

# Do We Make Learning Easier or Harder?

Positioning your learning assets • BY BOB MOSHER



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I recently spent some time with an organization examining the many learning offerings they'd assembled for their learners. The latest and greatest option was in the distance learning arena. The potential was staggering and the implementation was impressive. Still, I had to ask myself: "Would the addition of this tool really help, considering all the other impressive learning assets I had already observed?"

More and more learning organizations are taking the time to step back and look at the learning environment they've created. They are asking themselves three very important questions:

1. What learning options have we made available?
2. How well do they complement each other?
3. What results are we getting?

Although each offering is designed to support employees throughout the learning process, do these efforts make learning easier or harder?

We live in a "more is better" world. More technology, more information, more resources, more collaboration, more connectivity — the list goes on and on. The danger is when "more" becomes the driver, instead of effective learning. Orchestrating what exists and knowing when to stop adding is essential to a successful overall strategy.

There are a few key things to consider throughout this analysis. First, are the learners we serve aware of all that's available? I can't tell you how many learning organizations I've worked with that weren't fully aware of all that was offered. One of the more eye-opening parts of this analysis is that many find that the most effective tools used throughout the enterprise may not live under their domains. Many find powerful learning assets that have been created, distributed and maintained within the business units themselves. Getting organized and having a better understanding of exactly what's available is a critical first step.

The next question is do we have too much? Is the amount and complexity of the assets themselves getting in the way of making our learners successful and productive? Redundant systems are helpful in some areas and cause confusion in others. As

I've mentioned many times in this column, we often spend more time designing and adding learning assets than we do teaching how and when to use them.

To maximize these assets, this instruction needs to occur on three levels. The most obvious is at the learner level. The next is the organization's hierarchy, especially the learner's manager and, finally, our trainers and the learning organization itself.

I've watched many learning assets demonstrated in a classroom but never truly taught in the context in which it was meant to be used. I've observed managers telling their reports to stop wasting time with a performance-support tool so they can get back to real work. I've also seen employees waste co-workers' valuable time helping them with a problem when a more effective and less costly option was available. In each

case, stakeholders were not taught how to introduce and use the asset properly.

Finally, one last thing to consider is the accessibility of each asset. Some are simply hidden or poorly orchestrated. This allows two dangerous things to occur: First, we encourage

poor learning behaviors, and second, we unfairly represent the true power of each asset. If we observed our learners trying to navigate throughout the learning process, we would be surprised at how poorly many of them perform. They often choose the path of least resistance, which may be the least effective and most costly.

Because of these behaviors, many also develop a negative attitude toward a particular learning asset simply because they are using it incorrectly. E-learning faced this challenge throughout most of the 1990s. It often was hidden behind poorly deployed learning management systems and incorrectly positioned as a just-in-time learning asset. The combination of these approaches poorly positioned this highly effective asset across many organizations.

The most instructionally sound learning asset can be ineffective if it's misused or poorly positioned. Our role is to help empower our learners to be productive as quickly and consistently as possible. Sometimes that involves getting out of our own way and simplifying the entire process. **CLO**

## DID YOU KNOW?

Use of e-learning in organizations rose to nearly 18 percent this year, up from 15 percent in 2007.

*Source: Chief Learning Officer Business Intelligence Board survey*