The Future of Learning at Work

Trends Shaping the Landscape of Learning

Corporate training and learning have undergone dramatic changes in the last ten years. These changes have been fueled not only by shifts in formal education, but a host of technology advances (including the Internet, laptops, increased data storage, social media, and mobile devices) and a new emerging workforce. The emerging workforce has “grown up” using these new technology underpinnings to reach out and interact with their peers and colleagues in ways never possible before. Learning, which used to be a pursuit of the individual, is now an interactive effort within a group. We learn by doing, and doing has become a collaborative action. These changes have also fostered a major shift in how we set up the workplace to embrace new technologies and the collaborative spirit of how learning happens today.
Technology Delivers Information

The Internet and mobile connectivity have paved the way for learners to access information anywhere and at any time. Trainers still need to impart formal course information, but today’s students want to learn from their peers, as well. New technologies make it possible for students to reach each other more easily, making collaboration and group work more common. Tools like Google Docs, Basecamp, and Skype and social media sites like Facebook and Twitter give students and trainers new opportunities for collaboration and instruction.

Technology means that peers are also no longer limited by space or scheduling; they can work together and interact from any location and at any time, in or out of the training classroom. According to Global Workplace Analytics’ January 2016 data, 50% of the U.S. workforce holds a job that is compatible with at least partial telework (the substitution of technology for travel), and 20–25% telework at some frequency. 3.7 million employees (2.8% of the workforce) work from home at least half of the time.

Technology Enables Blended Learning

Blended learning refers to the mixture of traditional instructor-led learning with computer-mediated activities. It integrates online, mobile, and instructor-led learning to deliver a more thorough and engaging education experience. Trainers, for example, can present introductory materials in a traditional classroom setting. Personalized training exercises can then be delivered by the trainer via mobile devices such as tablets. Learning can occur after hours via YouTube or by applications such as “Chatter.”

“Gamification” (online simulations pitting one training team against another) is becoming a successful component of many corporate training regimens. The spirit of competition among students not only makes learning more enjoyable, it increases retention and shrinks learning time. eLearning Industry’s Gamification Statistics and Facts for 2015 reported that 79% of survey participants (both corporate learners and university students) said that they would be more productive and motivated if their learning environment was more like a game.
How We Learn and Collaborate

Expectations are continuing to shift toward 24/7 access to information. Today’s worker wants less formal, structured presentations and an increased focus on blended learning channels such as video, e-learning, face-to-face interaction, and coaching. All of this must be delivered in an environment that can be easily personalized and configured for the learning task at hand. The advent of virtual, mobile, and social technologies has also fostered a self-service learning model versus the passive (lecture-oriented) information transfer that occurred in years past. Workers aggressively pursue learning on their own time frame and according to their own preferences. They also do it in collaboration with co-workers. This means that information has to be available in the wide variety of media and locations where learners want to consume it.

“Every learner approaches material differently, and to be successful in transferring knowledge you must have different approaches. Think of it as a toolbox of ways to present content to learners in order to increase accessibility. By integrating approaches that use multiple strategies like visuals, verbal, music, interpersonal interactions, and hands-on experiences, you provide a variety of contexts to engage in and increase your likelihood of a successful plan.”

-Leslie Eichelberger, HON National Sales Training Manager
Translating Trends into Practice

So, what does this mean for how you train and set up your workplace? You can make simple adjustments that will take advantage of technology advances and encourage collaboration that amplifies learning. Adopting these moves in a cohesive manner can create an environment where everyone is eager to learn and contribute to the company. It’s important for your work environment to be flexible so it can address not only multiple uses, but also a variety of worker preferences as they move from place to place within in your facility. It’s also necessary that your environment supports current and future technologies.

Consider including the following furniture options, spaces, and technologies in your office to ensure employees are at their most comfortable and productive:

Flexible Workplace and Furniture
Flexibility is needed to support the multitude of learning activities that can take place - from formal, individual presentations to informal group discussion sessions and everything in between. Additionally, training furniture may also have to “double” as everyday business furniture and vice versa - it needs to be adaptable for this multi-purpose requirement.
Interchangeable and Engaging Spaces
Your training environment will be used by a variety of learners. Furniture and space must be quickly adjustable to support personal and group needs for all types of learners. For example, Cisco’s McCarthy Ranch campus in Milpitas, California offers a multitude of spaces to create a hybrid workplace. Hundreds of mobile workers who use the campus have access to eight different kinds of unassigned workspaces: workstations, touchdown spaces, privacy rooms, focus booths, open project spaces, team rooms, lounges, and dens. The spaces support many different kinds of virtual collaboration using IP technology and audio and video conferencing.

“Furniture can have a significant effect on meetings, learning, and productivity in the workplace. A casual seating area can invite deeper conversation and more open idea sharing than a formal conference table. It is important to provide options for employees, because if you are comfortable, you perform better.”

-Le Leslie Eichelberger, HON National Sales Training Manager

Tech-Ready Rooms
Make sure office space is well-equipped with flexible power sources, as well as equipment that fosters collaborative learning: high-resolution video, interactive white boards, recording devices, and video conferencing tools.

Efficient Use of Space
As employees become more mobile and less tied to their desks, the average amount of space per employee nationwide, in all industries, has dropped. In 2010, the average was 225 square feet per worker, but 40% of North American companies polled by CoreNet Global expect that number to decrease to 100 square feet per worker by 2018. The smaller allotment of space works in conjunction with the opportunities presented by technology - employees may be spending more time working remotely, as they can access projects from any location.
Learning Management Systems
Online applications that enable companies to store, administer, and deliver content for web-based training programs and events make the transfer of information very smooth. These systems should support a self-service model, so they must be readily available and easy to use.

Video
Give employees access to YouTube and encourage the production of internal training videos to easily train new employees and customers. Use video conferencing tools such as Skype, GoToMeeting, and WebEx to foster information flow and collaboration.

Social Media
Employees should be able to connect with each other using tools such as Facebook and Twitter, but also enterprise applications such as Salesforce.com’s “Chatter,” Microsoft’s “Yammer” and Windows Live Messenger.
Implementing Policies and Practices

Implementing policies and practices like these will ensure that your work environment effectively accommodates shifts in learning. As new learning styles are discovered and evolve within formal education, they will migrate down to affect the workplace. You can harness these advancements to enhance the productivity of your training and work environments.

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