



No More Sheep Dipping

*Follow the lead of some top companies
and move from training to learning support.
Here's how.*

NOT LONG AGO, I was asked by a company in a country on the other side of the world to help hire a training supplier over there that could create a learning support system for a plant start-up. I was excited about the request. For several years, I had been thinking about people *learning* (as opposed to being *trained*—as in, dog training) and what that shift in thinking means to organizations regarding how they provide learning support for employees.

In fact, I would prefer to abolish the term *training* as it relates to people, and replace all references to training organizations and training classes with the term *learning support systems*.

BY CARLENE REINHART

KNOWLEDGE CAPITAL: A SHORT COURSE		
	Codifiable	Noncodifiable
Know That	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ rules ▶ process steps ▶ standards and measures A golf example: course rules.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ organizational culture ▶ intrinsic values A golf example: playing through.
Know How	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ cleaning a machine ▶ using technology to manage a process A golf example: swinging a club.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ assessing the feel of a product A golf example: using wind or green slope to advantage.

In working with the overseas client, I drew a picture of what *not* to do, instead of creating a model for an ideal learning support system. Unfortunately, I've had a lot more

experience with what can go wrong than what organizations do right. Then, I created criteria for selecting a supplier to build a learning support system. The criteria were based on current research and my own beliefs, values, knowledge, and experience. If my client company could avoid the pitfalls and use the criteria, it might create an efficient, effective learning support system for its new plant.

What not to do

Here are some situations that exemplify the pitfalls, or the dog-training school, of human resource development.

Not understanding knowledge capital.

In the frantic race to keep up with changing technology, new product development, and new plant openings, it's easy for companies to emphasize a new product or facility. Instead, they should recognize the value of knowledge capital and spend up-front time documenting "know-that and know-how" information that is the basis of a learning support system. Their people will need that knowledge to perform success-

Document the "know-that and know-how" information

information is the skills people must demonstrate to perform a given task effectively. Companies that understand knowledge capital pay attention to what is codifiable or explicit in their work environments (knowledge that is relatively easy to capture), and they try to identify knowledge that isn't easy to capture (implicit or noncodifiable information). Identifying and disseminating noncodifiable knowledge can give an organization competitive advantages.

Companies spend incredible amounts of money on facilities and technical support systems while committing few resources to documenting what employees need to know and be able to do—the foundation of a learning support system. In such companies, managers don't have a framework within which to collect or organize information. When learning support is needed, it tends to be makeshift and inefficient. That's a costly mistake. In addition, when employees don't have the information and learning support they need (and don't know how to do the actual core work), their self-esteem can suffer. If

people don't feel capable of doing their jobs, it doesn't matter how much time and effort are committed to team building. Workers' capability starts with learning support based on the assessment of their abilities to achieve

- ▶ desired outcomes
- ▶ identified critical performance outcomes
- ▶ best practices
- ▶ the identification of competitive performance gaps.

Not enough time or money. In starting a new plant, companies often assume that new employees can learn much faster than long-term employees, despite the veterans' experience. Consequently, a company may expect things to be up and running by a specific date. But people learn in different time frames, in different ways, and at different paces.

A company may invest a lot of money in facilities and hardware and forget that they are only as effective as the people that run, clean, service, and manage them. That is changing. Now, some large multinational corporations devote 10 percent of employees' time to learning support activities. Depending on the complexity of the work, the time allocated for learning can be from five to 15 percent of employees' time and cost about four percent or more of payroll. That level of commitment to learning has risen over time as organizations began to realize that know-how and know-that information based on clear performance outcomes and measures is creating their competitive advantage.

Getting to the core

When I was at Xerox Corporation in the late 1970s and early 1980s, we didn't have the instructional design staff or head count to create all of the training that we thought we needed for new products. So, we put our product development teams together with outside suppliers (then more commonly referred to as "vendors"), and we monitored them periodically. What we got were expensive courses on how to repair products, sell products, and manage product teams—and just about anything else that our teams and suppliers could come up with.

At the time, we weren't thinking about learning styles or whether em-

employees found the training useful. We did evaluate training, but we asked the wrong questions. We asked, "Were the instructors good?" and "Did you enjoy the course?" Certainly, students enjoyed the experience in our posh training facilities, bonded with the trainer and each other, and told us how wonderful the instructor and training were.

Then one day, a technical representative in Denver said, "You're asking the wrong questions. You should be asking whether the training helped us do our jobs better."

When we approached our suppliers with the requirement to base training on job-performance outcomes, they thought it was an interesting idea. But they had worked with us for so long that they knew more about our products and processes than we did. They controlled the training design and development, and they weren't particularly interested in making any changes. They already had a process for developing training, they had been using it with success, and they were going to stick to it. Consequently, learning support was out of our control.

It wasn't until the early 1990s that we really began to look at performance outcomes as a basis for training. That meant rethinking how and what we outsourced in terms of learning support. We still had to purchase instructional development, and we decided that this was the core work of the education department:

- ▶ to create performance models based on strategic goals
- ▶ to identify what employees knew and needed to know
- ▶ to determine how performance (the output of skills and knowledge) would be measured
- ▶ to manage the learning support design and development efforts.

No supplier or consultant would ever again "own" too much of our learning processes or products.

The consultants' lens

Many companies do their own courseware development. It becomes problematic when the critical up-front work isn't done first, either by outside consultants or the company. When a company isn't clear about its critical

performance outcomes and it lets consultants design training without clear specifications, the consultants will often just sell the company what they know how to do. No one can blame them. Consultants' products are the lens through which they view internal performance problems. So, they tend to tell the CEO or plant manager, "We can fix it. We've used this course hundreds of times with that kind of problem (or issue or whatever)."

By the early 1990s at Xerox, we knew that we couldn't afford the time or money to put people through learning experiences that weren't targeted to their performance outcomes. Those outcomes were aligned with the core processes and work of the education department and the company as a whole. At that point, we began to purchase fewer packages from consultants, unless they met our specifications.

Holy Writs and sheep dipping

Technical materials tend to need the most frequent updating. For example, a plant start-up hired a courseware developer to create all of the learning support. The plant managers said, "We don't have time to do it." They spent \$600,000 to have a supplier pull everything together. They received volumes of material, but the internal training people were afraid to touch it because they didn't know how it was put together. Within six months, the courseware was outdated. But the internal people couldn't update it because they hadn't been involved in or informed about the design and development.

In a high-technology environment, particularly a plant, learning support must be modular and easily updatable whether audio, visual, paper-based, or computer-based. Many organizations are using interactive video because it's fairly easy (although sometimes costly) to update. Audio and CBT are also easy to update.

Holy Writs. In many *Fortune* 100 companies, a training curriculum is created to support a new product or process. As the documentation, curriculum guides, instructor guides, and so forth begin to expand, they become sacrosanct.

In some work environments, peo-

SOME DEFINITIONS

- ▶ A learning support system is a means of identifying the critical performance results required to successfully accomplish the strategic and tactical goals of an organization or business unit.
- ▶ A learning support system is a means of identifying the knowledge and skills of current performers as assessed against critical results and best practices.
- ▶ A learning support system is a means of individualizing learning and development for each performer.
- ▶ A learning support system is a means to integrate learning activities (particularly just-in-time learning and mentoring) into work processes.

A learning support system includes:

- ▶ performance and competency modeling
- ▶ competency assessment
- ▶ resource identification
- ▶ a learning development plan
- ▶ ongoing evaluation and feedback.

ple like paper: curriculum guides, reference materials, workbooks, and so forth. It makes them feel comfortable even though they may never touch any of it. The lesson is that documentation can come to be regarded as Holy Writ. But if it isn't going to support the learning required for successful performance outcomes, it should be in a library, not part of employees' required learning.

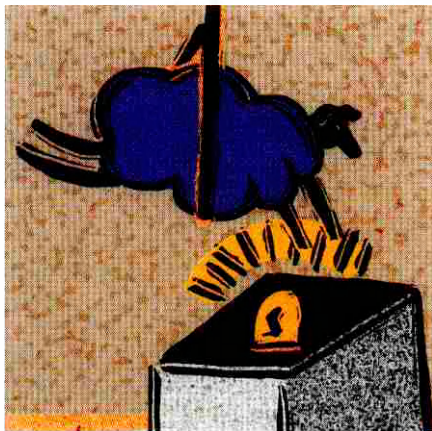
Sheep dipping. Almost all companies have been guilty of "sheep dipping"—as in, all new employees need such-and-such, or everyone moving into a supervisor's position needs supervisory skills (and the course is taught quarterly in Chicago).

For many years, companies tended to assume that there were certain "gates" in the performance management process and that in order to move upward (or even sideways) one had to take the courses required to move through a particular gate. The gates had little to do with performance

requirements. Companies also tended to assume that *everyone* needed *everything* when entering a new job or performance area. A company would convene all employees at a centralized learning center and put them through every single course. If a little training was good, then a lot must be even better.

It wasn't until the mid-1980s when companies were starting to feel a financial crunch that they began looking at training costs. They assessed what could be cut or eliminated, and what was essential to job performance and achieving strategic outcomes.

At Xerox in 1991, we made the decision that we wouldn't automatically sheep dip everyone in everything. We would bring people together for cen-



tralized training only when it was clear that it fit their development and learning goals or another good reason. The reason might be that we wanted new employees to start meeting each other and get a feel for the company's culture. Or, it might be that we wanted managers at different levels to begin building networks. Or, the product they were being trained to repair required hands-on experience.

We proposed to provide performance models and an assessment process so that people could identify their competency gaps. Then, we would help them create learning development plans that might (or might not) require centralized training.

Most companies aren't sheep dipping anymore. Instead, they are struggling with the way their training departments and HRD professionals think about training versus learning.

Starting at the beginning

Designing and developing courses are what most of the training world knows how to do. Instructional designers the world over know how to write objectives, create evaluation systems, work with subject matter experts, create delivery systems, and select appropriate media. But they often don't know how to do performance modeling and the front-end analysis that must happen before trying to identify learning objectives.

As training professionals, if we think in terms of learning support systems, we must identify critical performance outcomes for each core process and sub-process. Those outcomes must be aligned with the mission, goals, principles, behaviors, feelings, and attributes of an organi-

■ *Identify critical performance outcomes for each core- and sub-process* ■

zation. Once we identify the critical performance requirements, we can identify the learning gaps. Then and only then, should we begin the activities that traditional instructional designers do so well. To do anything else is to start in the middle.

Whole-brain thinking, learning styles

Even though we see advertisements that say, "This is a car for the right side of your brain" and references to "whole brain" and "learning styles," many organizations and HRD professionals still don't understand that people have different, preferred styles in thinking, learning, and problem-solving. Or perhaps customizing learning experiences just seems too difficult.

We know that some people learn best through written words, facts, and plans. Others learn more easily if they can see pictures, hear music, tell stories, and use metaphors. The key for all organizations is to balance the kinesthetic with the cognitive, and visuals with text, in order to create

learning support systems that can accommodate a variety of learning styles and preferences. We now know that we must address all four brain quadrants (right and left cerebral, and right and left limbic) as we prepare and deliver learning experiences, information, and communication. What an organization wants people to learn, their individual learning styles, and how learning is presented must be congruent.

Organizations that are thinking about classrooms to fill aren't likely to think in terms of learning support systems or learners' individual needs. Such thinking also means that a company may believe that learning has to be provided by the training department or outside suppliers. It may not realize that a powerful source of learning support is its own people.

Now, many organizations are giving line employees the responsibility for delivering learning support, certifying them as learning facilitators to help their work teams become learning teams. The new facilitators work directly with people whose total responsibility is to support learning in teams across the organization by maintaining performance models and competency maps, identifying resources, and so forth.

General Electric has found tremendous value in bringing in people at the outset of a plant start-up to teach them to work and learn as a team. The companies losing valuable time and resources are the ones that hire people, sit them down in a room (frequently with people they aren't even going to work with), and teach them about the company and what they need to do on the job to be successful. It's much better to involve people in their own learning from the first day of work.

For example, a start-up plant put all of its new employees in a classroom for plant orientation on the company's culture and so forth. The new employees, who were used to working in a mill, were miserable. They couldn't relate to, much less learn, the information they needed in such a foreign environment. The company realized it had to make changes in its orientation program.

When a company invests in learning

support, it needs to know employees' learning styles. It must identify what employees need against the framework of performance outcomes in order to identify critical learning goals.

The main focus

Most—60 to 75 percent—of the development of a learning support system should focus on creating performance and competency models, the learning system design, renewal processes, and delivery methods. About 25 to 40 percent should focus on creating modules, identifying internal and external learning experiences (such as, who can mentor for what performance outcome or which local school offers appropriate courses), and assessing where employees are compared with the measures established in the learning support model.

Many organizations put their resources into development without taking the time to plan carefully what they are developing (a learning support system) and why (the gaps between employees' current knowledge and the knowledge and skills needed to achieve critical performance outcomes). So, they end up with a lot of useless or not-used training—costly in terms of time and human resources. Admittedly, it's difficult when starting up a new facility to take the time and make the investment to build a learning support system first. In fact, such systems are always in process. Still, learning can begin at some point in the development process, but not before certain data are collected.

Several years ago, Bell Atlantic identified hundreds of training hours that had been created because a manager thought it was a good idea, or because someone had a performance problem and had called in a supplier to fix it—without actually identifying the exact problem. Bell Atlantic had catalogues with all kinds of systems, technical, and leadership courses that were no longer needed but that were still offered regularly. It found that people still attended the courses for a variety of reasons, including to get away from their jobs for a few hours. But by focusing on performance outcomes, it was able to eliminate or revise a lot of

the training to become learning-support-focused on specific business requirements.

Selecting a supplier

Here are some questions and tips for choosing the appropriate supplier to help you build a learning support system.

- ▶ Listen to the supplier's language. Does it talk only about training, classes, and courses? Instead, look for a supplier that shows it understands what a learning support system is in its language, products, and presentations.
- ▶ Does the supplier show that it understands the need to align the learning support with your company's mission, objectives, principles, behaviors, feelings, and attributes?

■ Learning can begin after certain data are collected ■

- ▶ Does it understand the concepts of performance outcomes, and performance and competency modeling? Has it created such models?
- ▶ Does it understand and value knowledge capital?
- ▶ On what data does the supplier propose to create learning modules?
- ▶ Does it know how to identify key results in your company's processes and sub-processes?
- ▶ Does the supplier know how to conduct interviews with employees to gather performance data? Can it show examples of instruments it has used and will use to collect the data?
- ▶ Does the supplier have a specific process for coding interview data?
- ▶ How will the performance models be presented? Will you be involved in their development? At what stages? What will be your role in validation?
- ▶ How will the necessary skills and knowledge (the competencies) be derived from the model?
- ▶ How will measures be determined?
- ▶ Does the supplier have a process for identifying performance barriers

that can be removed before building the learning support?

- ▶ How does the supplier propose to measure its progress?
- ▶ How will it create curriculum maps? Does it have examples?
- ▶ Does it propose to identify learning gaps? How?
- ▶ Does it propose to create assessment instruments and an assessment process based on the identified performance outcomes? Ask for examples.
- ▶ How does the supplier propose to create performance development plans for employees? Ask for examples.
- ▶ How does it propose to assist in identifying high-priority learning support areas?
- ▶ How does it propose to select the most appropriate delivery medium for learning support? Ask to see



media selection tools.

- ▶ How does it propose to create learning support? What will the support look like? What is the timeline?
- ▶ How does the supplier propose to create the renewal systems for easy updating of the modules?
- ▶ Does it understand how to apply whole-brain technology to products and deliverables?

So, no more dog training and sheep dipping. It's time to build learning support. ■

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