



THE TRAINING COMMUNITY NEEDS TO BRING ITS LEARNING EXPERTISE INTO THE TENT

FOCUSING ON STRATEGY AND GOVERNANCE

There is an increasing focus on the importance that informal learning in the workplace plays in the overall learning landscape within organizations. Its impact has been researched for some years, and everything points to its effectiveness and efficiency in building workforce capability.

Jay Cross, one of the leading thinkers in this area, defines the difference between formal and informal learning as follows:

Learning is formal when someone other than the learner sets curriculum. Typically, it's an event, on a schedule and completion is generally recognized with a symbol, such as a grade, gold star, certificate or check mark in a learning management system. Formal learning is pushed on learners.

By contrast, informal learners usually set their own learning objectives. They learn when they feel a need to know. The proof of their learning is their ability to do something they could not do before. Informal learning often is a pastiche of small chunks of observing how others do things, asking questions, trial and error, sharing stories with others and casual conversation. Learners are pulled to informal learning.

Cross and other researchers estimate that between 70 percent and 90 percent of organizational learning takes place informally, as part of daily working life. In the last issue of *Training Industry Quarterly* I wrote about the 70:20:10 approach that aligns with this.

So, if up to 90 percent of learning occurs outside formal training courses and programs, then it's im-

portant for executives who are responsible for employee development to have an explicit strategy that outlines how the training and development team will facilitate, encourage and support learning that takes place outside their traditional remit of formal classroom and e-learning provision.

A strategy for informal learning should address questions such as:

- What role will training and development executives play in establishing communities of practice and expert knowledge sharing across their organization?
- What accountability will they have for providing guidance on the use of any social networking infrastructure and tools to support collaborative learning?
- How will they extend their formal learning services to facilitate and support informal, workplace learning?

Equally, executives responsible for training and development need to develop a clear governance structure and governance processes to underpin and support informal learning. This means obtaining buy-in, support and active participation by senior leaders including decision-making powers for budget allocation and organizational strategy alignment.

Charles Jennings is the director of Duntroon Associates, a training & development and human capital consultancy company. Charles is the former chief learning officer for Reuters, where he was responsible for developing 55,000 professionals. E-mail Charles at charles@duntroon.com.