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Change on the Horizon

Trends that will shape learning in 2010 • BY JOSH BERSIN



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The coming year will bring dramatic changes to corporate learning. Here are the biggest trends to consider as you make learning resolutions.

Formalize informal learning. New training programs must incorporate elements of social learning, embedded learning, on-demand learning, coaching and performance support.

Formalizing informal learning is an imperative for all training organizations in 2010. Doing so will likely touch many aspects of the organization and could require you to revamp the instructional design process, retrain and reallocate staffers, re-evaluate the role of off-the-shelf content, reallocate budget dollars and more.

Embrace social learning. Social learning is one of many elements of informal learning but deserves special focus because of its pervasiveness in our culture. With so many employees now accustomed to using Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, blogs and wikis, many organizations are leveraging these and similar tools. These include The Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland, BT, Sun, Microsoft, Accenture, Qualcomm and Cisco.

To get started, organizations must first embrace “we-learning” and its collaborative philosophy. Accept that some of the best knowledge resources are found within the company; employees often learn best from peers and credible subject-matter experts; and powerful learning can transpire when people collaborate.

Communities of practice, wikis, blogs, discussion groups and expert directories are just a few of the ways to help employees solve problems faster while bringing new efficiencies to learning. While many of these tools are already standard for IT and other types of technical training, consider them for all other types of training, including managerial, leadership and certification.

Focus on deep specialization. The recession has forced us to cut back on many training and infrastructure investments. As a result, focus is on the programs that drive greatest business value.

Unexpectedly, some organizations are finding an upside to budget cuts. Doing less means they can focus on building deeper levels of expertise in their audiences. Businesses that have done well over the last year have focused on core competencies, such as product design, engineering, consulting, research, sales and marketing. CLOs have the opportunity in

2010 to re-engineer programs for even greater levels of specialization.

A case in point is the worldwide on-boarding program for wind engineers and support professionals at Vestas Wind Systems. As one of the world’s fastest growing energy companies, Vestas needs to hire thousands of professionals worldwide. Its products are highly engineered (consider the fact that a wind turbine blade the length of a football field can only have a few millimeters of variance). The company has invested millions of dollars in a global on-boarding program that teaches new hires about all the important elements of wind energy and power distribution. Vestas will continue to be successful in 2010, in part because of its attention to specialization. IBM, Accenture and Boeing are among organizations with similar stories.

Recognize this is a period for technology transition. Changes in program design, learning delivery and implementation require highly flexible learning platforms. Traditional LMS, LCMS and learning portals are being revolutionized. Additionally, most companies also want to integrate their learning technology platforms with talent management solutions.

Consequently, most learning and HR technology providers are in the middle of major transitions. This may require patience with an LMS provider, connecting a current solution to SharePoint or another social networking system and stitching together the technology pieces necessary to meet immediate needs. As the platform market continues to evolve, take a pragmatic approach and recognize that some investments will likely have a fairly short lifespan.

Do less with less — and then do more. Over the past year, most L&D organizations have been downsized, forcing them to do less with less. This actually has been a healthy process, according to many executives. For example, a senior HR executive for a large event services company told us that she consolidated the company’s training team from more than 150 people to only 40. After much process redesign, the team is actually more productive than before.

If economic recovery continues, budgets will gradually begin to grow. Nearly 70 percent of all the companies we surveyed in 2009 told us they were reorganizing their L&D teams for efficiency. When budgets do grow, these new structures can be used to deliver more efficient programs. **CLO**