



Chapter XII

Learning Maturity: Incorporating Technological Influences in Individual and Organizational Learning Theory

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ABSTRACT

An explosion of research on the organizational learning paradigm has caused a great need for continued theoretical development to enable a more complete understanding of how to manage the concept for strategic advantage. At the same time, learning theory has not adequately addressed the technology variable in its framework, models, or propositions. The body of theory derived here centers around “learning maturity,” the capacity of an actor to effectively exhibit intelligent behavior in a wide range of situated actions. The theory is significant because it uniquely includes technology as a meaningful element in learning and intelligence. The research methodology uses over a century of published literature to

serve as a “learning history” of an observed organization: the learning research community. The theory extends decades of cumulative research by focusing on the capabilities of actors to succeed in their interactions (use and development) with technology.

INTRODUCTION

An explosion of research on learning has recently been observed in the organization and information sciences. The concept has served as a theoretical foundation for studies involving adaptive behaviors of organizations and their members who strive to compete in the ever-turbulent information society (Templeton & Snyder, 1999). At the same time, learning theory has not adequately addressed the technology variable in its framework, models, or propositions. This incompleteness of theoretical application is evidenced by several problems in the field, such as relatively few accepted definitions and measures of learning (Templeton, Lewis, & Snyder, 2002), despite its long tradition. The crisis can only be alleviated by attempts at providing more complete theories on learning.

The purpose of this chapter is to report on a theory that respects the profound influences that technology has had on learning theory and report what this means to both individual and organizational learners. A synthesis of the literature resulted in several conceptualizations about learning. Among them:

- a history of learning research at both individual and collective levels of analysis
- the major periods and eras of theoretical development in learning research
- some major specific contributions upon which prominent learning theory is based
- effects of technological change on the evolution of learning theory
- a theory of learning maturity

The technology-inclusive theory of learning presented here is called *learning maturity*, the capacity of an actor to effectively exhibit intelligent behavior in a wide range of situated actions. In the spirit of Kleiner and Roth's (1997) “learning histories” methodology, this chapter attempts to document major events, contributions, and themes found in individual and organizational learning theory. In this vein, the presented “learning history” of the learning field of research serves as the empirical basis upon which theory is developed. Throughout the discussion, several major contributions are made through the synergistic construction of themes found in the history of discourse on learning theory.

The derived theory and its associated concepts are important because they help explain the essence of learning at both levels of analysis. It is a unique

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