LEARNING
IS THE NEW WORK

WORKING SMARTER: NEW WAYS OF LEARNING

More recently at the Internet Time Alliance, we've been focusing not on training and learning but on ideas around "working smarter." Jay Cross, one of my colleagues in the Internet Time Alliance, is well known for his early work and books on informal learning. Jay describes working smarter as being the key to sustainability and continuous improvement, and to productivity. Working smarter requires learning in new ways.

Harold Jarche, another Internet Time Alliance colleague, advocates that learning is the new work in the knowledge economy. Harold argues that learning and working are meshing together and highlights the need for individuals to develop the skills of the networked learner if they are to work smarter.

Networked learning is certainly a critical skill for all workers whether they are in high-end technical roles, in co-ordination and administrative roles, or working in any professional capacity in the modern economy.

The types of questions a networked learner needs to continually ask are:

- How do I keep track of all of this information?
- How do I make sense of changing conditions and new knowledge?
- How can I develop and improve my critical thinking skills?
- How can I cooperate with my colleagues and others?
- How can I collaborate better?
- How can I engage in problem-solving activities at the edge of my expertise?

If we focus on addressing these questions we will certainly help people work smarter. However the role of training and learning in this environment will differ significantly from its traditional role.

Training may help address some of the challenges above, but probably not through a formal course/curricula approach. The formal training approach can possibly help workers improve critical thinking and other core skills (I wrote about the key skills for high performance in the Fall 2010 edition of this journal, and critical thinking skills was one). However, the responsibility for continuous learning falls not to the training department but to individual workers themselves. Of course line managers and supervisors also have a responsibility to provide support and to give time and space for development.

Workscapes are the infrastructure required for working smarter. Workscapes involve different ways of looking at how we organize and execute work, taking into account all of the challenges above. Once again, building workforce capability in workscapes may involve training and development, but not always. In fact the workscape approach may even make some training departments obsolete.

The traditional approaches of event-based, away-from-work training are no longer helpful in a workscape world with ever-increasing rates of change where workers operate in an ocean of information and knowledge.

We need to look at new approaches beyond formal training. Continuous learning and a working smarter mindset may be the only solutions.

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