

Need for Speed

Virtual classrooms stimulate the innovation needed to grow • BY JOSH BERSIN



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In today's business environment, "what's now" has become a continuous stream of "what's next," challenging L&D organizations to keep pace with accelerating change. The flow of information has become so fast that the relevance of learning programs is based as much on speed and timeliness as it is on instructional rigor.

We have entered an era of borderless workplaces, one where employees collaborate and communicate internally and externally on a continuous basis. In order for companies to thrive in this kind of environment, L&D should build programs that encourage and celebrate innovation, knowledge sharing, collaboration and the development of deep expertise.

CLOs are wondering two things:

1. How can they rebuild their deep skills development strategies in a modern, virtual work environment? Deloitte, for example, is building a new brick-and-mortar corporate university to drive core skills development in its ever-growing workforce. How can organizations reinvest in such strategies but do it in a modern, blended way?
2. How can they build programs faster, using an agile learning model that enables continuous, rapid development of content? Learning is taking place everywhere: How can L&D develop programs that are flexible, rapid and timely?

Both of these issues can be addressed in the context of the virtual classroom.

In today's connected business world, virtual classroom tools have become virtual learning and collaboration systems. They are always on; they include audio, video and screen sharing; and they offer a wide variety of learning tools to help people collaborate, share information, store and replay materials and catalog content. If you look at tools such as Adobe Connect, Cisco Telepresence, Centra, WebEx and GoToTraining, you see that they have become virtual work environments that replicate and improve upon many of the face-to-face meeting experiences we have in business.

How do these systems address the two issues mentioned above?

Virtual classrooms are both less expensive and can be more instructionally rich than physical in-class experiences. Last year Cisco used its own virtual tech-

nology to train its entire worldwide channel team — using local facilitators to manage the program — and found the learning outcomes and learner satisfaction were higher than when they ran the program in person. Studies have been conducted on the effect on technical training, IT training and sales training, and in all cases the instructional value of virtual programs, when delivered by a suitable instructor, are equal or better than in-class experiences.

Second, these virtual learning experiences are far less expensive; they reach more people; and they deliver more hours of training per dollar. Although cost is not always the issue, we are all looking for ways to reach more employees more regularly, so by reducing cost we can greatly expand our reach.

Third, virtual learning experiences are fast. We can put content online in a few hours and the instructional value is very high. When a learner has a question or wants feedback, the instructor can immediately respond or ask the learner to go into a breakout room to work with another instructor or expert. In our continuous need for speed, a learning organization can identify a training opportunity, find an expert and prepare him or her for a learning event in only a few days.

Fourth, virtual learning creates an on-demand learning environment. One of the most exciting and cost-effective new tools for corporate training is video sharing. Almost every digital device now has a video camera. Organizations can now capture video through a virtual learning experience or on the job, put it into the LMS or learning portal and create an internal YouTube for learning.

This whole market is growing and evolving.

Last year I had the opportunity to meet a number of CLOs and training leaders in Europe and found that despite the fact that virtual classroom technology is more than 15 years old, many companies are still not sure how to use it effectively. The market for synchronous learning tools and platforms is now more than \$1.2 billion, and these tools integrate the use of a wide variety of rich media that used to cost tens of thousands of dollars to author.

If you feel the need for speed in your training organization, develop an agile learning strategy and look to virtual classrooms as a core part of your solution. This area is exploding with innovation and growth and should be a core of your team's expertise and strategy. [CLO](#)