

# PERFORMANCE SUPPORT HOLDS THE STRATEGIC KEY FOR L&D

Studies show the most common methods of learning don't deliver the desired strategic result for L&D. Ali Parkinson argues the case for performance support.

L&D teams are in a tight spot. Productivity and budgets are decreasing yet the pace of business change is on the increase. The job is made even more difficult by the many leaders who do not consider L&D to be mission critical or of strategic value. Because the axe often falls on what are considered non-essential initiatives, it often falls on L&D.

It's no secret; L&D teams are constantly watching their backs. In the current environment L&D struggles to justify shrinking budgets. Doing 'more with less' has become the motto for L&D teams. Employees without adequate training and support are less motivated and less able to do their jobs.

This dilemma is impacting worker performance and overall productivity. The

most recent figures from the fact-finding agency, Bureau of Labor Statistics, show productivity is diminishing.

A hyper-competitive marketplace is driving a dizzying pace of business change. Organisations are making process improvements and adding new or updated applications and systems, often several times every year. In order to fully realise the intended benefits of these changes, employees need to successfully adopt and apply new knowledge and skills to these new tasks, processes, systems and policies.

L&D teams have responded to this challenge by adding more traditional learning as well as new methods of delivery. They support their end users by staffing costly help desks, building knowledge databases and initiating information portals. Yet, when looking at

the effectiveness of these efforts, studies show they don't deliver the desired result.

## ALWAYS CONNECTED

Due to the high rate of information change, employees no longer rely on knowledge stored in their head to do their job. The Internet and digital era has changed the way we search for and use information. People now expect they'll be able to find what they need, when they need it. Yet the predominant focus of most of today's corporate learning strategy remains the training event.

Regardless of form (classroom, online virtual classes, or e-learning) this is designed to provide all the necessary task-level detail to employees. The primary goal of this learning approach is to ensure the user understands all the information



presented, resulting in a 'we need to teach them everything' mentality. Unfortunately, employees are not able to retain and apply this amount of information over time.

Compounding the knowledge retention problem is the ever-increasing volume of information employees create and need to access. Companies have been quick to get these documents into shared drives, portals, and even formal knowledge management systems. While the assets now contained in these systems are valuable, they are frequently underutilised by the very people they are meant to support. IDC surveys find the time spent searching for information averages 8.8 hours per week!

**WHAT WORKED BEFORE...NO LONGER WORKS**

L&D organisations, focused on traditional content and delivery, have lost sight of the ultimate goal of learning; to teach employees to be more productive. Most organisations are still focused on the 'course' paradigm and continue to explore different delivery methods, including mobile learning. These solutions are well designed to enable users to acquire new knowledge, but they are poorly suited to the provision of immediate support in the workplace, where the employee has to *apply* this new knowledge.

These tools fail because they are disconnected from the employee's natural workflow. Employees have to leave what they are doing to find answers. In many cases, users struggle to remember what system and which assets provide the best solution to their question. Rapid e-learning is often wrongly confused with embedded learning or performance support.

Rapid e-learning is not enough; it typically refers to online training in smaller modules. Training authors create small courses and slides in PowerPoint, add narration voiceover and interactivity, like tests or polls. However, performance support presents the learner with information at their moment of need, allowing employees to move forward with their work as quickly as possible.

**SIMULATIONS ARE TOUGH TO ACHIEVE**

Simulation tools are a popular solution, especially when organisations are adopting large enterprise software packages (CRM, ERP, ECM). These tools claim to reduce the need for traditional classroom training and e-learning. They empower non-technical classroom trainers to create and distribute interactive tutorial videos, i.e. simulations.

Though simulations are well suited to first-time learners, they are less suited to

**Performance support: the key to elevating L&D to strategic business partner**

Dr. Conrad Gottfredson's 'Five Moments of Need' theory is a framework depicting the primary times of need faced by employees in the learning and performance life cycle.

ACQUISITION OF KNOWLEDGE	
1	When learning for the first time TRAINING
2	When wanting to learn more TRAINING
APPLICATION OF KNOWLEDGE	
3	When trying to remember and/or apply PERFORMANCE SUPPORT
4	When things change PERFORMANCE SUPPORT
5	When something goes wrong PERFORMANCE SUPPORT

Classroom training, e-learning, knowledge and support systems are the most common methods of learning. Yet, they don't deliver the desired strategic result for L&D.

employees needing an answer to a simple question. The bottom line is that classroom training, e-learning, and knowledge systems are far and away the most common methods to provide employee learning. Yet, when looking at the effectiveness of these efforts, studies show they don't deliver the desired result.

It is no longer helpful to continue sharpening the tool if it's not the right tool. The fast pace of the workplace requires a new approach that steps outside the traditional methods of content and delivery and harnesses a real time approach with immediate access to knowledge and information. So take a fresh look at what users need to be able to learn to perform effectively. *See boxout.*

**RESURGENCE OF PERFORMANCE SUPPORT**

Most training efforts help the employee acquire knowledge. But, given the low retention rates and the difficulty finding information in a timely manner, it is clear that very few of today's learning programmes can successfully address the application of knowledge.

Performance support provides just-in-time information to employees while they work. Traditional training and e-learning requires users to step away from productive work in order to learn. But performance support embeds into enterprise applications and

business processes, helping employees in real time to apply knowledge, adapt to change or solve problems. A true performance support solution will always include these qualities.

- It begins when an end-user has 'a moment of need.' This often happens when he or she is trying to remember something or something goes wrong, or something changes
- Then, regardless of physical location, the user calls upon the performance support solution from anywhere within the application. The solution captures the user's context, including role, workflow status and system state
- This information is passed to the performance support software, which determines which learning asset to deliver
- The software selects the most appropriate learning asset from a 'virtual repository', a catalogue of all available learning assets within an organisation

The learning asset is delivered back to the employee providing just the right amount of learning, at the moment of need. And, most importantly, it allows productive work to continue!

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