Chapter I

The Corporate Learning Environment

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Editors’ Notes

Jerry and Deniz give an excellent overview of the corporate learning environment. We found their deep understanding and thorough analysis very informative. Their clear and lucid presentation of the field concludes with a framework for corporate learning environments. Within its context, a number of critical issues are discussed and readers are asked to use their critical thinking to further exploit the communicated meanings.

We invite you to comment on their proposition about the required actions and steps for developing the corporate learning environment. At the end of this chapter, a critical shift in your thinking will be evident. You will require more guidance on how socio-technical systems and applied informatics can support such a framework in real-world situations.

Since you will acknowledge that Jerry and Deniz describe the rich picture for the requirements and the directions toward corporate learning environments, you will be thirsty for the contents of the next chapter, which incrementally contributes to our vision for the learning organization of the 21st century.

Many additional resources and a case study are provided at the end of the chapter. We are certain that you could spend many hours with these materials, and we encourage you to do so. The authors will be delighted to receive your comments.
Abstract

Emerging technology has changed the focus of corporate learning systems from task-based, procedural training to knowledge-intensive problem-solving with deep conceptual learning. In addition, the deployment of open systems and distributing processing are adding new stresses to learning systems that can barely keep pace with the current rate of change. Learning environments to address these challenges are viewed within a framework of the conventional learning curve, in which different learning elements are required to support different levels of expertise. An adaptive development model for creating and sustaining a learning environment is proposed that consists of the iterative application of three phases: (1) analysis and reflection, (2) architecture inception and revision, and (3) alignment. The model relies on the notion that analysis deals as much with synthesis and learning as it does with decomposition. We conclude that the concept of a “learning environment” provides a viable construct for making sense of the array of systems designed to support knowledge management, document management, e-learning, and performance support. A learning environment with a well-defined architecture can guide the convergence of multiple systems into a seamless environment providing access to content, multimedia learning modules, collaborative workspaces, and other forms of learning support. Finally, we see future learning environments consisting of networks of databases housing content objects, elegant access to the content, ubiquitous virtual spaces, and authoring tools that enable content vendors, guilds, and universities to rapidly develop and deliver a wide range of learning artifacts.

Introduction

In recent years, the importance of knowledge as a source of sustainable competitive advantage has been discussed by a myriad of authors (Drucker, 1993; Leonard-Barton, 1992; Nelson, 1991; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Prahalad & Hamel, 1990). In a knowledge-based economy, the new coin of the realm is continuous learning. Today’s companies have been exhorted to consider knowledge creation a source of competitive advantage by building a corporate learning environment that focuses on the requirements of knowledge workers in order to meet the demands of the post-industrial information economy. As Reich (1998) notes:

Want to build a business that can outlive its first good idea? Create a culture that values learning. Want to build a career that allows you to grow into new responsibilities? Maintain your hunger to learn — and join an organization where you will be given the chance to learn continuously. (p.198)

This chapter presents a conceptual framework for creating and sustaining a viable corporate learning environment (see Figure 1). This framework integrates the various
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