



THE MOST EFFECTIVE LEARNING OCCURS THROUGH INTERACTION OVER SHARED INTERESTS

PEER-TO-PEER: THE FUTURE OF LEARNING

Trends in community learning indicate a future where people will become informal “trainers” to their peers. Consumer behavior often predicts future corporate trends, and already, the amount of workplace learning among co-workers is occurring much more frequently than in professional training sessions. Peer-to-peer learning, collaboration and corporate mentoring are among tomorrow’s best training practices.

A New Culture of Learning: Cultivating the Imagination for a World of Constant Change (Brown & Seeley, 2011) suggests that the most effective learning occurs through interaction over shared interests and opportunity. Evidence indicates that within this era’s culture of learning, people are increasingly comfortable offering personal experience or expertise that often contributes to the overall flow of knowledge. As we move toward a world where training doesn’t always involve traditional consultants or settings, several organizations are emerging at the forefront of providing — and researching — peer-to-peer learning.

Skillshare is a community marketplace that aims to democratize learning through peer-to-peer teaching. After recently raising \$3.1 million in funding, the organization is turning average adults with a skill or talent into teachers. This formula could translate to the workplace through training programs geared toward teaching employees to teach each other. External experts will “train the trainers” and through practice and by learning key principles, these employees will serve as in-house trainers. While facilitation will come with challenges — such as accountability or trust building — technology platforms will emerge that assess the trainer’s capacity to teach and the trainee’s capacity to learn.

Another promising consumer experiment that has corporate application is **General Assembly**. At its New-York based “campus,” entrepreneurs are exposed to a learn-by-doing method taught by other entrepreneurs, VCs, angel investors and authors. It offers collaborative space, curriculum and support for learning across the entrepreneurial community. The collaborative approach of organizations like General Assembly is poised to influence corporate HR policy, where potential employees will be assessed not just on résumé qualifications, but on what they can teach others within the organization.

While mentoring is not a revolutionary concept, its effect on employee retention is. According to Dr. Lillian Eby, an associate professor of psychology at the University of Georgia and an authority on corporate mentoring, employees who are mentored

demonstrate a stronger commitment to the organization and are much less likely to leave. Mentoring promotes employee engagement and organizational development, and opens up communication between junior and senior staff. The future of corporate mentoring will involve sophisticated assessment software that pairs compatible new hires with established employees, and tracks the learning curve in real time. Increased employee performance — and the staggering costs of turnover — are highly compelling reasons for the businesses of tomorrow to incorporate mentoring into their business objectives.

The possibilities of shared learning are generating interest from a variety of corporations and government entities. This year’s **Digital Media and Learning Competition** (DMLC) is being held in collaboration with the Mozilla Foundation, NASA, the USDOE, Labor, Energy, and Veterans Affairs, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Microsoft, Intel and HASTAC. The competition explores how digital technologies are changing the way people learn and participate in daily life, through interaction with each other in connected, participatory ways. The focus of the 2011 competition is on “badges” as a means to inspire learning, confirm accomplishment, or validate the acquisition of knowledge or skills.

In the workplace, badges can become meaningful motivators when they represent real accomplishment, an acknowledgement of learning, or provide positive and public re-enforcement. For example, badges awarded for successfully completing difficult tasks or projects that involve a great deal of teamwork. Badges will measure competency while recognizing non-traditional ways of learning, and organizations that promote participatory environments and recognize employee “wins” will be rewarded with more highly motivated team members.

As peer-to-peer learning evolves from a movement to a mainstream concept, in what ways will you harness its power for your organization? Can you leverage current HR resources to implement a corporate mentoring program? What types of company badges will encourage collaboration and motivation among your employees? The not-so-distant future combines high technology with democratized training: How will you incorporate the principals of communal learning into a workplace model?

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