING

1.0

What's your vision of learning? Monastic study within Medieval Europe? Or the enforced grind of a 19th Century English boarding school? Or maybe you're thinking of the soulless churn of 20th Century mass education. I hope you're thinking of something more personalized. How personalized is the training in your workplace? Sadly, most workplaces inherit the dysfunctional formality of old-style methods or resort to half-hearted attempts to repackage information using generic office technologies. Or perhaps your workplace exemplifies the worst of both worlds ...

LEARNING

2.0

What's the new vision of learning? More importantly, how does vision affect the way you learn? Most new techniques tap into people's innate ability to understand by picturing and mapping complicated ideas. More ideas can be juggled in the mind. Making connections between ideas is easier. Lessons stick in memory better. As importantly, more learning revolves around dialogue groups, networks, and communities. Learning is no longer just an isolated and passive absorption of information. It is also a rich co-creation and application of new knowledge.

BULLET-POINT PRESENTATIONS

Presenters read-out lists from the screen. Text snippets are disjointed. The audience's ability to cognitively absorb ideas is limited. The result is usually boredom. Time to check the BlackBerry.

INFO-DUMP

Large quantities of text are foisted upon learners. Most of it goes unread and valuable lessons get lost in the pile.

RECYCLED E-LEARNING

Instead of tailoring content to the medium, old text documents are simply repackaged for online consumption. Too much time is spent reading long documents on computer screens. There is little interaction and engagement.

VISUAL EXPLANATION

Ideas are explained visually with information graphics, photographs, and other visual aids. Visualization forces the speaker to orchestrate words and visuals into clear and coherent messages and frameworks. Complicated ideas are better understood, easier to fit together, and more memorable.

SOCIAL NETWORKS & COMMUNITIES

Web-based social-networking technologies (blogs, wikis, and such) put large quantities of facts at people's fingertips and facilitate online conversations. Communities of practice meet online and face-to-face in order to steward a body of practical knowledge, teaching new members in the process. New ideas and perspectives are brought to bear on problems.

GRAPHIC FACILITATION

Facilitators help people visualize their ideas on-the-fly and teach them visualization skills. This helps them see patterns and craft ideas into coherent stories. People find it easier to come to agreement and understand complex concepts because are less likely to quibble about the meaning of vague terms and jargon.

IMPRACTICALITY

Lessons learned are abstract and difficult to apply. The relevance is not always obvious.

REAL WORK PROBLEM

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MEMORIZE & REGURGITATE

Rote studying does little to stimulate the imagination and lessons are quickly forgotten.

SINK-OR-SWIM ON-THE-JOB TRAINING

Left to themselves, veterans have little time and inclination to train successors. The pressure to fill vacant positions means unprepared employees learn the ropes with risky and unproductive coping. Many wheels are reinvented and past experiences ignored.

AIMLESS CHAT SESSIONS

Instead of deep debate, learners talk past each other and go off on pointless tangents. There is no focus. People are expected to learn from each other but usually get few substantive lessons.

MEANINGLESS EXERCISES

Many traditional group exercises are contrived and have only a superficial relevance to work activities. Employees often think of these exercises as phoney and just go through the motions. Time to check that BlackBerry again.

