

LEARNING AT THE SPEED OF ~~light~~ ~~sound~~ **CHANGE!**

Does a faster rate of change need a faster way of learning? Bob Mosher and Conrad Gottfredson say, "You bet it does!"

These days, while learning may not quite have to break the sound barrier – it must keep pace with organisational change. With everything changing faster and faster, we need to learn faster and faster, right? This question was posed to two prominent advocates of performance support: Conrad Gottfredson and Bob Mosher, pioneers of working and learning simultaneously. In this interview they present the case for performance support.

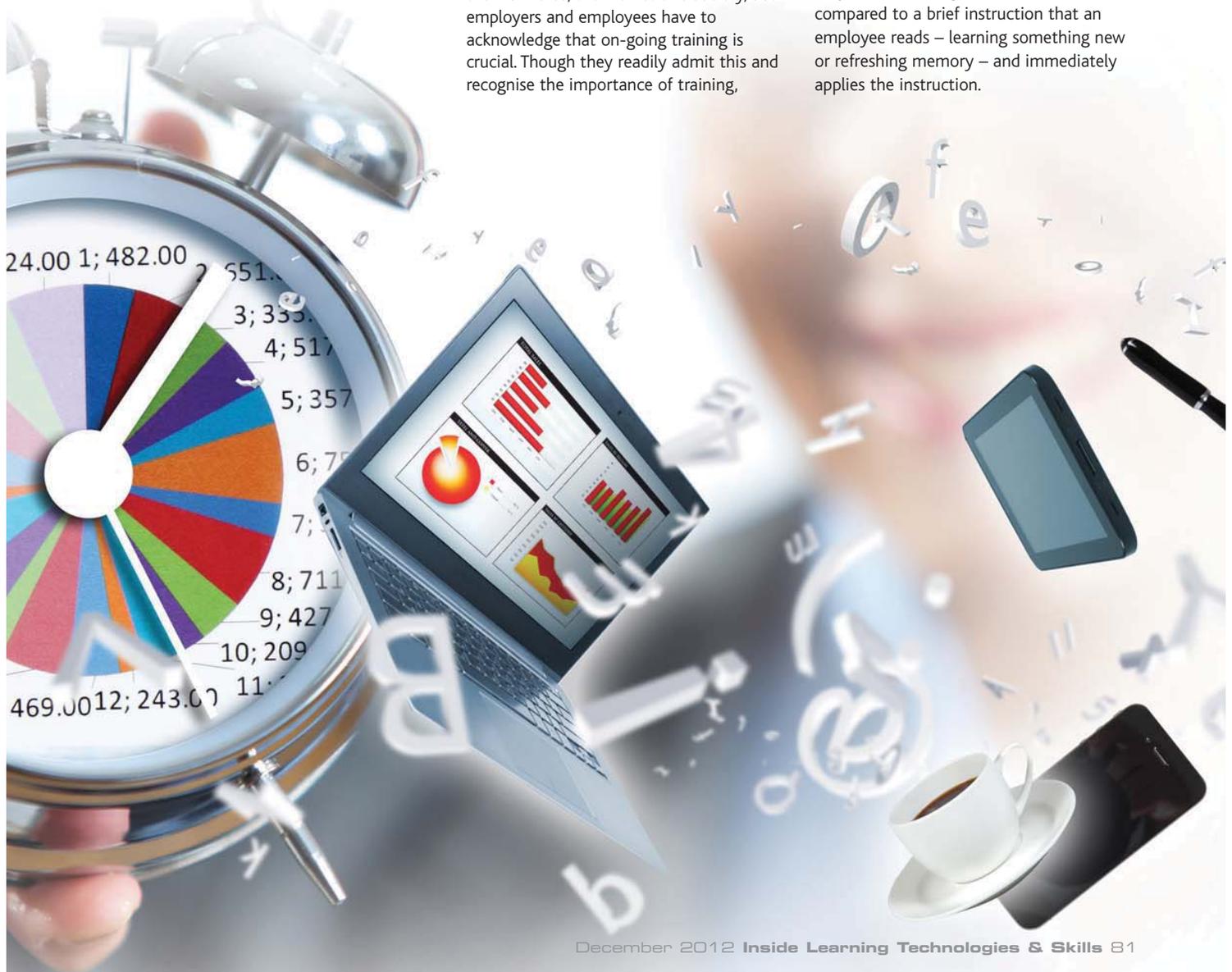
What's the problem with training today?

Bob Mosher: In a world where drastic technological changes constantly challenge the workforce, the market and society, both employers and employees have to acknowledge that on-going training is crucial. Though they readily admit this and recognise the importance of training,

employees say they want to learn more efficiently, while their bosses refuse to interrupt the business for frequent training sessions. There's a sense of frustration among both. Even when the content is a hit, employees hardly ever remember anything they have learned at the point of need. The big problem with training in a business context is not that there isn't enough training (there's often too much) but that they don't get the best out of it.

What is performance support?

BM: Performance support offers the correct information to employees exactly when they need it: during work. It can be compared to a brief instruction that an employee reads – learning something new or refreshing memory – and immediately applies the instruction.



Isn't performance support or embedded learning nothing more than a link in the learning chain, albeit a link that's often overlooked?

BM: Performance support is more than that – it organises the training completely differently. The problem is that training often loses its connection with performance. Our view of training changes as soon as we abandon the perspective of application. That is why performance support shifts the focus from 'learning to use', to 'the application of what's learned'. We have to look at the training as a tool, not as an objective in itself. It's no use bringing everyone together in a classroom, teaching them something and then letting them leave again. The question is, have they been taught the right thing and can they apply whatever they've learned quickly and correctly? The time at which training is given is therefore very important. When the application of the acquired skills and knowledge occurs months after the training, you've got a problem straight away.

Does this imply that the trainer shouldn't just learn or teach? Should trainers also ensure that it is applied?

Conrad Gottfredson: Of course, the trainer should first and foremost be able to learn the necessary skills. However, trainers have put far too much emphasis on learning. They want to transfer every skill in the classroom in the shortest possible time. Yet people have spent too much time on memorising skills and too little time on applying them. With performance support, they stick to the fundamental skills they need to learn to be able to get started. Thus the emphasis shifts to problem-based learning. The trainer is no longer just a teacher; they're also a guide who builds bridges between the classroom and the workplace.

BM: These days, we have to learn more and more, while there's less time to learn. This paradox is also important in switching to performance support. It means the trainer no longer has to rush things in the classroom in order to teach delegates as much as possible. Students know they are given enough time later to apply what they've learned. The trainer concentrates on things that matter and gives the students the necessary references, enabling them to get started.

CG: This method is also needed for another fundamental reason. The content of courses changes fast and is soon outdated. What it boils down to is giving the student enough resources to enable them to stay up-to-date with the changes. Just think of the increasingly shorter shelf life of certain

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products. Some course material is outdated the moment the course starts. Once you've learned the necessary fundamental issues, and you've got the necessary references, there's nothing to stop you from following those changes yourself.

BM: In order to survive, organisations have to be able to learn at the same speed at which changes take place – constantly learning and applying new skills. Employees continuously have to prepare for changes in order to hold on to their jobs. From this perspective, we now have to look at learning and training in a business context.

Does the trainer have to become a coach?

CG: It depends on the organisation. Trainers are often impressed yet feel threatened by a new and different approach. But we've already learned two things. Firstly, there's more than enough work left for the classic trainer. And, secondly, trainers are appreciated more when they are able to make the shift to reference-based instructor. They immediately create visible added value. They did an excellent job teaching the employees and now they are obviously helping out to apply what has been learned...

BM: Training and the tools that go with it are only as good as the extent to which the user believes in them. Students have to believe that the resources are assets that will actually help them. As such, the trainer has a very important role as a teacher of the essentials rather than as the person who knows everything about all the instruments and references. So the trainer is not one to answer questions, more to increase the employees' level of self-sufficiency.

Does this on-the-job coach have to be a professional, or can it be a supervisor or even a colleague?

BM: Sure, it can be a colleague. Some organisations have an employee support and coaching system. Any company that wants to use performance support has to be able to map out who plays which role. Who are the mentors or coaches? Are they ready to adjust their roles to performance support?

Does this also mean the end of standard training, the general packages?

CG: Absolutely not. In order to learn the

essential skills, standard training is a good place to start and offers a good grounding. While trainers want students to reach the top level, they also realise that not everyone is cut out for that. So we have to make the most of every individual in the time we're allocated.

You can still take people out of their work place and put them in a classroom. But with performance support you may not have to. If you see that they need something, you can often deliver it there and then, without having to leave the workplace at all. So, not only is the knowledge transferred much more quickly, it is applied to the job straight away. This brings us back to the core – people have to learn as closely to the application as possible.

Innovative Performance Support – Strategies and Practices for Learning in the Workflow by Mosher and Gottfredson (2011, McGraw Hill, ISBN 9780-07-170311-6).

Become a member of Gottfredson and Mosher's Performer Support Community: contact a.parkinson@ontuitive.com for more information.



Bob Mosher, the former Microsoft training director, is now the chief learning and strategy evangelist at Ontuitive. He is a specialist in performance support solutions.

Conrad Gottfredson has helped governments, non-profits, and multi-nationals employ emerging technologies to deliver learning-at-the-moment-of-need.