

Chapter 13

E-Learning Design for the Information Workplace

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ABSTRACT

Anytime and all-the-time access to electronic resources, artifacts and community have changed learning practices in the workplace as surely as it has changed the workplace itself. Learning today is measured not by what we know, but by how successfully we tap into our network to find the information we need in the moment we need it. The business environment now demands anytime and just-in-time answers at all levels of the organization. In response to new expectations within the information-rich workplace, the organization must look to a new practice of comprehensive design for a shared knowledge architecture that can leverage the digital tools, methods and effective practices now available. To understand not simply technology but the affordance (Norman, 1988; Carmean & McGee, 2008) and effective use of each technology now available, a new design practice is needed. Current digital learners seek practices, resources and help in navigating the shared knowledge flow and have little training or support in understanding the network of information available. If anytime, anywhere, and from any source is a new e-learning paradigm in the digital workplace (Cross, 2006), then the challenge for a new breed of designers will be to help the digital learner to find, understand and create the shared knowledge embedded within local and global networked resources.

INTRODUCTION

“In the connected world, experts are people who know where to find information, how to make sense of it and what to do with it” claim Rennie

& Mason (2004, p. 42). In the workplace, this expertise is now demanded of office workers as it becomes increasingly crucial to enterprise success. Unlike the worker’s educational experiences, the demands of the digital workplace are creating practices that increasingly reject a formal learning experience and look to *just-in-time* or immediate,

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-60566-788-1.ch013

applied answers to real world needs. Practice that includes finding, creating, sharing, vetting and synthesizing is a new and little understood learning paradigm for dynamic, distributed and interconnected organizations (Allee, 2002; Cross, 2006; Siemens, 2006).

Along with providing the technology and anytime access to needed information, enterprise learning models have shifted from valuing information receipt in a taught environment to looking to a communal and immersive culture of independent discovery (Reiser & Dempsey, 2002). Learners no longer need to wait for training and formal knowledge transfer to come to them. With its vast volumes of information, affordable storage, reliable search logic and high-speed connection to a distributed community of practice, the Internet has changed how, where and when we learn (see Brown, 2000; Norris, Mason, & Lefrere, 2004; G. Siemens, 2005). The digital worker, connected to networked decisions and responsibilities, no longer has the time or luxury for just-in-case learning. Instead, workplace expectations include the demand for dynamic collaboration, solutions and real-world applied knowledge. The digital worker now looks for digital resources to be available within and beyond the enterprise network. In response to this need, organizational support for learning must rethink the tools and services provided. A digital learning architecture must ensure that the independent learner has the skills and resources needed to adapt to a new learning paradigm.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Access to people, solutions, ideas and file sharing now requires a sophisticated skill set to make effective use of the inherent capabilities of the network. Brown (2000) suggests that our ability to use the Web to find information and build from it to create something more is a practice of *bricolage* in cobbling together an understanding from pieces

known. This distributed e-knowledge practice defines a shift in learning and knowledge creation where knowledge is seen as an act of finding what is needed, rather than being expected to know. In this author's research in knowledge architecture, Carmean (2008) explores the emergence-based properties of this new paradigm and proposes a new practice in knowledge management that includes a systems design for shared knowledge to better prepare learners for effective practice in learning bricolage. To effectively use the tools and practices within shared knowledge architecture, stronger information literacy would be expected of the learner. New skills in digital collaboration will be increasingly demanded in the next generation workplace (Carlile, 2002). Monitoring, contributing and synthesizing information are core skills expected but not yet taught in the connected information age.

Similarly, learning *design* for this self-directed and just-in-time practice is a relatively unexplored framework within the traditional performance metrics found in the workplace. Face to face or online, trainers, knowledge managers, and learning designers seldom step outside the instructor-led experience despite an industry desire for learning to more strategically "happen within the flow of work through the tools used in the workplace" (McStravick, p. 7). In the workplace, support for distributed, solutions-based learning is still a relatively unexplored field of inquiry and many questions remain regarding effective learner participation, collaboration, evaluation and outcomes (Nworie & Dwyer, 2004; Sims, 2006; Kays & Sims, 2006). Much research needs to be done on the effective use of tools, practices and processes that better enable creation and support for anytime, collaborative learning and shared knowledge (Kozma, 2000; Gold, 2001; Grudin, 2006; Braun, 2006).

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