



MANY LEARNING TEAMS ARE REALIGNING THEIR EFFORTS.

LEARNING INFRASTRUCTURE: ADJUSTING FOCUS

Over the past 15 years organizations have spent lots of time, effort and budget deploying technical infrastructure to support learning. Initially the focus was on Learning Management Systems (LMS). More recently, attention has moved to tightly coupling or incorporating the employee development elements of LMS systems into wider talent management and HR information systems.

Although these learning systems have undoubtedly helped with the management of formal training processes, they have added little value to organizations with wider aspirations to build sustainable learning cultures. In fact, they have often resulted in inhibiting the development of learning cultures and deflecting attention from where most learning happens, in the workplace.

Today many learning teams are realigning their efforts away from those that gave rise to the traditional LMS-centric world — a world almost exclusively dedicated to designing, developing and delivering formal, structured learning events. The new focus incorporates a wider remit of supporting and facilitating learning both in the classroom and in the workplace.

This change has some profound consequences. It not only requires L&D professionals to acquire new sets of learning skills and capabilities, but it also means the diminishing utility of traditional LMS approaches and tools.

The management and tracking functions provided by LMS, talent and HR systems are still needed for some aspects of formal employee development (especially in industries that need to report training activity

to regulators). However, these activity and process management functions are of little relevance to the day-to-day learning that takes place in the workplace. We need a totally different type of learning infrastructure to support this.

If we are measuring activity, it needs to be the measurement of metrics such as “social capital” – the level of contributions employees make through sharing useful content, providing expert advice, and participating in communities. If we are to measure learning results, it needs to be through an understanding of employee “know-how” and “know-who” rather than “know-what.” That is, through assessing performance improvement and the extent and effectiveness of individual employees’ social networks rather than through achievement in end-of-course tests.

Is there a learning infrastructure that does this? The answer is “yes.”

A number of dedicated “social learning platforms” have emerged over the past few years. These vary in approach, but most incorporate YouTube and Amazon-like features that support individual content sharing, peer-ranking and analysis of social capital.

If you’re still looking to deploy an LMS, thinking about changing your existing one, or if your L&D department is putting its toe in the water with informal and workplace learning, I thoroughly recommend you consider this “second generation” learning infrastructure.

Charles Jennings is the director of Duntroon Associates (www.duntroon.com) and a member of the Internet Time Alliance. E-mail Charles.