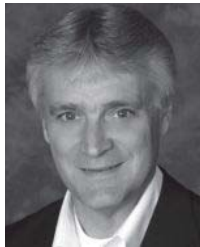# Prepare for the New Ecosystem

It's time to rethink how information is aggregated and used • BY BOB MOSHER

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I have attended three learning events in the last month. Although every role in our industry was represented, there was one common theme, which was referenced during one of the CLO panels: "The world we serve is growing more and more out of our control. I'm finding it harder to become a part of the ecosystem." I appreciate this highly qualified learning leader's candor because I can relate.

The world we live in is constantly changing, making it next to impossible to keep up through traditional learning methods and design. The ecosystem the panelist spoke of is one of constant churn and collaboration. It is often a place where our traditional methods and tools of instruction, including more embedded ones such as e-learning, are not seen as native and intrinsic to the problems our learners try to solve every day.

But does this mean we can't be more intentional and included in that ecosystem? I remember calling my mother for advice during a frustrating parenting episode, and she said to me, "Your job as a parent is to not only guide their behavior when they're with you, but to arm them to behave correctly when you're not around." As parents, we live on in our children's ecosystem, not through our presence, but through the lessons we taught them about managing their lives on their own. There's a learning lesson here.

I recently spoke with two senior learning leaders from different organizations who adopted innovative approaches in their ecosystems. Simply put, they will not allow any resources in class, either taught or referenced, that are not native to the learners' environment as a resource when they leave instruction and are on their own in the workflow.

For instance, the infamous three-ring binder is no longer allowed because in their world, binders are found on shelves throughout their enterprise, few are current and most are not used. This approach forces us to take a different look at how we use the precious, and ever-shrinking, time when we have learners in a classroom.

With the ever-changing world of content that we struggle to keep up with, is our charge truly one of knowledge gain or enabling knowledge aggregation and application? This is not to say that some degree of base knowledge shouldn't be taught, but the idea that we can keep up and arm our learners to use that knowledge in the ecosystem may be a thing of the past. The aforementioned two learning leaders have taken an ecosystem approach to instruction. For them, it's all about enablement.

Take a different look at how you use the ever-shrinking time you have with learners in the classroom.

For this to work, there are a few things we have to understand regarding the ecosystem our learners go back to. The first is what type of learning resources are available and intrinsic to the ecosystem. This is not a strategy of abundance, but one of focus and filtering. If you ask learners about the availability of resources, most tell you they are overwhelmed. Technologies such as SharePoint, LMSes and other content repositories abound. The frustration is found not in the availability of these resources but in their accessibility and contextual nature.

This involves a whole different approach to design — don't create content; intentionally guide learners to it. Disciplines such as performance support are re-emerging as constructs that can surround assets and enable them in ways we have not seen before.

Another consideration is the ecosystem's ability to support the learner's journey through these approaches. Meaning, do our learners live in a world of self-empowerment or one of dependency? The numbers are not promising when we look at our employees' willingness or understanding of their own engagement. In our efforts to be supportive, we have created a world of confusion and dependency. This would not be good parenting. We don't need 40-year-olds who are still living at home. We need self-reliant and self-confident learners supporting themselves and each other intelligently and effectively in their ecosystem. **CLO**