WHY CORPORATE TRAINING IS BROKEN AND HOW TO FIX IT

The times, they are a-changin' and training needs to get back in with the times, says Jay Cross.

Corporate training is broken because work and training are becoming indistinguishable. Training departments are no more at fault than bankrupt companies who had great products. They just fell behind the times. What worked 20 years ago doesn't work well in the social, always-on networked world of business.

Traditional training departments cannot build courses fast enough to keep up with the speed of change, and workers are expected to acquire tacit knowledge, the kind of know-how one learns on the job, not in the classroom.

ASTD, the association of workplace learning and performance professionals, measures formal training (workshops, classes, and assignments meted out by training departments) and this accounts for a mere 5-10% of the way workers learn their jobs. They mostly learn informally, from experience, by trying things out, mimicking what works for colleagues, by asking questions, making mistakes, and conversing with friends.

Savvy managers encourage people working for them to stretch themselves and expand their breadth of experience. The Industrial Age is giving way to the Network Era. Previously, workers were cogs in the machine, rewarded for efficiency and meshing smoothly with fellow cogs. In the Network Era workers replace the machine, creating value. They are rewarded for innovation in delighting customers.

TRAINING IS NOT THE SAME AS LEARNING

Training is *imposed* on people (for example, by the training department) as if they are cogs. Learning is chosen by people (whether or not through training) who are trusted to make their own decisions. Training assumes the trainer is in control. Learning puts the learner at the helm. This distinction is vital because networks are democratising the workplace and workers have an increasing amount of say in what and how they learn.

It sometimes seems that the younger the worker, the more likely they are to resent being told what to do. They take charge of their own development. The Millennials (mostly the children of Baby Boomers) are used to having information at their

fingertips. They are accustomed to digesting, sharing and creating information on the web. Learning is shifting from a top-down to a bottom-up and side-to-side model.

Training departments are mired in Industrial Age, top-down attitudes and this is not playing well with Network Era, customer-focused workers. Collaboration is replacing command and control and training is out of sync with the times. These days most workers have better connections to the Internet and social software at home than on the job. Workers are making more of their own decisions. They want to learn but they don't want to be trained.

COMMAND AND CONTROL Vs COLLABORATION

Every business has one foot in the Industrial Age and the other in the Network Era.

Training departments 'push' training while workers 'pull' the information they need by searching and asking. This disparity creates a power struggle that the workforce is destined to win. Industrial-age hierarchies are evolving into collaborative networks and corporate learning must follow suit.

The evolution from command-and-control to collaboration is not an either/or situation but rather a matter of degree. Organisational transformation is a journey of a thousand steps – one aspect moves forward, another pulls it back. It's unhealthy when one sector of the organisation runs far ahead of the others.

Bolting on informal and social learning as a new technique simply doesn't work. A company cannot take full advantage of networked learning without shifting its values, culture, and practices, and becoming collaborative. Here are four early steps towards transformation: culture, motivation, infrastructure and learning.

1 Collaborative Culture

Trust is fundamental to collaboration. You don't collaborate with people you don't trust. Conversations are the stem cells of learning and trust lubricates the conversation. Together we're smarter than any one individual. That's why collaboration works. Bill Graham was a salesman for Allis-Chalmers in New Jersey before he became a rock promoter in San Francisco.

He told me that when it comes to trust, the US cultures of the east and the west were really different. "On the East Coast, nobody trusts you until they check you out; know where you went to school, who your friends are and where you live. On the West Coast, everybody trusts you until you screw up." Managers in collaborative organisations trust workers to be guided by corporate values and mission. And trust drives out micro-management.

2 Collaborative Motivation

Research firm Gallup reports that 49% of employees are not actively engaged and that 18% are actively disengaged. The 'not actively engaged' aren't adding to the bottom line. The 'actively disengaged' are subtracting from it. When management has high expectations; workers generally live up to them. When expectations are low, the same holds true.

Collaborative motivation dispenses with the concept that managers control workers. Instead, managers are expected to inspire workers, set expectations, and then get out of the way. Dan Pink's marvellous book, *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*, demonstrates that knowledge workers are motivated by a sense of *autonomy* and *mastery*, and a *purpose* that is greater than themselves.

Autonomy is the desire to direct our own lives. *Mastery* is the urge to improve at something that matters. *Purpose* is the yearning to do what we do in the service of something larger than ourselves. These characteristics motivate people more than money. In fact, too much money eradicates intrinsic motivation and degrades performance.

'Getting out of the way' is the path to autonomy and wise managers take control

---

How to get a jump on collaborative learning

Work and learning are converging and person-to-person instruction is no longer cost effective. Industrial Age firms must morph into collaborative Network Era organisations.

- Focus on helping high performers work smarter. Novices aren't the only people who need to learn

- Stop punishing people for failed experiments; if you never fail, you're not innovating

- Create a directory that enables people to locate who knows what

- Apply the 80/20 rule to critical functions and seed communities of practice around them

- Encourage people to narrate their work by documenting what they do to share with others

- Root out information hoarding and make sharing the norm. Some companies fire hoarders

- Reduce cycle time with instant messaging, Twitter and podcasts

- When feasible, substitute self-service and peer learning for workshops

by giving control. Mastery of skills and accomplishments is the direct result of applying autonomy. Purpose sets the goals and frees the worker to act in the pursuit of goals. Collaborative companies inspire workers by replacing rulebooks with shared beliefs, and freeing workers to make their own choices in upholding the organisation's values.

3 Collaborative Infrastructure

Collaborative infrastructure is the circuitry that connects workers with the resources they need to work and learn. This includes co-workers, information, customers, news, models, plans, directives, gossip and more. Workers collaborate to solve problems and come up with fresh ideas. They don't just learn things, they learn by doing things. Deep learning is experiential.

Should we make people learn the knowledge or should we provide an app? Do they need to memorise it or simply to know where to find it when needed? It's a perennial trade-off. In the old days, when knowledge workers were not tethered to the internet, they stored most of the knowledge in their heads. Now they store information in their hard drive or more

likely, in the cloud, so performance support is a vital to collaboration.

4 Collaborative Learning

This is learning without borders. Organisations improve this by removing obstacles, seeding communities, increasing bandwidth, encouraging conversation and growing networks. It's a natural way to learn and grow. The pace of progress is now faster than ever and a rising tide of information threatens to swamp us all. People work at one career after another and therefore workers must learn all the time to remain productive and relevant.

Learning can no longer take place outside of work because people would miss too much. Besides, learning on the job is more effective. So learning must be embedded in the work and as a result, work and learning become indistinct.

WHAT'S THE HURRY?

As the global economy shifts from factory to service industry, employees need the human, judgmental expertise and emotional intelligence that one just doesn't acquire in class. The accelerating rate of change makes it impractical to

learn everything you need to know in advance.

The urgency of collaborative learning depends on your organisation. If your company is becoming a social business, installing social networks and experimenting with collaborative culture, you may have already missed the bus. However, those organisations that evolve and move toward informal learning will make it.

Change provides L&D with an opportunity to emerge as heroes. But bear in mind that the generation coming into the workforce has no patience with spoon-fed, single-track instruction.

Baby boomers are leaving the workforce and taking their tacit knowledge with them. Organisations must transfer this knowledge collaboratively before it's too late.

Jay Cross is CEO of Internet Time Alliance
http://internettimealliance.com/
http://www.jaycross.com/wp/
Twitter: @jaycross