



THE FOCUS HAS MOVED FROM THE PROCESS TO THE PRODUCT

EXTRACTING LEARNING FROM WORK

We need to learn in order to work well. There is clear evidence for that. However, we also need to learn from our work.

Over the past few decades, most learning professionals have wholeheartedly embraced the former of these two statements - it has been the *raison d'être* for learning organizations. However, only a few address the latter.

There is certainly an increased interest on linking learning with work. Learning content and activities are now designed with the impact they will have in the workplace in mind rather than a focus on the learning itself. For many, the focus has moved from the process to the product.

Injecting Learning into Work

Many learning professionals have extended their programs into the workplace in one way or another. The increasing focus on outputs and on solving organizational performance problems has been a major driver.

Some achieve this simply by constructing pre-work that is carried out before participants take part in a training program, or by developing work-based exercises and activities that are completed by the participant back in the workplace following a program. A large percentage of blended learning is built on this approach. Prepare in the workplace - learn in class - “embed” learning back at work.

So, there is a clear trend toward embedding learning in work. This is good to see, although there is still a considerable way to go.

Adding learning into the workflow is certainly better than providing learning as a parallel activity to work. All the evidence points to the fact that learning is a continuous process that works better if carried out in the context where it is going to be used rather than away from the workplace. Research tells us that the relationship between success in post-course tests and performance in the workplace is complex but often weak. People who do well in class tests don't necessarily turn out to be high performers in the workplace.

Extract Rather Than Inject

Injecting or adding learning to work is one approach. It is better than away-from-work learning. However, an even better strategy

than injecting learning to improve performance is to extract learning from work in order to further improve performance. Why is extraction better than injection?

Extraction of learning from work can be much more readily incorporated into daily or weekly work rhythms. It is easier to take time in a meeting with your manager to think about what you've learned from your last week's work activities and how you can accentuate the positives and extinguish the negatives, than it is to take time out to step through some workplace learning activity.

Types of Workplace Learning

Injecting Learning INTO Work	Extracting Learning FROM work
Courses and programs are designed so they add learning into the work-flow	Tools and techniques are used to extract learning from work experiences
Objective is to improve learning	Objective is to improve performance
Flow: learning > work	Flow: work > learning > better work
Measurement: learning metrics	Measurement: performance metrics
Results in additional activities and workload	Results in changes activities only

Of course, you could take time out to work through some learning exercises or content in the workplace without involving your line leader, so it may be easier in the instant, but it certainly won't be as effective.

The Line Leader Role in Extraction

Line leader involvement is the key to extraction of learning from work. If your direct manager supports your efforts to learn from your experiences and if she provides space and time to allow you to reflect on your learning, then it will be highly successful.

If your line leader is not involved, you may still find good opportunities to extract learning from your work but, almost inevitably, opportunities will be fewer and the work experiences from which you are extracting learning are likely to be less focused for your development.

My advice is to think “extraction” rather than “injection.” Use work to learn and develop, as well as using learning for work.

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