

On the Road Again

No matter the location, we must become change agents and promoters • BY JAY CROSS



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Over the course of 18 days in December 2010, I took part in learning events in seven countries. Here are some of the things I learned.

Brussels, Belgium: Jane Hart and I keynoted “Learning Day” for senior training managers of the European Commission. The 16th century guild halls that line Brussels’ Grand Place, or Grote Markt, remind me of the ancient communities of practice where craftsmen learned their trade through apprenticeship and curated their professional know-how. Ironically, their lessons have been lost. The European Commission relies on 19,000 courses for training, shuns social media and does not provide Wi-Fi in classrooms. Participants asked us if real people use Twitter. Few saw any value in blogging. The guilds were more advanced in their thinking.

Berlin, Germany: Charles Jennings, Laura Overton and I planned Business Educa and coordinated a number of sessions. We discovered that spontaneity is not always the best approach. Some people feel uncomfortable without a clear structure.

One vendor showcased the women’s world champion foosball player. She stomped me 10 to nothing, slamming the ball into the goal so hard it sounded like rifle shots. Her focus was winning at all costs. I kept waiting for some tips or coaching but that wasn’t part of the deal. Sometimes you can’t escape your pre-defined structure.

Doha, Qatar: Platitudes about education being the salvation of the world are hot air, but practical examples of local community learning initiatives are inspiring. At the World Innovation Summit on Learning we heard several examples: Pakistani schools for girls funded by entrepreneurs; learning by radio for small farmers in Nigeria; South Africa’s Next Einstein initiative; vibrant decentralized primary and secondary schools in the wake of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans.

Her Excellency Sheikha Mayassa Bint Hamad Al-Thani is the power behind Qatar’s stunning Museum of Islamic Art. She is also an informal learning supporter. Her Excellency agreed with my suggestion that objections to injecting collaboration into the classroom as too costly, complex and difficult disappear if the world is the classroom, the self-organizing Internet is the technology, and the smart phone is the access device.

ON THE WEB

See photos and videos of Jay’s journey at www.flickr.com/photos/jaycross/tags/euro2010/.

Stockholm, Sweden: At the Cisco Public Services Summit, I heard how some medical schools have shifted to patient-centered education. Future doctors learn from diagnosing patients instead of studying academic subjects. Shouldn’t we refocus undergraduate education on solving important problems instead of following increasingly dated curricula? You’d learn what’s needed instead of studying fragmented, aging disciplines.

Oslo, Norway: Cisco chartered a private train to take more than a hundred of us to Oslo for the Nobel Peace Prize Concert. Five hours of conversation as we rolled past the idyllic Swedish countryside provided a peak learning experience. At the concert, the poems and protests of Liu Xiaobo were a reminder of the potential in a single voice.

Maastrich, Netherlands: The Internet Time Alliance led sessions on working smarter for TULSER. I talked about dealing with conceptual work, intangibles, the acceleration of time, information glut, unpredictability and other aspects of our new world. Clark Quinn described strategies for mobile learning. Harold Jarcho explained the shape of the 21st century training department. Jane Hart provided insights into social media learning. Charles Jennings explained the concept of workspaces, where enterprise work and learning converge.

London, U.K.: Innovative organizations were grappling with the same issues every place we spoke: paradigm drag blocks progress; Wikileaks sends social media shivers up conservative managers’ spines; leaders do not trust employees with social media.

At Reed Learning, we encouraged those in the room to recognize that learning is now a team sport where sharing replaces hoarding. Learning professionals must become change agents and promoters and sell senior management on social media and open collaboration. In 20 minutes, we set up an enterprise-strength workspace on Socialcast to support our new community of practice. [CLO](#)