



THE ENTIRE ORGANIZATION NEEDS TO DEVELOP A CULTURE OF CONTINUOUS LEARNING

LEARNING AT THE SPEED OF BUSINESS

In his mid-2011 review, [Doug Harward](#), CEO of Training Industry Inc., identified 10 key trends in the industry. Apart from predictions for changes in training spend, staffing, outsourcing and the role of the learning leader (evolving from program manager to solutions architect), Doug predicted that **speed** would become the new mantra for the training and learning profession. This prediction is certainly playing out in many organizations across the world and will continue to do so throughout 2012.

The speed of business has increased exponentially over the past 20 years. Irrespective of type of organization — commercial firm, government department or not-for-profit enterprise — all have been impacted. Underpinned by ubiquitous communications and the push for innovation and growth, cycle times for internal and client processes, products and services have dramatically reduced, impacting virtually everyone.

These changes have resulted in expectations on learning professionals to deliver solutions at speed reaching peak intensity. In the past, it may have been acceptable for the design and development of a training solution to take upwards of a few months. This expectation has now contracted to a few weeks, if not a few days.

Herein lies a major challenge. The question is: How is it addressed?

Learning Faster than the Rate of Change

Brad Benson, chief of staff at Intel, describes the challenge in the formula $L > C$ — where learning needs to be greater than the change taking place in the organization.

I think a useful extrapolation of Brad's formula is to think about the challenge in terms of organizational success or failure, taking into account both internal and external changes:

$$\Delta L > \Delta Cx + \Delta Ci = \text{Business Success}$$

$$\Delta L \leq \Delta Cx + \Delta Ci = \text{Business Failure}$$

Where ΔL = Rate of change in Learning; ΔCx = Rate of External Change; ΔCi = Rate of Internal Change

This throws clear focus on the imperative for training and L&D departments to deliver their solutions at speed. If we don't keep ahead of the change impacting our organizations we will not only fail, but we risk causing our entire organizations to fail. Quite a responsibility!

The Inherent Inertia of Training

Traditional training approaches contain an inherent inertia that creates “drag” between problem identification and performance improvement. This is a major barrier to working at the speed of business.

This inertia, inbuilt in many existing approaches, is a major problem in the fast-moving environments commonly encountered today. Contributing factors include the fact that it takes time and effort to design, develop and deliver learning content. The need for learning professionals to gather data and information from subject experts before they turn it into instructionally sound content is one element. As is the commonly used linear design-develop-deliver model. A further factor is the common perception that learning professionals need to “manage” all the learning that occurs to a detailed degree. This inertia means that speed-to-competence is often compromised.

The Training Department Can't Do It Alone

It is clear that we need to change our traditional learning approaches to meet the “need for speed” challenge, and that both the responsibility for skills and capability development, and the actions that enable it must spread more beyond the HR and training and development departments. The entire organization needs to develop a culture of continuous learning as part of their work.

Complexity is another challenge for training and development departments to come to terms with. Many of the tools and approaches, which were fit-for-purpose in a more measured world of the standardized work-train-work model for performance improvement, no longer apply. Dave Snowden, former director in the IBM Institute for Knowledge Management, explains in his [Cynefin framework](#) that many problems and situations for which learning professionals attempt to build knowledge and skills and create learning solutions are complicated or complex — where there is no “best practice” or single approach. In other words, they can't be “taught.” We need to look for other ways to support the business. Helping to create a culture of continuous learning through work is a good place to start.

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