THE FOUNDATION FOR THIS PROCESS IS EVERYONE LEARNING TOGETHER

THE COHERENT ENTERPRISE

I've been thinking a lot about strategies to help organizations stay ahead of the pack, outperform their competitors and raise productivity. I know I'm not alone.

Recently, the focus has been on the gains possible through working in a consistent way across the entire extended enterprise; where organizations acknowledge the benefits of interlinking with their suppliers, their distributors and their customers — and even their competitors - to generate higher value.

Although forging tighter links will definitely bring benefits, something more is needed; organizations have to become not just more closely coupled but also pulling in the same direction. Most of all, they need to understand how to exploit and build on each other's' strengths, to be "operating on the same wavelength." In other words, they need to be coherent.

Coherent enterprises can only emerge when, individually and collectively, they are adapting to the future at the speed of business. The foundation for this process is everyone learning together and in a coordinated way.

Developing Coherent Learning

You know that everyone inside your organization needs to stay current in their specialist area to best contribute. It's the same whether you're working in commercial, government, not-for-profit, or other environments. Training and development leaders recognize this and the majority have sophisticated processes in place to provide structured learning and development opportunities to help workers keep up and keep learning. Some are also looking to exploit the many opportunities offered by informal and social learning to extend development. However, few are thinking in terms of "coherence" and that even greater value will be released if thinking and planning extends to supporting coherent continuous learning across the value chain.

As my Internet Time Alliance colleague Jay Cross puts it:

"Conversations are the stem cells of continuous learning, and social networks are the carriers of conversations. These networks operate behind the firewall and outside it. They can be personal or professional on either side of the firewall. The firewall itself is becoming porous; customers and partners are increasingly privy to what was previously considered insider-only information."

So, how do we embrace the challenge of the coherent enterprise? We need to extend the idea of work beyond collaboration, beyond teams, and beyond the corporate firewall to make social networks, communities of practice, and narrative part of the daily workflow. We also need to move the business conversation away from military terms like target markets, strategic plans and campaigns, and instead talk in terms of complexity and cooperation.

The flow across a coherent enterprise moves from internal, structured, goal-oriented activity to informal, opportunity-driven activity that crosses divisional and organizational boundaries along the value chain.

In a coherent enterprise, there are development opportunities through work in typical in-company **team activities**, further opportunities across **communities of practice**, and even more opportunities within wider **social networks**. Communities and networks include participants across the entire value chain, and often outside it.

At the outermost level, social networks are necessary for tracking what's happening and who knows what, looking for developments in related fields to help improve internal and value chain productivity. At the intersections, sharing is critical — both outward and inward sharing.

The major question for training and development leaders looking to enhance and exploit the emerging coherent enterprise is how to restructure their processes and practices to support collaboration and cooperation. Little value is created without these, and structured training alone is no longer adequate.

Charles Jennings is the director of Duntroon Associates *and a member of the Internet Time Alliance. Email* Charles.