



WE NEED TO HELP WORKERS DEVELOP A CORE SET OF FLEXIBLE SKILLS.

KEY SKILLS FOR HIGH PERFORMANCE

Each year billions of dollars are spent on training. The 2009 ASTD State of the Industry report suggests training budgets represent some 2.24 percent of total payroll. Costs are high, and high returns are expected.

However, the general approach to training has changed very little over the past 50 years, and the overall impact on business outcomes from training is rightly being questioned.

One major problem is that training tends to focus on building detailed knowledge and skills. The process almost invariably involves the delivery of structured content in structured courses. Although there are signs that informal and workplace methods are gaining traction, training and development departments devote the majority of their efforts to the development and delivery of formal learning courses, programs or curricula. As a result, most of the training budget is devoted to the infrastructure supporting these activities.

We're living and working in a world where content and information are ubiquitous. Many jobs that primarily use heads rather than hands require workers to deal with increasing levels of ambiguity and complexity year-on-year. Innovation has become critical, and workers are expected to "think out of the box" to solve problems.

There are profound implications for our approach to training and development in this changed landscape. We need to discard the old model focused on transferring information and content—often called "knowledge transfer"—and move to a training model that can better serve workers and their organizations. Rather than fill heads with content, we need to help workers develop a core set of flexible skills so they can success-

fully navigate on-demand information environments.

In other words, we need new ways of learning for these new ways of working.

What are these core skills, then?

This list is not definitive, but it's a good starting point. If we help people develop these skills, at least they'll be on a solid footing to extract positive and practical use from the content and information they come across daily:

- **Search and "find" skills:** to find the right information when it's needed.
- **Critical thinking skills:** to extract meaning and significance from information.
- **Creative thinking skills:** to generate new ideas about using information.
- **Analytical skills:** to solve complex problems and make decisions based on available information.
- **Networking and people skills:** to build mutually beneficial relationships with sources of knowledge and expertise.
- **Logic skills:** to apply reason to extract meaning and validate data and underlying assumptions from information.

Going forward, training and development departments will need to focus less on content and more on developing core capabilities and skills such as these.

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