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## How Will e-Learning Evolve in a Performance-centric World?

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**How is e-learning impacted** as performance technology takes hold in organizations? When performance, rather than learning, becomes the goal, doors open to a variety of new ways to use new e-learning, information, and collaborative technologies directly in the context of work. What changes lie ahead? Questions such as these are addressed in-depth in the recently released book [\*Beyond E-Learning: Approaches and Technologies to Enhance Organizational Knowledge, Learning and Performance\*](#) (Pfeiffer, 2005).

E-learning is not really new anymore; most organizations are invested in e-learning programs in one way or another. But our current, comfortable e-learning practices may not fit the new realities of organizational learning and performance. Here are five ways e-learning will evolve in a performance-centric world:

### **1. E-learning will be viewed as more than simply “e-training.”**

This does not lessen the value of quality training, but it is increasingly clear that the two are not the same. What we commonly refer to as e-learning is primarily online training. E-learning is much more. In the workplace, people are more likely to “learn” from access to information or collaborating with peers and experts than they will from a sole reliance on courses. Technology enables these capabilities across place and space, and helps manage the sheer weight of everything everyone must know.

### **2. Managing knowledge will be more important than managing courses.**

The ability to get information from those who have it to those who need it—when they need it—will be critical. Training does this—transfers knowledge and skill from subject matter experts to learners through formal courseware (classroom and online), but if training, online or otherwise, was the only way we learned anything, we would all be in class 24-7. Going forward, we will devote more attention and resources to building high-value, easy-to-use information repositories for access to the wealth of explicit, codified information that people need to do their jobs. We will embrace communities of practice, so that individuals and teams can easily collaborate and share what they know. And, we must do a better job of leveraging our experts and their expertise in the organization. This is precisely what ISPI is doing with its [\*Professional Communities\*](#) initiative.

### **3. An accelerating shift from formal to informal learning is inevitable.**

Even in the best companies, the amount of time individuals can devote to formal learning (classroom or online training) is around 5% of their annual work time. The other 95% is spent on the job, where learning is much more informal, through access to information, colleagues, teams, and experts. Yet the bulk of training and learning departments’ budgets, staff, and time is devoted to creating formal learning programs, leaving workplace learning and support to others, including front-line managers. This is not enough. In the future, training and learning organizations will discover that their value increasingly lies in supporting people in the context of actual work, not just in the classroom.

**4. Building sound work processes, rather than continuing to support bad ones, will require more “upstream” involvement of training, learning, and performance professionals.**

Unfortunately, training is often used to compensate for a bad work process or poor work documentation. There is far too much investment in training programs that try to help people deal with work processes that are hard to manage or just don't “work” at all, or documentation that isn't easy to follow or just doesn't “document” anything of value. So we train people to cope, create workarounds, and deal with the status quo. One reason for this is that the involvement of most training and learning professionals is too far “downstream” when a work process or document is too far along to change, or is already implemented. When we become involved much earlier in the development cycle, we can embed better learning, information, and performance support tools into the system from the start. We can also use techniques of performance technology to better design processes and documents so that *less* training and support is needed to perform to standard. This is the ultimate, high-value performance improvement strategy—creating work process, documentation, and routines that are so well designed that the need for training is significantly reduced.

**5. Finally, the success of workplace-based learning and performance approaches will not depend so much on the sophistication of the technology, but on acceptance by the organization.**

When great technology, and great learning and support, meets an unsupportive culture, the culture wins every time. That is why the future of e-learning will not focus on the “e,” or even on the “learning,” but on the organization's readiness to embrace the transformation that this future represents. Leadership and change management that build a solid learning culture will be as important as anything else we do, if we want to be successful.

The continuing growth of traditional e-learning notwithstanding, the overarching move to a performance-centric world will create profound challenges and opportunities for us all. As we seek to take advantage of what new technologies offer, we would do well to redefine our view of e-learning—and learning in general—and not see our future as simply more of the same.



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