

Learning Connections

Build relationships in troubled times • BY TAMAR ELKELES



Tamar Elkeles is vice president of Qualcomm's Learning Center and the author of The Chief Learning Officer: Driving Value Within a Changing Organization Through Learning and Development. She can be reached at editor@clomedia.com.

Q: Reports have surfaced lately indicating that during times of crisis, people seek increased human connection. For the learning organization, this means more face-to-face time. What are some ways companies are responding to this need while maintaining their learning budgets? Does this mean a rise in classroom sessions, mentoring or social learning?

– Howard

A: There will always be a need for human interaction, especially in the workplace. Work is about people, and people will always find ways to connect. Learning programs and other developmental experiences are great opportunities to leverage information sharing and relationship building among employees. It doesn't have to cost a lot of money to create experiences for employees to connect. Many companies conduct internal conferences on specific topics, such as engineering or sales, to share information and build employee relationships. Some companies have internal trade shows to enable employees to share their knowledge and projects. Other companies use their own leaders to teach employees about leadership or company values. Recently, some companies have sponsored internal social learning networks to encourage employee connections. Whatever the method, it is a learning leader's role to facilitate information sharing across the organization: After all, information sharing generates lots of human interaction.

Q: How can progressive organizations benefit from being or becoming a "learning organization"? What are the advantages and disadvantages to this concept?

– Roy

A: A "learning organization" is an organization that values learning and embeds learning into its culture. Leaders in these organizations understand and commit to learning as a core value for company success. That doesn't mean these companies spend the most money on learning and development, nor do they necessarily have large learning staffs or departments. Rather, they are companies that systemically support learning initiatives, programs and results. Companies that are learning organizations tend to have higher employee engagement, higher productivity, more innovation, better leaders and higher financial performance. I can't think of any disadvantages to that.

It doesn't have to cost a lot of money to create experiences for employees to connect.

Q: It seems 2010 is the year of mobile learning. How are learning professionals bringing mobile content and mobile surveys to their audiences, and what are some best practices for measuring it?

– Bob

A: Mobile learning has been around for several years. It really refers to any learning that isn't tethered, whether it occurs on laptops, smart books, e-books, smart phones or other wireless devices. The use of laptops for learning has been happening for a long time, but moving content to devices such as mobile phones is more recent — and difficult. Companies that are deploying learning for mobile phones are typically customizing the content for company-issued equipment. While data usage on mobile phones is up, the size of the screen and the interactivity on mobile phones is still developing, which limits some of the functionality. Additionally, the diversity of devices in the marketplace and the lack of standardization of applications have an impact on standard content deployment. Before we begin the debate on how to measure online learning on mobile phones, we need to get more online learning content on those devices. 

ASK TAMAR

Have a question for Tamar Elkeles? Send an e-mail to editor@clomedia.com, and she'll answer your question in an upcoming column. Please note that due to space constraints, the editors may be unable to publish responses to all questions submitted.