Getting Started in *eLearning*

The eLearning Guild

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INTRODUCTION

The field of elearning has grown substantially in recent years. The world of technology-enabled learning and development continues to expand and evolve, with new opportunities and possibilities that can make the work we do as elearning professionals all the more impactful.

It can also make getting started in the world of elearning more challenging. That's where this curated guide, *Getting Started in eLearning*, comes in. Whether you are just out of school and starting your career, an experienced member of the workforce who fell into elearning accidentally, or a seasoned elearning professional looking to brush up on your skills, this guide will provide you with an overview of what you need to know to get started as a 21st century elearning professional.

Each section of this guide highlights a number of resources from the eLearning Guild archives, curated by one of the experts from our community, Catherine Lombardozzi. In most cases you will find all of the content collected into this single volume, with a few exceptions where we have included an executive summary of a resource, with a link available to the full publication.

Whatever your experience and goals, we invite you to use this guide to dive into the world of elearning. Thanks for being a part of the eLearning Guild community.

David Kelly
Executive Vice President, Executive Director
The eLearning Guild

TRENDING TOPICS IN ELEARNING

In the past, learning strategies were defined by formal courses. The digital age allows us to expand our toolkit considerably. Now the discussion is turning toward how to properly integrate an organization's systems, procedures, people, and content into a comprehensive ecosystem that supports both learning and performance.

Two trends are at the center of elearning conversations in many organizations: learning and performance ecosystems, and corporate digital learning.

LEARNING AND PERFORMANCE ECOSYSTEMS

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A learning and performance ecosystem is a community of people in conjunction with the processes, information, and technology of their environment, interacting as a system supporting development.

David Kelly, Executive Vice President
The eLearning Guild

THE eLEARNING GUILD

LEARNING AND PERFORMANCE ECOSYSTEMS

STRATEGY, TECHNOLOGY, IMPACT, AND CHALLENGES

The increasing complexity of the world in which we live and work requires us to be more sophisticated in how we learn. We must be better prepared to learn on demand, with minimum disruption to our workflow and productivity. With this goal in mind, it is increasingly critical that the resources we put in place to help us learn—and ultimately perform—be as direct, effective, and instantly available as possible.

To accomplish this, we must move away from individual, siloed, "one-off" solutions to an ecosystem comprised of multi-faceted learning and performance options that enhance the environments in which we work and learn.

This complimentary white paper, by Marc J. Rosenberg and Steve Foreman, explores learning and performance ecosystems from conceptual, technological, cultural, and managerial perspectives, and looks into how this new framework will dramatically impact the ways in which people learn and work. It lays a foundation for further discussion, experimentation, and innovation into new ways to leverage all that we know about learning to improve workforce performance.

Executive Summary

"The whole is greater than the sum of its parts."

—Common colloquialism often attributed to Aristotle

The increasing complexity of the world in which we live and work, combined with the explosion in the amount of knowledge we need to be successful, requires us to be more sophisticated in how we learn. We must be better prepared to learn on demand, with minimum disruption to our workflow and productivity. With this goal in mind, it is increasingly critical that the resources put in place to help us learn—and ultimately perform—be as direct, effective, and instantly available as possible.

To accomplish this, we must move away from individual, siloed, "one-off" solutions to an ecosystem comprised of multi-faceted learning and performance options that enhance the environments in which we work and learn.

We define a learning and performance ecosystem as enhancing individual and organizational effectiveness by connecting people, and supporting them with a broad range of content, processes, and technologies to drive performance.

While this framework is new, it is derived from earlier, well thought-out concepts including, but not limited to, blended learning, human performance technology, and informal learning. It brings together six major components that help people learn and perform better: talent management, performance support, knowledge management, access to experts, social networking and collaboration, and structured learning. These are not set in stone. We expect these components to evolve and new ones to emerge over time.

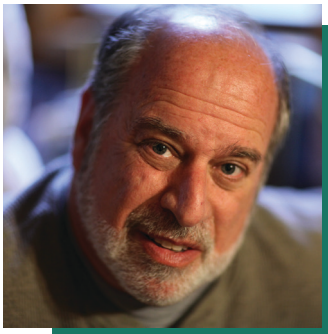
Despite its name, a learning and performance ecosystem is more flexible and adaptable than most typical "systems." It can be applied in creative and dynamic ways, shaped one way to address a specific set of

performance problems and opportunities, and then reshaped to meet new challenges. It gives us a way to organize the increasing complexity of what we do, without locking us into one specific step-by-step methodology.

This white paper explores learning and performance ecosystems from conceptual, technological, cultural, and managerial perspectives, and looks into how this new framework will dramatically impact the ways in which people learn and work.

This white paper lays a foundation for further discussion, experimentation, and innovation into new ways to leverage all that we know about learning to improve workforce performance. There isn't enough space to delve into the intricacies of each of the many solutions possible within the ecosystem, or describe in great detail their underlying processes and technologies. It assumes that the reader is familiar enough with these approaches, terms, and concepts to make the jump to ecosystem thinking, or can access additional information if needed.

Download the complete white paper.



Marc J. Rosenberg & Steve Foreman,
November 4, 2014

QUINNSIGHTS: MUSING ON

THE L&D ECOSYSTEM

I've been touting the idea of the L&D ecosystem; I think it's both important and under-considered. The idea is a major step forward in developing an environment for performance and development, and I want to make sure we're not missing the opportunity.

The core of the L&D ecosystem concept is having the necessary tools to both perform in the moment and develop over time. A second dimension is to both execute on what's known and deal with the unknown. The latter naturally brings in the situation of working with others, performing and learning together. Finally, we want resources wherever and whenever we need them, decoupling technology from the desktop. Ultimately, we have a fairly rich space we would like to support.

The notion here is meeting a range of needs. Having job aids when we're performing specific tasks can remove many or most of the mistakes inherent in our cognitive architecture. Checklists, lookup tables, how-to videos, decision trees, and the like are more efficient and effective than training, particularly when things are arbitrary, extensive, complex, unique, or changing quickly. And those situations are increasing!

Providing learning beforehand hasn't gone away, of course, but we now recognize that the picture is complex. For instance: We need different approaches to prepare people for things that occur both frequently and infrequently. We can take advantage of performance opportunities and turn them into learning experiences with the timely delivery of content.

For the unanticipated situations—such as the need to innovate, problem-solve, or troubleshoot—we may need to collaborate with others. We may need tools for representation and reflection. We know that the outcome is likely to be better when we bring in complementary skills and diverse approaches, so we want to make that easy. Support for working out loud (aka showing your work) is valuable here, too.

Beyond just making these capabilities available ubiquitously through mobile, we have another possibility. The ability to track location, time, and other contextual details means we can start delivering or customizing things proactively, not just generically. Delivering the right thing to the right person, at the right time, in the right way, is on tap.

Digital technology, which is eLearning in the broad sense, makes this possible. When we're smart about what's possible and how we work best, we can pull together a full suite of capabilities and make them available not only on demand, but opportunistically. We can align portals to individuals and push contextually relevant support. We can also instrument these solutions to give us back valuable data.

The effort to do this requires a holistic mindset. We need to worry about performance, not just learning. We need to care about meeting informal as well as formal learning needs. We need to think about facilitating, not just delivering.

Doing all this is more than just a different perspective. It's a different role in the organization, but a valuable one. And while the cost to do more may seem overwhelming, it's also about working smarter; that

is, moving past courses to resources, thinking curation over creation, and working on the least assistance principle (people don't want everything—just enough to succeed and move on).

I suggest that this is both doable and desirable. You're moving from course delivery to solution provider, and pivoting from being a cost center to being a value generator. It involves a bigger perspective on measurement.

Ecosystems are balanced ecologies. Here, we're talking about a balance of support for all the ways of working. Start thinking full suite. Your organization needs it, and you are best poised to deliver. Are you ready?

Clark Quinn, March 2, 2018

THINKING SYSTEMICALLY ABOUT

LEARNING ECOSYSTEMS

As our understanding of learning and development improves, we must continue to explore the system within which we operate. Our learning space goes well beyond just an LMS; there are multiple elements that we influence and impact. We can be much more effective if we look at each element to determine its health and potential for improvement.

In this session you will explore a more systemic view of learning ecosystems that will take into consideration the possibilities outside our traditional scope. You will participate in an open discussion on your own experiences related to learning ecosystems. You will leave this session with a better understanding of the full scope of possibilities of the entire system within which you operate.

In this session, you will learn:

- One definition of a learning ecosystem
- The elements of a learning ecosystem
- Success stories about exploring these areas
- Challenges and tips in socializing others on learning ecosystems

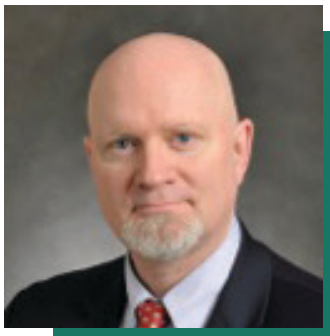
Audience:

Novice to advanced designers, developers, managers, and directors who are familiar with tools such as EPSS and communities of practice, in addition to more formal training methods.

Technology discussed in this session:

LMS/LCMS, electronic performance support systems (EPSS), individual readiness assessments, evaluation tools, mobile and tablet technology

Download the conference archive handout and watch the session video.



Jay Chance & Chester Stevenson,
March 25, 2015

LEARNING ECOSYSTEMS: PRACTICAL LESSONS IN

DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

This year is proving to be the year of the learning ecosystem. It's the culmination of years of research into knowledge management and collaboration, refinement of online learning design, practical experimentation, and maturity of online learning technologies and associated skills. The creation of a successful learning ecosystem requires deep insight into an organization's key business drivers and metrics; effective stakeholder engagement; understanding of the current technology infrastructure; and the appropriate skills and knowledge of those responsible for the ecosystem's definition, design, and maintenance.

Participants in this session will see what creating a learning ecosystem looks like in practice. You'll examine how Vodafone used the learning ecosystem approach to develop a comprehensive corporate university that aggregates and curates the best formal learning resources across the enterprise and fosters informal learning to create a truly global learning organization. Because there's no one-size-fits-all approach to these ecosystems, you'll also learn how to identify the most important aspects of the ecosystem for your organization, and using the provided frameworks for the business analysis and design of ecosystems, adjust your approach accordingly.

In this session, you will learn:

- How learning ecosystems are defined across a variety of contexts
- How to link learning ecosystems to real business metrics
- About the skills required to deliver and maintain an ecosystem
- The role learning and development, subject matter experts, IT, and learners play in learning ecosystems
- How one of the world's largest telecommunications providers created a successful learning ecosystem

Audience:

Intermediate to advanced designers; strategists; facilitators; technologists; content developers; project managers; managers; directors; VPs; CLOs; and executives who are experienced in the online learning field, have knowledge of the current technology landscape, and understand the principles of effective learning design or experience in learning needs analysis. No prior knowledge of learning ecosystems is required, but we recommend reviewing *Learning and Performance Ecosystems: Strategy, Technology, Impact, and Challenges* and *Learning and Performance Ecosystems: Current State and Challenges*.

Download the online conference handouts and listen to the recording.

Lisa Minogue-White, October 29, 2015

CORPORATE DIGITAL LEARNING

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Digital learning is a new paradigm… an openess to adapting corporate skills acquisition and performance support to the needs, goals, and behaviors of modern learners.

Pamela S. Hogle,
from What is Corporate Digital Learning?

THE eLEARNING GUILD

WHAT IS CORPORATE DIGITAL LEARNING?

There's a new term that's been emerging in our industry recently: Digital Learning.

While that phrase has been in use within the academic space for a number of years, it seems to be catching on within the corporate training space as well. But what is Corporate Digital Learning? How is this phrase different from any of the other labels we've used to describe the work that training and development professionals do each day?

I think the answer to that question will take some time to emerge through conversations within our industry over the next few years. While the academic space has been exploring the concept of digital learning for a number of years, there's still not a single clear definition of what the phrase means.

What I would like to do here is share how I see the definition of Corporate Digital Learning emerging, and why I think the phrase represents a shift to the work training and development will be doing in the future.

What is Corporate Digital Learning?

In order to understand the concept of Corporate Digital Learning I think it's important to explore each individual word within the context of the phrase itself. I'm also going to explore them in reverse order because I believe that order helps one word's context build upon the next to shape the overall definition.

Learning

> *Corporate Digital Learning focuses on the activities of learning itself, rather than on the activities related to creating learning resources.*

Learning is a term we throw around a lot in our industry. We use the phrase as the very title we often associate with our work—that of a Learning Professional. In actual practice though, what we do isn't building learning; it's building resources and programs—usually in the form of training—that provide people with the opportunity to learn. That's an important distinction as we look at the word *learning* in the context of the phrase *Corporate Digital Learning*.

Let me be clear. We do amazing work in training and development, and the resources we have built have helped individuals and organizations for decades. We've been creating courses and programs and resources for decades because of a simple paradigm: If people in an organization needed to learn how to do something, we needed to create the content and structure through which they could build that skill. People didn't have the ability to fill the skill gap on their own. They not only needed someone to provide the solution to them, there was an expectation of it.

That paradigm is rapidly changing.

People in our industry often describe this paradigm change as a shift to "self-directed learning", but that's in many ways industry jargon. There's not a conscious shift among individuals towards self-directed learning; what does exist is a cultural shift in behavior as people realize that they can find answers on their own. That behavior change is increasingly shifting expectations in people from "I need you to solve this problem

for me" to "I can solve this problem for myself". It's this change that is at the heart of what we call self-directed learning, and it's being enabled by technology.

Digital

> *Corporate Digital Learning looks at all the ways we interact in a connected digital environment as the infrastructure that drives self-directed learning.*

There's a social paradigm that didn't exist only a few years ago, yet is almost ubiquitous today.

You're in a conversation with friends or family and a question is posed to the group. After a brief pause it becomes apparent that no one in the conversation knows the answer. When this happens, inevitably someone in the group will pull out their smartphone to look up the answer.

This scenario is so common today that many of you probably heard a voice in your head saying "I'll Google it" as you read it.

The convergence of new technologies that have enabled us to tap into the limitless world of data provided by the internet at any moment wherever we are has fundamentally changed how we interact with information... and each other. It's this connected digital environment that forms the infrastructure that drives self-directed learning.

While the environment is often an amalgamation of different resources—apps, portals, internet sites, and more—that people call upon in the moment to solve a problem, new technologies designed from the ground up to support this new way people are naturally learning are emerging. These emerging technologies enable us to do two major things.

First, there are technologies that enable us to track all of the different types of activities we engage in every day and to—more importantly—analyze them in the context of learning and performance. Second, there are new services built with self-directed learning in mind, which enable this natural problem-solving behavior while also enabling organizations

to structure learning opportunities in a way tied to organizational goals.

It's those final two words—organizational goals—that lead us to the last word I want to address within the phrase Corporate Digital Learning.

Corporate

> *The problems people need to solve in their work aren't the same as those they explore in their personal lives. These problems are linked to job-related tasks and organizational goals, which alters what digital learning looks like in a corporate or organizational context.*

When you started reading this article you may have wondered why I add the word corporate as a qualifier to digital learning. After all, digital learning is digital learning, right?

How learning cognitively works within our brains may be the same, but the purpose and environment in which the learning is taking place is very different, and that context shapes much of the definition of what digital learning looks like in action.

In academic environments, learning is often about developing understanding. The goals of an academic program are to build knowledge, skills, and attributes related to a topic, which collectively lead to an overall understanding.

In organizational learning, the goals are different. Organizations don't care about understanding, at least not in the literal sense. They care about what employees do.

You might read that and think "Not my organization. We value learning here." That may be the case. But every senior leader that genuinely says "We value learning in our organization..." is also saying something else, even if they don't speak it out loud – "...because we believe a culture of learning will lead to better organizational performance."

The problem-solving behavior I described earlier still applies to people in organizations; they're just applying these new behaviors in the context of their work. Similarly, the efforts of organizational training and learning professionals are linked to the goals of the organization and the metrics used to measure performance against those goals. That context heavily influences how digital learning is defined within the corporate or organizational environment.

The Future of Corporate Digital Learning

While the term Digital Learning may be emerging as a buzzword in our industry, I think the trends that are driving it are here for the long-term. The number of technologies that are supporting the digital learning infrastructure continues to expand, which will only work to reinforce and normalize the change in human behaviors that are shaping this shift.

People in the K-12 and Higher Education space are already exploring this new way of learning, and the emergence of the trend in the corporate and organizational learning industry continues to grow. Training and learning professionals will need to adapt to these changes in behavior while at the same time linking the shift towards self-directed learning to organizational goals.

The description for Corporate Digital Learning I've shared in this post is by no means a final definition. It's simply the framework I see emerging around the concept. The discussions our industry will have on the topic in the months and years to come will not only bring clarity around this concept, but it will also help deliver tools and strategies to help us harness the potential of this shift.

Personally, I'm looking forward to participating in these discussions. It's an exciting time to be in our field.i

This was a Twist blog post. Download the white paper by Pamela S. Hogle that inspired it.

David Kelly, August 11, 2017

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DIGITAL LEARNING: AN INTERVIEW WITH DAVID KELLY

Although the term *digital learning* has been referenced in academia for at least a decade, it is attracting considerable attention among those in the learning and development industry. David Kelly, executive vice president of The eLearning Guild, chronicled the emergence of corporate digital learning in a recent blog post. He expands upon the subject in this interview.

Susan Jacobs (SJ): In a nutshell, how would you define digital learning?

David Kelly (DK): First, my intention is not to necessarily define it, but to start a conversation about it. That's what we do at The Guild. We provide a platform for the community to engage in discussions to make sense of changes and trends in our industry. I've been sharing my perspective on the topic to provide context as a starting point for discussions.

Let's begin with what it's not. It's not a new methodology or a new way of training or educating people. Digital learning reflects a fundamental

change in the behavior of learners themselves, rather than a change in behavior related to the training department.

To me, digital learning is about this shift from people waiting for someone to give them the resources to solve a problem, to just finding the resources themselves. It's a shift from "I don't know how to do something, so I guess I need to go to training," to "I don't know how to do something, so I'm going to pull out my phone and Google it to find the answer."

SJ: How is technology driving this move toward digital learning?

DK: Technology enables learners to find answers themselves. This metaphor can explain it. When my wife and I were planning our honeymoon to Europe in 1999, we couldn't book our own flights or hotels because we didn't have the ability to research all the options that were out there, let alone go to sites and make the reservations ourselves. We had to have someone plan our itinerary, so we turned to a travel agent. We needed that external person to not only provide the content, but to also facilitate the transactions.

Speed ahead 18 years. I'm going to Singapore in November. I've never been there before, but I have gone online and done all the research. I booked my own flight and hotel, and learned the cultural things I need to know. My personality is such that I would have done that in 1999, but the reality is that those resources didn't exist then.

SJ: How does digital learning compare to eLearning?

DK: Digital learning is the promise of learning technology in full bloom. It reflects the shift in learning responsibility from the trainers to the learners themselves, powered by technologies that are enabling people to learn and solve problems on their own, in real time. As such, digital learning is less about the actions of a learning professional and more about the actions of the learners themselves. It represents a paradigm shift that will change the role of the learning professional forever.

SJ: If digital learning is an iteration of eLearning, isn't it just a case of semantics?

DK: It could be viewed as semantics in the regard that we are relabeling something we all know. But the other piece of the equation is the shift of the conversation from what the training department is doing, to what the learner is doing. That is not just semantics. That is the core element of what the digital learning conversation is about.

Training is something you can do to another person. Learning is not. I can provide a resource that helps you learn, but you have to learn on your own. Digital learning is about the activities of the person who is learning. As L&D professionals, this represents a fundamental shift in how we approach the subject.

SJ: What does digital learning encompass?

DK: It encompasses the larger, formal training rocks, but also all of the little rocks that exist on a day-to-day basis. As an example, in our company we use a digital communication tool called Yammer. If I post a question on Yammer and nine people respond with answers to it, that's digital learning in practice. There's no official course there, it's not in the LMS, and it's not being tracked anywhere, but learning is taking place. I also use a host of other digital tools to engage in similar interactions with people around the world every day to learn and solve problems.

Companies are going to have to learn how to leverage digital learning because interactions that help workers solve problems, and develop their skills and competency, count. They keep our organizations moving forward. But we've never prioritized them or really incorporated them into our strategies.

SJ: Do you believe digital learning will complement, compete with, or replace eLearning?

DK: Definitively complement! I want to emphatically state that nothing's dying, and eLearning is not going to go away. Digital learning simply gives us more options and enables us to have more tools in the belt. I see eLearning in its current form being part of the digital learning environment. Digital learning is just acknowledging that there is a larger pie of how people are learning, and understanding that we should be

giving weight to things we previously didn't give weight to.

SJ: What impact do you expect digital learning to have? Will it completely disrupt the L&D industry, the way iTunes altered the music industry or Uber disrupted the automotive industry?

DK: I don't think it's going to be as disruptive as either of those. Both of those examples disrupted their industries almost overnight. I don't see that happening within our environment. If you look at corporate learning today, each organization is its own ecosystem. Many still train in a 1980s classroom environment, and that works for them. The fact that all these new tools have been introduced hasn't changed their world. With digital music, everyone had to adapt because the CD industry went away. You didn't have the option of not changing. In corporate environments, you still have the option of not changing, as long as it doesn't hold back your business.

That said, the change in learner behaviors I've been talking about aren't really "learner" behaviors. The change is how people are engaging in a digital world. Our smartphones alone have fundamentally changed what it means to live and interact in a digital world. If these technologies are changing how we live and learn in day-to-day life, it stands to reason that expectations for how we learn in our organizations will shift accordingly.

SJ: Do you think digital learning will reduce the need for trainers?

DK: No, but I see it becoming a potential threat to trainers who are not adapting. If you're a trainer who is not looking at the way technology is changing the environment in which we work, you are putting yourself at risk to be circumvented by that technology. This is an opportunity to pivot in new directions.

SJ: How can people in our industry best prepare for the advent of digital learning?

DK: Everyone in the L&D industry should put on their learner caps for a minute. Think about how you use your technology in your day-to-day life, and acknowledge the gap that exists between how you use these

technologies personally, and how you use them in your organizations. There is a huge difference between those two, and that difference represents the promise of digital learning.

SJ: Is there anything L&D should fear about digital learning?

DK: No. Fear is about change holding us back. This is all about opportunity.

Digital learning resources

Bersin, Josh. "The Disruption of Digital Learning: Ten Things We Have Learned." JoshBersin.com. 27 March 2017.

Bersin, Josh. "Watch Out, Corporate Learning: Here Comes Disruption." Forbes. 28 March 2017.

Kelly, David. "What is Corporate Digital Learning?" The eLearning Guild TWIST Blog. 11 August 2017.

Susan Jacobs, September 6, 2017

5 REASONS EXECS SHOULD PAY ATTENTION TO DIGITAL LEARNING

With an abundance of rich resources literally at their fingertips, today's learners are using technology to find their own answers to workplace questions. This unprecedented shift in human behavior is expected to radically transform the current corporate training paradigm. L&D executives need to be prepared for the ramifications digital learning will bring.

Five reasons execs should pay attention to digital learning

1. Digital learning is here to stay

It may be tempting to dismiss digital learning as a buzzword or passing trend; however, experts maintain that digital learning is here to stay. Furthermore, they predict that it will significantly impact the L&D industry.

"Right now we're in the early stages of a major disruption," writes Josh Bersin, principal and founder of Bersin by Deloitte. In a piece for

Forbes, the business thought leader notes that the industry is pivoting to embrace digital learning. Technologies that support digital learning are expanding, and vendors are "focusing on developing video-learning platforms that feel more like YouTube than an educational course catalog."

David Kelly, executive vice president of The eLearning Guild, advises L&D executives to educate themselves about digital learning because it will inevitably become part of their overall strategy. "Even if your training department is not proactively looking to shift towards this change in human behavior right now, your organization will eventually be impacted," he says.

2. It changes the conversation

"The question we need to be exploring from an executive standpoint is: What does learning and development look like when we realize and accept that we are no longer controlling the conversation?" Kelly says.

In the past, L&D took responsibility for providing the resources learners might need, usually housing it within the corporate learning management system (LMS). Workers today can fend for themselves. In many instances they are shunning the LMS, opting instead to use digital tools such as Google and YouTube to find immediate answers to their questions.

In light of this paradigm shift, L&D should be redesigning training to be simple, accessible, and employee-centric. "Just as we use apps like Uber to locate a ride or like DoorDash to order food, we need learning and information support to be as easy and intuitive to use," Bersin writes in a separate comprehensive and thought-provoking article about digital learning.

In the past, employees participated in lengthy instructor-led workshops or online training courses; however, today's busy workers don't always have time for that. Bersin's research indicates that harried

employees typically allocate just 24 minutes per week for training and development. "Rather than produce two- to three-hour 'courses' that require page-turning and slow video or animation, we need to offer 'learning on-demand' and recommended content just as needed," he suggests.

3. Self-learning has merit

This new and fundamental change in how today's workforce is learning has far-reaching ramifications for L&D, which must accept and embrace the fact that there is inherent value in self-learning.

"Right now we're in an environment where if you didn't learn it from the training department, it really doesn't count, to a certain degree. That's going to shift," Kelly says. "We're going to start to recognize that what people are doing outside the walls of the training department counts. The question is: How do we acknowledge and give weight to it? And how do we leverage it as an organization?"

The academic world views pure learning as a way to expand one's knowledge base. Kelly points out that in the corporate world, learning is accepted because it is an opportunity to enhance performance.

"The truth is: Very few organizations are going to allocate resources for the benefit of just learning. They will allocate resources if it is going to help employees do their jobs better," Kelly says. In this new paradigm, L&D executives will be called upon to demonstrate that digital learning adds intrinsic value and can help the company achieve its organizational goals.

4. Digital learning will irrevocably alter L&D

Digital learning promises to alter the industry in many ways, and L&D leaders must be prepared to respond appropriately. Personalization will take on greater importance. Rather than simply dishing out the same one-size-fits-all content to workers, L&D departments will have to partner with employees to develop customized learning journeys. Effectively tracking and measuring this will require new thought processes and technologies.

Kelly describes how digital learning will change the way the L&D assesses competency. "We may see workers saying 'I've learned this already, so I don't need to go through your formal training course.' This will shift the discussion from 'I'm going to build a test on the material you went through in my course' to 'I'm going to build a test that verifies your competency because you may have learned this elsewhere.'"

L&D departments may move in a direction similar to that of digital badges, which demonstrate competency in particular topics. Workers could earn the badges by taking Lynda.com or Coursera-style classes, reading blogs by industry experts, commenting on posts from work colleagues on internal communication sites, or watching relevant videos on YouTube. Such initiatives, when combined with a transcript documenting official training from the LMS, will generate a more robust picture of the learner's skill set and could actually follow the employee throughout his or her career.

Kelly admits that the technology to effectively track digital learning is not yet fully realized. "There's infrastructure in place that can track a lot of this, xAPI and LRS (learning record stores) being the most visible," he says. "They can form the foundation of how we can track all these activities and make sense of them. But there's enough gray in what falls under the heading of digital learning that we can't say at this time that they can handle all of it."

What is clear is that the traditional LMS may not be built for the task. Bersin points out that many large firms are confining their LMSs to managing compliance and formal training, while developing new infrastructures to track digital learning.

"One of the keys to digital learning is building a new learning architecture. This means using the LMS as a 'player' but not the 'center,' and looking at a range of new tools and systems to bring content together," Bersin says. He predicts that in the future, a growing number of firms will shift L&D investment away from costly capital purchases (such as learning management systems) toward "pay for use" models that will provide increased flexibility as the market shifts.

5. It creates a need for new skill sets

Traditional trainers, instructional designers, and developers concerned that digital learning might usurp their jobs need not worry. Experts predict that digital learning will create new roles for employees, especially those with the aptitude to track and measure learning.

"A growing number of organizations out there have chief knowledge curators. I anticipate that we will see more of that," Kelly says. "I can also see some new technical roles emerging, especially for those who understand coding and can get different systems to talk to each other," he adds.

Pivoting employees in order to cover new staffing needs is just one of many decisions L&D executives will be faced with as digital learning permeates the workplace. According to Bersin, the explosion of digital learning promises to radically disrupt the industry, and L&D leaders must be prepared and up for the challenge.

"I'm not saying this is going to be easy. It takes a lot of new technologies and approaches, but it's clearly where things are headed," Bersin states.

Susan Jacobs, September 27, 2017

ELEARNING'S MANY FORMS

When the eLearning Guild was founded, the most widely used elearning application was self-contained courses. Now, elearning has expanded to encompass a treasure trove of formats and tools, enabling designers to select the best methodologies for the project at hand. Even when designers create classroom-based courses, they frequently supplement them with digital assets.

Technology-enabled learning currently in use included blended learning, curation for learning, microlearning, mobile learning, personalized learning, social media and virtual classroom/webinars.

HYBRID, MIXED-MODE, OR BLENDED LEARNING: BETTER RESULTS WITH ELEARNING

Blended learning is the term used to describe the instructional method that involves both face-to-face classroom style instruction as well as the use of online methods. It is also called hybrid learning or mixed-mode learning. A blended curriculum could include:

- a range of instructional methods, from traditional lecture and guided practice to problem-based learning and other approaches, such as games, case studies, simulations, and discussion groups;
- various delivery methods, in or out of the physical classroom, such as videos, eBooks, synchronous virtual classroom, and asynchronous (self-paced or self-guided) eLearning; and/or
- a mixture of moderation and facilitation methods, including instructor-led, peer-to-peer, collaboration, and so on.

For organizations that have not already incorporated eLearning into their enterprise learning strategy, it makes sense to start the transition

by shifting a small part of the traditional classroom training online and creating a blended curriculum. Blended learning can provide many benefits to the organization, to L&D managers, and to employees.

- It can integrate seamlessly with the organization's business objectives, bridging employee skill and knowledge gaps by supplementing existing training practices with additional resources.

- It can address the problem of limited classroom space and offer learning opportunities to employees who have otherwise not had opportunities for professional growth and development.

- Online courses that deliver basic content on a subject make better use of the valuable time of both the instructor and the employees; afterward, a subject matter expert, facilitator, or instructor in a classroom setting can help employees develop a more in-depth understanding of the subject.

- Blended learning enables L&D team members to get familiar with eLearning and to adapt their course development techniques to the online context. It also provides them with opportunities for innovation in instruction.

- A more dynamic method of knowledge transfer that includes a combination of online, face-to-face, and collaborative learning does a better job of engaging employees.

How to get started

There are many ways to blend courses and curricula. To a certain extent, the best way to start will depend on the course itself, the target audience, time available, and expected learning outcomes. However, assuming that you have an existing training calendar and program, you can supplement it with blended learning options in the following ways.

Put introductory courses online: Develop basic or introductory content on a subject into online modules. For example, if new employees have

to go through orientation or onboarding, they can first complete online courses that give an overview of the organization and all the essential aspects that do not really need to use the resource of an HR manager. Then, the face–to-face interaction provides more value-added knowledge and an opportunity to clarify doubts or questions that employees might have as a result of the online course content.

Create pre-classroom content: Case studies or problems give employees situations to think about before coming to a classroom session. The classroom interaction can then focus on possible ways to resolve the problem. For example, the case study could be about the customer objectives for a sales person, and employees can discuss their ideas as to how to achieve them. During the classroom interaction, not only will participants get to know the ideas held by the subject matter expert or instructor, but will also get to know the ideas held by peers. Peer-to-peer learning can make the learning value much higher.

Set up a collaborative platform: We know that classroom interaction can limit knowledge gain. Sometimes, the gain is just theoretical. When employees put the theory into practice they may face hurdles or roadblocks and they may or may not have someone to help them. Having a virtual space in which to engage and interact with each other will help them share their experiences, offer suggestions, and learn from each other. The instructor or other experts could then be moderators, facilitators, or even active participants in the group.

Post assessments online: Another simple way to start blended learning is by following up the classroom training with online assessments. We can test the understanding and outcome of the classroom training with summative online assessments that can be in simple multiple-choice format or in a more sophisticated gamification format.

Digital job-aids: Today's employees are used to accessing information instantly when needed using their mobile devices or tablets. Hosting job aids in the form of videos, podcasts, and eBooks online makes them available to employees as needed. It is important to make these

resources accessible via multiple devices and to tag them effectively for easy and quick access.

In summary, the design of blended learning options must make them part of an integrated training curriculum with a planned workflow structure. It means aligning every online resource, be it an eLearning module, eBook, video, podcast, or an assessment to a particular course and classroom curriculum and integrating them as single units with a planned workflow. When you do this, employees who have registered for a course have a clear understanding that they take an online course before attending a classroom session, and then follow it up with an online assessment. They also know what online resources to tap when they need help during the course of their jobs. If done this way, you are much more likely to get better learning outcomes.

RK Prasad, December 14, 2015

BUZZWORD DECODER:

CONTENT CURATION

Curation is about organizing, editing, and bringing order from chaos. How does this apply to online content for eLearning? As *Learning Solutions magazine* columnist Marc Rosenberg says, "There's a lot of stuff out there" on the web. Content curation aims to sift out the valuable content and present it to learners in a meaningful way. Put another way, curation is filtering out the information that you, your organization, or your learners need in order to accomplish a specific goal. Content curation can also mean, in the "museum curator" sense of the word, tending to a collection of content items to ensure that it stays relevant and current.

What any of that means specifically depends on your organization, your audience, and your goals.

The Internet, as NYU journalism professor and Internet communications expert Clay Shirky says, represents not an information overload so much as a filter failure. When the printing press was invented, publishers were responsible for filtering. If they published books that did not

sell, they paid the cost. That cost has all but disappeared; anyone can publish information at virtually no cost. Therefore, the Internet has a vast amount of inaccurate, inappropriate (for your needs), irrelevant, or just plain bad content. It also has many gems of information; the trick is finding them among the mass of content.

How does curation apply to eLearning?

Focus on finding those gems.

The eLearning Guild's program director, David Kelly, says that to be effective curators for their organizations, "learning and performance professionals need to discover where information is being shared in their organizations and tap into it."

He adds, "Curation is less about the quantity of resources than the quality of resources."

In an eLearning context, curation might include:

- Connecting learners with existing educational and training resources, both within and outside the organization, and filtering out the irrelevant, inaccurate, or poor-quality resources
- Facilitating resource sharing, where learning professionals and learners alike find resources and build reference "libraries"—which can be as simple as a communal web page—to share what they find with co-workers and fellow learners
- Creating and sharing networks of employees who are interested in and learning about the same topics
- Identifying trends—in topics discussed and information or training sought by members of an organization or workplace—and using that information to curate relevant learning opportunities and share pertinent resources

- Combining elements of unrelated resources or content to create training or new content that is useful to learners in an organization

- Adding value to content—not only selecting the most relevant resources, but also enriching them with comments, insights, suggestions, or even links to other content

Content curation can pay off in time saved and knowledge shared. Consider an example of an employee struggling to master a new tool. If all members of her department or project team are also learning that tool, the manager might simply assign them to complete an online training course and consider the task done. But as each employee begins using the tool, he or she will encounter roadblocks, have questions, and come up with new ways to use the tool or new shortcuts for tasks that all members of the team need to do. Curating that knowledge on a team discussion board or resource page would allow team members to answer one another's questions, share tips, rule out inefficient or unhelpful articles and training, and share how they are using the tool for their project. It might also contribute to a stronger sense of being part of a team

Pamela Hogle, August 2, 2016

BUZZWORD DECODER:

MICROLEARNING

Microlearning is a trendy buzzword and concept; so trendy, in fact, that people can't quite agree on what it means. Some use microlearning to describe short, informal learning experiences that learners consume individually (rather than learning that occurs in formal course frameworks). Others see it as brief learning experiences that add up to a planned program to meet stated learning goals—in other words, taking that formal course and breaking it down into tiny little nuggets of learning.

Whatever your overarching definition of microlearning, however, some aspects of it are consistent:

- Learning units are small, perhaps only a few minutes in duration
- Microlearning can be delivered on mobile or online platforms (but does not have to be)

- Each unit is narrowly focused
- Format can vary—microlearning can occur through games, simulations, activities, video, reading … pretty much any format

Microlearning offers clear advantages

A clear advantage of microlearning for eLearning developers and designers is that they can produce small units more quickly, and often less expensively, than deeper courses. In addition, they can create new modules more easily—and update existing ones more quickly—than longer course modules. When tagged or indexed and located within a searchable framework—an LMS or database, for example—microlearning units can be easy for learners to access at the moment they need the information (facilitating and complementing a "just-in-time training" approach). It suits the way many workers have become accustomed to acquiring knowledge.

Not everyone is a fan

Microlearning has its detractors as well as enthusiasts. Michael Strawbridge, a blogger on the Learning Professional Network, decries the focus on duration and frequency and the allure of technology rather than a focus on content and results.

Other critics contend that this approach fragments learning, making it harder for learners to synthesize and apply what they learn to long-term learning goals. Microlearning units tend to cover a single learning objective, so delving into deep or complex topics is not really feasible within a single microlearning experience.

However, microlearning is well suited to learning that requires lots of repetition, such as study of a new language, or for introducing or refreshing knowledge of procedures. It also plays nicely with

instructional strategies that emphasize spaced repetition and distributed practice, where learners practice a step or skill over and over before moving to the next. The small steps or skills build into a more complex process, so the microlearning units ultimately add up to mastery of a complex skill.

Pamela Hogle, August 30, 2016

RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT: MOBILE LEARNING PERSPECTIVES

Mobile learning (a.k.a. mLearning) is a topic that continues growing and evolving at astonishing rates. In our newest eBook, Mobile Learning Perspectives, I begin by acknowledging that in today's world, mobile is more than pervasive; it is ubiquitous, universal, even omnipresent. In fact, Larry Page, former Google CEO, may have said it best: "We are no longer living in a mobile-first world; we are in a mobile-only world."

Wide Variance in mLearning Practices

Author and educator Cecelia Munzenmaier, my co-contributing editor, begins with the observation that a recent Towards Maturity benchmarking survey found wide variances in the way mLearning is being implemented (see References). In top-performing organizations, 83 percent of respondents reported they were using mobile devices for learning. These companies typically describe mLearning as being "embedded" in their culture. However, among respondents as a whole, about 25 percent rate themselves as still "experimenting" with mLearning. These results show broad agreement that organizations need to use mLearning, but there are wide variations in practice, and not everyone has a strong record of success.

It doesn't matter where you are now, or your past record of implementation success. We focus these mobile learning resources on three fundamental capabilities that are essential to everyone's success:

- Assessing how mLearning can specifically benefit your organization
- Planning an effective mLearning strategy that works for the needs of your organization
- Implementing best practices in developing mobile content that help you avoid common mistakes and obstacles

The authors featured in this eBook are managers and practitioners with strong, hands-on experience in mobile learning development. They present their best thinking on five fundamental questions about how to realize the potential benefits of mLearning.

1. What can mLearning do that other types of eLearning can't?

The answer, for Paul Clothier, starts with the users. In "Right Time and Place: mLearning Use Cases," Paul discusses examples of effective mobile solutions and then suggests questions you can use to develop your own use case scenarios. At the time he wrote the article, Paul was a chief learning guru at TapLearn, a consultancy specializing in mobile learning content solutions. He is currently a director of training and mobile learning specialist at Apple.

In "Challenging the Infinite Monkey Theorem: Mobile Performance Support," Steven Loomis argues that the greatest advantage of mobile learning is that it allows you to embed learning content in the environment. He also details the advantages that mobile options have over traditional hard-copy materials and paper-based references (Table 1).

Table 1: **Traditional hard-copy materials and references vs. mobile options**

Materials/tools we give students	Advantages of a mobile option
Training manuals These materials contain the content covered in your class or course. They may also provide extra scaffolding or supplementary information that wasn't part of the class or course.	Mobile devices connect to the Internet and can have dynamic content. Use of movies, audio, and interactive elements can add extra support and expand on your classroom content.
Phone lists and contact information These materials contain factual content related to contact information.	Built-in mobile features can trigger phone calls, SMS, and email. This information could be dynamic so that it adjusts to changes within the organization. Skype and FaceTime options are available now to enable video conferencing. Other options include GPS and location information that could map directions.
Other reference materials These materials contain blocks of data organized to support searching and scanning activities. Here, users need to access specific information quickly and easily.	GPS, scanning, and recognition features within these devices can push or pull information to your students based on their immediate environment. Networks, databases, and mobile computing power can greatly amplify your students' search capabilities.
Procedural or process guides These job aids provide step-by-step directions on how to perform a procedure or task.	Video, AR, and interactive content could be included with your procedural guides to provide greater detail and guidance on these procedures.
Checklists These job aids support the need to document a list of items or tasks that users must complete for a complex process. These checklists ensure the accuracy and completeness of a given task.	When checklists are completed, mobile devices could trigger emails, alerts, or other notifications.
Calculators These job aids allow you to input data and perform calculations.	You could automate calculations and cluster analysis. This could allow you to create custom material handouts or send data to other sources.
Decision tables and flowcharts These job aids walk you through several conditions or decision points. Your inputs here will guide you to a set of recommendations.	Completing these job aids will generate automatic recommendations. This activity may trigger prepopulated process flows or initiate other actions based on your inputs.

Steven then goes on to recommend three strategies for making the transition to mobile performance support. Steven, who began his career in the QA department of an educational video game company, has developed performance support tools and training solutions for the legal, banking, and health care sectors.

2. How can we think strategically about mLearning?

Beyond making sure your authoring tool supports HTML5, and making sure you have either a BYOD (bring your own device) policy or a mobile-usage policy in place, what else do you need to be ready to deploy mobile learning? In "Five Tips: Are You Ready to Deploy Mobile Learning?," Stephanie Ivec identifies five things to think about as you plan and implement a mobile learning strategy. She writes for the Lectora eLearning blog (www.trivantis.com/blog), eLearningIndustry.com, and HR.com.

The way to execute a mobile learning strategy at scale is to take advantage of micro-moments, explains David James in "The Role of Mobile in Learning." People will want to access learning at so many times and in so many places that L&D will need to use three ways to develop content, he says: create, collaborate, and curate. Formerly a director of talent, learning, and OD for Disney, David is currently a learning strategist with Looop.co.

"Your learners are already mobile learners," according to Jennifer Neibert. In "Mobile Learning for Talent Development: Critical Questions for Learning Leaders," she offers questions to help organizations think strategically about how to integrate mobile learning into their culture. Jennifer is a news writer with *Learning Solutions Magazine* and principal of Brushfire Learning, which creates custom solutions to engage learners and promote long-term performance sustainability.

3. How can we best develop mLearning?

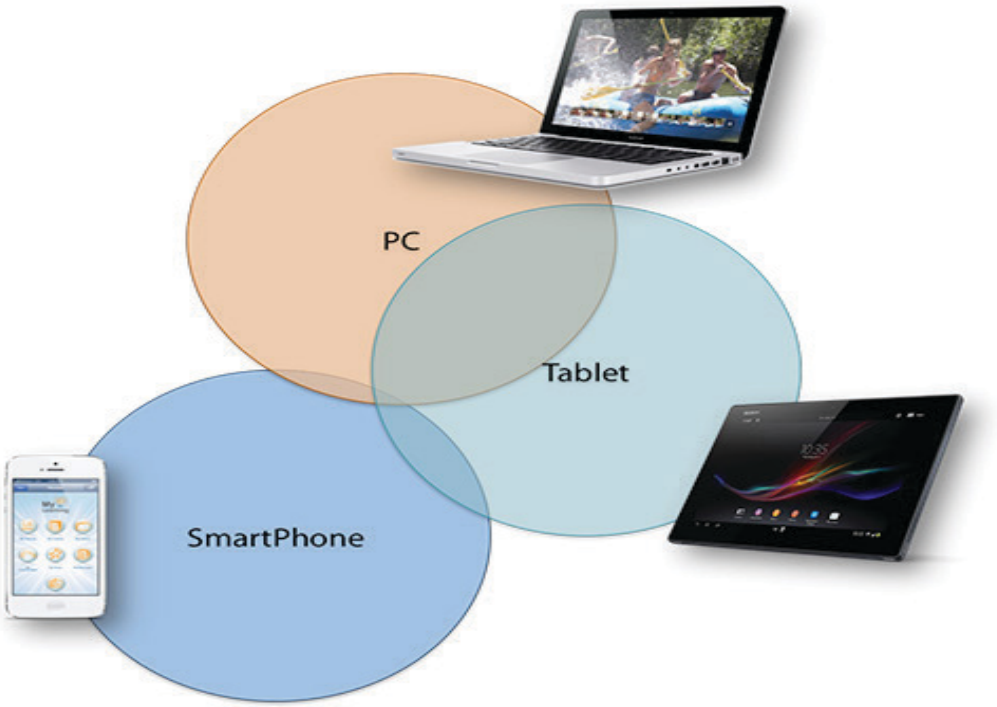
J.P. Medved presents a template for managing all five phases of an

mLearning project in "Mobile eLearning Design: How to Survive Your First mLearning Project." J.P. is a content editor at Capterra, a privately held technology and online media company focused on bringing together buyers and sellers of business software.

Tempting as it can be to simply move existing content to a mobile platform, it's best to "think of ways you can supplement the eLearning you have rather than trying to duplicate it on a small screen," says Paul Clothier. In "Adapting eLearning for Mobile: Learning from Wonderful Mistakes," he models best practices for transitioning to mLearning, as well as a positive attitude.

Paul divides "mobile" into two categories, "phone mobile" and "tablet mobile." When writing about mobile devices, he is "primarily talking about smartphones, not tablets," he says. His perspective is that designing learning content for a tablet has more in common with designing for laptop or desktop eLearning than for smartphones (Figure 1). As a result, Paul's guidelines are for "phone mobile" devices—"those with a small screen that you typically carry with you everywhere."

***Figure 1*: Content similarities between devices**



4. What new insights are emerging about mLearning?

Rick Wilson and Gary Woodill's article "Engineering Intelligent Content for Mobile Learning" originally appeared in *Learning Solutions Magazine* on March 24, 2011. In its final section, the authors discussed the "emerging vision" of mLearning. We've incorporated the authors' updated thoughts on the potential of intelligent mobile content.

5. How do we know we're doing mLearning right?

Another area in which new insights and best practices are emerging is quality control. We invited our authors to reflect on how you can monitor whether you're doing mLearning right. Their responses give you their latest thinking on the potential of mLearning and provide benchmarks you can use to assess the quality of your mobile initiatives.

Where do we go from here?

Our purpose in creating this eBook was to reach out to L&D professionals who see the pervasive workplace influence of mobile and its exponential impact on almost all aspects of learning and development. More importantly, we also wanted to provide guidance and resources—and a solid starting point—toward gaining an in-depth understanding of current mLearning strategies, development approaches, and best-practice insights. Among these are additional Guild resources, detailed references for further reading, and a glossary of terms for those new to mobile learning strategy, design, and deployment.

In terms of "where we go from here," let me leave you with two data points that we discuss in the eBook:

- *We have already moved from "mobile" to "mobility."* According to Giselle Abramovich (see References), "90 percent of the population has a connected device within arm's length at all times." Mobile is no longer just a tactic for marketers—or for learning professionals; it is a "core critical strategy," as Steven Cook writes at CMO.com (see References).

- *"Mobile" is becoming "digital."*We will begin to see the distinction between "mobile" and "digital" disappear. Terms such as "mobile teams," "mobile strategy," and "mobile marketing" "will start to diminish in 2016," Giselle Abramovich writes, as we recognize that mobile cannot be confined to its own conceptual or technology "silo." It remains to be seen whether mobile learning will also disappear as a distinct type of learning.

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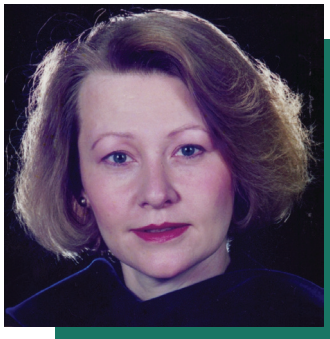
Download the eBook, Mobile Learning Perspectives



Sharon Vipond, April 27, 2016

ONE SIZE WON'T FIT ALL: THE FUTURE OF

PERSONALIZED DIGITAL LEARNING

In June, I attended The eLearning Guild's new FocusOn Learning Conference & Expo. There was one particular takeaway from the conference that I think we need to embrace more as an industry, and I want to share that thought with you. The thought is this: What if your digital learning could adapt, adjust, read, and assess the needs of each of your "digital students," then serve up a personalized course specific to each of them based on their personal learning history? How cool would it be if we could create a personalized learning experience for each student who takes our courses?

Personalized learning? What is that?

What do I mean by personalized learning? Imagine, if you will, that we are in a classroom together. I am the teacher and you are the student. You came to my class to learn how to use a certain software program. Before the class, you decided that you wanted to review some tutorials and documents that would help you feel ready to dive right into the content. But others in the class did different things to prepare, and some did not prepare at all, so each person is on a different level.

As the teacher, I prepared a lesson, but I wanted to make sure I would be ready for any type of question that might come up. So I almost over-prepared to make sure I was knowledgeable enough about the tool and ready to answer any question about the software. I then organized a plan based on where I thought the class would go, but I also prepared for other situations that might happen. So as a teacher, I am able to adapt and adjust my lesson depending on the learners' needs and the questions that may come up as I am teaching the class. But suppose that, during the class, you have questions that are different than what I had planned.

Now, I can take your questions and respond in one of two different ways. I can ignore your questions and continue with my plan, or I can change my plan and spend some time helping you understand some of the basics, and then adapt the rest of the content as I go. If I am a good teacher, I will choose the second option. I would see the students' needs or identify their knowledge gaps and then do what I could to help fill those knowledge gaps. In that way, when I get back on schedule it will go more smoothly than if I had tried to ignore those knowledge gaps and just push the content I prepared.

For the most part, as "digital teachers" we tend to just push our content as the solution, a "one-size-fits-all" course, ignoring where users may be in their current knowledge. In person, I am able to adapt, change, adjust, read, and assess the student needs in real time and change my approach based on what I learn about the individual learners. Because of that, I can personalize my teaching to better help everyone in the class.

So how do we do that digitally? How do we adapt, adjust, read, and assess our digital students' needs to create a personalized experience in a digital format? Most current eLearning tools only allow you to push content, creating a presentation without really allowing for the customization and personalization that the users need. Yes, I know some allow you to collect the user's name and then plug it in throughout the course. That is a good start, but I am talking about creating a completely different course for each user.

Getting to know the user

So how do we get around that? Do we have to stop teaching digitally and move back to in- person courses? No, of course not. How do we create digital learning that can adapt, adjust, process, and assess our learners' needs? How do we create training that can get to know the users, identify their knowledge gaps, figure out what they have done and what they haven't done, and then serve up instantly a personalized digital course that best suits their needs?

One solution could be as simple as adding "get-to-know-you questions" at the very beginning of a course. The responses would allow you to create logic on the fly for the course: which sections to serve up and which sections not to deliver. You could even modify the content based on user responses.

If you have not heard of Consensus (www.consens.us), you should check it out. This application targets sales organizations, but I think the concepts behind the approach could easily be applied to the learning sector. Instead of just asking prospects to click a button and watch a one-size-fits-all sales demo video, the technology first asks questions of the individual. Knowing what the person already knows and what they don't know, what their needs are, and which features are of most interest to them, the application creates a custom sales demo for each prospect. This demo shows longer sections of the video that target the prospect's interest and shorter video snippets for features the prospect cares about less.

Holy smokes! Can you imagine doing that for learning? What if you gathered some user info before a course to set up the logic and then programmatically adapted the course for the user? It is not as personalized as a one-on-one discussion, but it gets closer than static one-size-fits-all learning.

Knowing how to write some basic code could accomplish this. You could prompt the users with questions, store their responses in some variables, and then programmatically take them down different paths based on those responses.

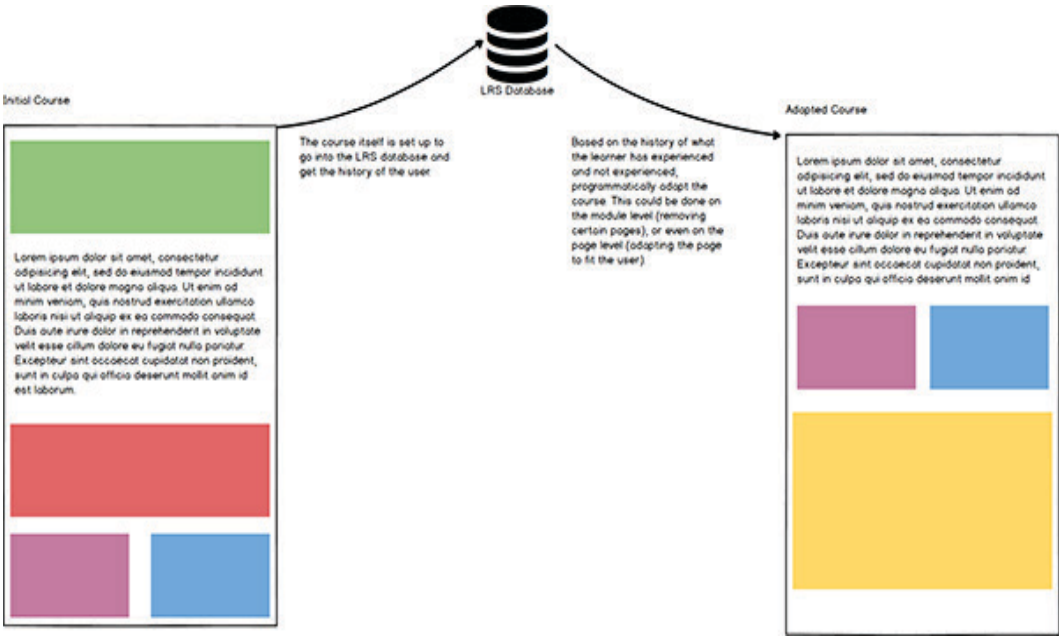
The xAPI—personal learning history

We have been hearing about the xAPI (Experience API) for years now. We know that it allows us to track data from any location and that we can get more detailed data than we ever could with SCORM. With the xAPI, we can assemble what are called "statements." This allows us to track various learning activities, such as: Jeff Batt attended FocusOn Learning Conference. This statement has three important elements—the actor (who it is: "Jeff Batt"), the verb (the action: "attended"), and then the object (name of the thing the actor acted upon: "FocusOn Learning Conference"). Sending over these statements allows us to start tracking learning history. Every time we send a statement, that event is now stored in an LRS (learning record store), which gives us greater insights into what our learners are doing and how our content is performing.

But probably the most fascinating part is that it also gives us the ability to programmatically go into the LRS and, on the fly, see what a learner has done and hasn't done, and use that data in whatever way we need to use it. Imagine: With a learner's history built over time in the LRS, we could create a personalized course that first goes into the LRS and asks the question, "What has the learner already learned or experienced?" With the information that the LRS gives us, we could adapt, change, adjust, read, and assess the student's needs, and deliver a different course based on their personal learning history. This is just like I explained in the first example ("Personalized learning? What is that?"), but now we don't need to ask the users questions or ask them to fill anything out first—the course can obtain the information automatically, and in fact, it would have more data to work with than it could get from a form.

Figure 1 is a schematic of the way this could work.

***Figure 1*: Schematic of xAPI support for personalized learning**



This may seem "Big Brotherish," but it is not far from what is already being done on the web. How does Amazon know what I want? Facebook uses what it knows about you and your behaviors to deliver customized, personalized marketing ads for things you like. Target has also been doing this for years.

I have done some initial tests of this concept, and it looks promising. I am excited to explore this use of the xAPI in more depth. This does call for creating courses in a different way and for becoming more user-centric. It forces thinking beyond static page-turners. It requires that we create courses that can flex and adapt based on user data. This may seem hard, and we may need to engage with web development teams and other talents outside the normal learning teams, but this approach forces us in the right direction. It is the path we need to take for digital learning.

Jeff Batt, July 15, 2016

FUNDAMENTALS OF SOCIAL MEDIA SUPPORT FOR LEARNING

2011 proved to be the year of high interest in the use of social media, from Facebook and Twitter, YouTube and Diigo, to Tumblr and Scoop.it, and other online networking services to support learning, as well as through similar services behind the firewall. Industry conferences and organizations were abuzz on the topic. However, while many learning professionals are interested in social media for learning, relatively few organizations have begun to implement it.

It's important for organizations to separate the buzz from reality and focus on the elements necessary to make a social learning program successful. As they become more comfortable with the concept and look to move forward, it's important for them to keep some fundamental requirements in mind.

Social learning is a three-legged stool

The most important concept for those who are venturing into social learning to keep in mind is that there are three elements required for success: a technology platform, a vibrant community, and great content.

The platform is necessary as it acts as a place to capture the organization's interactions. Ideally, it's easy to find and use in the course of everyday work. However, a simple platform is not enough – it must be filled with enough interesting content for viewers to return and engage.

People may come to visit the new social platform once or twice out of curiosity, but they won't return if there isn't anything there to engage them. Continued use is crucial to developing a vibrant community. By seeding the platform with great content, it's much easier for employees to jump in and offer initial comments, which will lead to additional comments and overall interaction.

It's also important to start with content that's both interesting to the audience and that provides business value. Learning professionals can help add this by building off their current base of learning content. This rich business or technical content will help keep the conversation focused on professional growth, rather than off-topic subject matter such as the weekend social scene.

Use social media to address the problem of information overload

The abundance of content can be a challenge to organizations, as it becomes difficult for users to find specific pieces of information among the overwhelming wealth of knowledge. Providing community support for learning through social media can help overcome this problem, with the power of such applications to amplify the most relevant content, highlighting the most useful resources. This in turn drives a higher level of productivity, because employees don't waste time searching for the proverbial needle in the haystack of information.

There are several ways communities can help bring attention to relevant content. One option is a social platform that allows users to recommend or "like" certain assets. Another is a platform that allows users to post comments on the material contained in books or courses, as this can create a layer of unique business knowledge on top of the trusted knowledge contained in the resource.

Make social media part of your blended learning strategy

Blended learning has emerged over the past several years, with learning leaders developing programs that blend traditional learning experiences with online learning. Social media support for learning has now entered the arena, adding another element to the blended learning paradigm.

Social media can increase employee participation in learning, especially if the programs have a significant element of self-directed learning. Learners are more likely to stay engaged and complete their program of study if they are able to reach out to peers involved in the same program or get help on a particular topic. Face-to-face or virtual-group interaction at key points in the program, such as a kick-off or achievement of a milestone, helps enhance user engagement.

Social media can also enhance the overall organizational learning program by supporting the knowledge transfer and actual behavioral change after the "formal" learning event has ended. Sometimes making the link between learning events that occurred away from the job (in a remote location or outside the flow of work) and the work itself can be difficult. By reinforcing the event, the involvement of peers and others through social media helps ensure the knowledge exchange was successful and applied in the workplace, contributing to improved business outcomes.

Build the equity of experts

One of social media's greatest values is that it helps to identify internal experts, which in turn increases organizations' productivity.

Today's highly specialized workplace often blurs the line between learner and teacher. Coworkers often have untapped knowledge, but they will go overlooked without a social program that allows them to share their insight.

This is especially true in today's global, virtual organizations where job titles don't tell the whole story about a person's range of skills and expertise, and where many workers are operating from remote offices. Social learning platforms can become a virtual water cooler: a place for colleagues to gather and exchange information.

Don't overlook the importance of discovery

Building on the idea that organizations are a network of experts, the issue quickly shifts to the ability to effectively and efficiently search for these experts. The knowledge that a system captures will be of little value if users can't find it when a need arises. To help achieve the goal of expert location, a social learning platform must have:

- A way for experts to self-identify;
- A way for community members to recognize others for their expertise; and
- A search function that identifies experts as learning resources.

The first step is a user-created profile that captures interests and skills not evident based on job title. Personal-interest information may help connect workers who would not normally interact, and let them gain from each other's knowledge base. These profiles will help coworkers identify and recognize expertise, bringing the most knowledgeable members of the organization to the forefront.

The ability to rate experts can also inform search, pushing these individuals to the top of the results, thus helping in future inquiries. Contributions, such as comments, notes, discussions, etc. should be searchable too, so users can recall these valuable nuggets of information as needed.

Make sure your social initiatives have cross-generational appeal

To achieve the maximum benefits of social media support for learning, organizations need to appeal to the entirety of the workforce. Millennials will gravitate to social media, as they grew up with these technologies and experienced them as part of their formal education.

However, social media tools should also appeal to Gen-Xers, Boomers and Traditionalists. This is crucial for capturing tacit knowledge, which is such an important part of the rationale for implementing social learning to begin with. It's vitally important to create an environment that's welcoming to the entire enterprise, especially in today's age-diverse workforce.

Ease of use and "reverse mentoring" are keys to overall adoption. Utilizing Millennials as spokespeople while marketing the program internally can help increase chance for success. Organizations should consider creating a team of internal champions to promote the benefits of the system and act as personal guides to employees who are less comfortable using online social systems.

Capture tacit knowledge (before it walks out the door)

As many baby boomers look towards retirement, social media can help capture the decades of institutional knowledge they currently possess. It can be a strategic tool in documenting tacit knowledge, especially when intertwined with the daily flow of work. This seemingly mundane institutional know-how, such as processes and people unique to the organization, is often the most important information to capture as it is crucial to daily productivity.

Make it simple and secure

Widely used social networking sites have set the bar for ease-of-use and learners will expect a similar intuitive experience from organizational social media technologies used in support of learning. If they mimic the basic elements of already-accepted social systems, social media used for learning will simplify and speed the process of employee engagement.

To help grab the attention of time-strapped learning professionals, social media-supported learning initiatives need to be relevant to employees, provide obvious value and be easy to find. By building a social learning platform on top of existing learning resources, organizations can maximize existing content and behavior to drive adoption.

To ensure organization information isn't leaking out to the Web, they need to make sure their system has the appropriate safeguards for security and that their employees understand the system is focused on serious business information. Organizations should also consider the privacy of employees participating in the system. Participants should be able to decide what information is included in their profile and whether or not their participation becomes public. Some social media systems are designed to automatically infer expertise based on usage. For example, if a user frequently searched a particular topic, it could show up as an area of expertise, even if the user may not want to be identified with it. It's important for organizations to allow employees to search the system privately, while still making sure they understand that contributed information becomes the intellectual property of the organization.

Lastly, it's important for organizations to carefully evaluate who's providing their social media system. Longevity is important to learning through social media, as platforms increase in value over time as more information is added. To help ensure long-term success, it's important for organizations to make sure their social system partners have a good track record of customer support and a viable future.

Tips for using social media to support learning

Building on blended learning, the use of social media to support learning has now entered the formal paradigm with traditional classroom, mentoring/coaching, and online methods. The following tips provide guidance on how to build successful social-media-supported learning programs for your organization:

- To help grab your employees' already-stretched attention, social media-supported initiatives need to provide obvious value, be easy to find, and be relevant to employees. You can help drive adoption by building your social learning platform on top of your existing learning and information resources, maximizing existing content and behavior.

- There are three key elements to keep in mind while planning social media support for a learning program: a technology platform, a vibrant community and great content. Seed the platform with great information from your current base and it will serve as a hook for users to return and engage. Prompting initial comments will lead to additional ones and an overall back-and-forth, achieving continued interaction.

- Social media can increase employees' participation in learning, as your employees are more likely to stay engaged and complete their program of study if they are able to reach out to coworkers involved in the same program or get help on a particular topic. Face-to-face or virtual group interaction at key points in the program, such as kick-offs or achievements of a milestone, also helps enhance user engagement.

- Reinforcing the knowledge transfer and actual behavioral change after "formal" learning events is important. By providing reinforcement after the event, social media helps ensure the knowledge exchange was applied in the workplace, contributing to improved business outcomes.

- Allow your social learning platform to become a virtual water cooler where colleagues can gather and exchange information. This will be especially beneficial if you work at a company where many employees work from remote or home offices on a global scale.

- Identifying internal experts and providing functionality for search and discovery are two of social media's greatest values. Make sure your social platform has the right set of features for capturing information and quickly recalling it at a later time.

- To help capture tacit knowledge, it's important to provide social media initiatives with cross-generational appeal. Utilize your company's Millennials to help market the program internally and train Gen-Xers, Boomers and Traditionalists who may not be as familiar with online social systems.

- Your users will expect the level of intuitiveness currently available in widely-used social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. People will more easily accept social-media support for your learning program if it can mimic the basic elements and usability of these sites.

- You can also increase engagement by providing the right user profiles. Profiles should represent your employees' interests and skills that sit outside their job titles. It's also important to allow your employees to provide personal details that may help them connect with their coworkers.

- Learning communities formed and supported by social media can help your organization overcome the issue of information overload by highlighting the most beneficial content. Allow users to recommend or "like" certain assets, as well as comment on the material.

- It's important to provide clear regulations to your employees to help ensure organizational information does not leak onto the Web. You should consider publishing a list of "Do's and Don'ts" for participation in workplace forums.

- Respect employees' desire for privacy, as they will feel more comfortable engaging with the system if they are in control of how much of their use is shared. Avoid using social media systems designed to automatically infer and publicize expertise based on usage and/or previous searches.

- Carefully review the companies you are thinking of partnering with for the social system, keeping longevity and customer support in mind. Longtime use of the social media platform is crucial to learning, as the value increases over time as more and more layers of information are added. It's important that your system partner can support long-term use.

Pam Boiros, January 30, 2012

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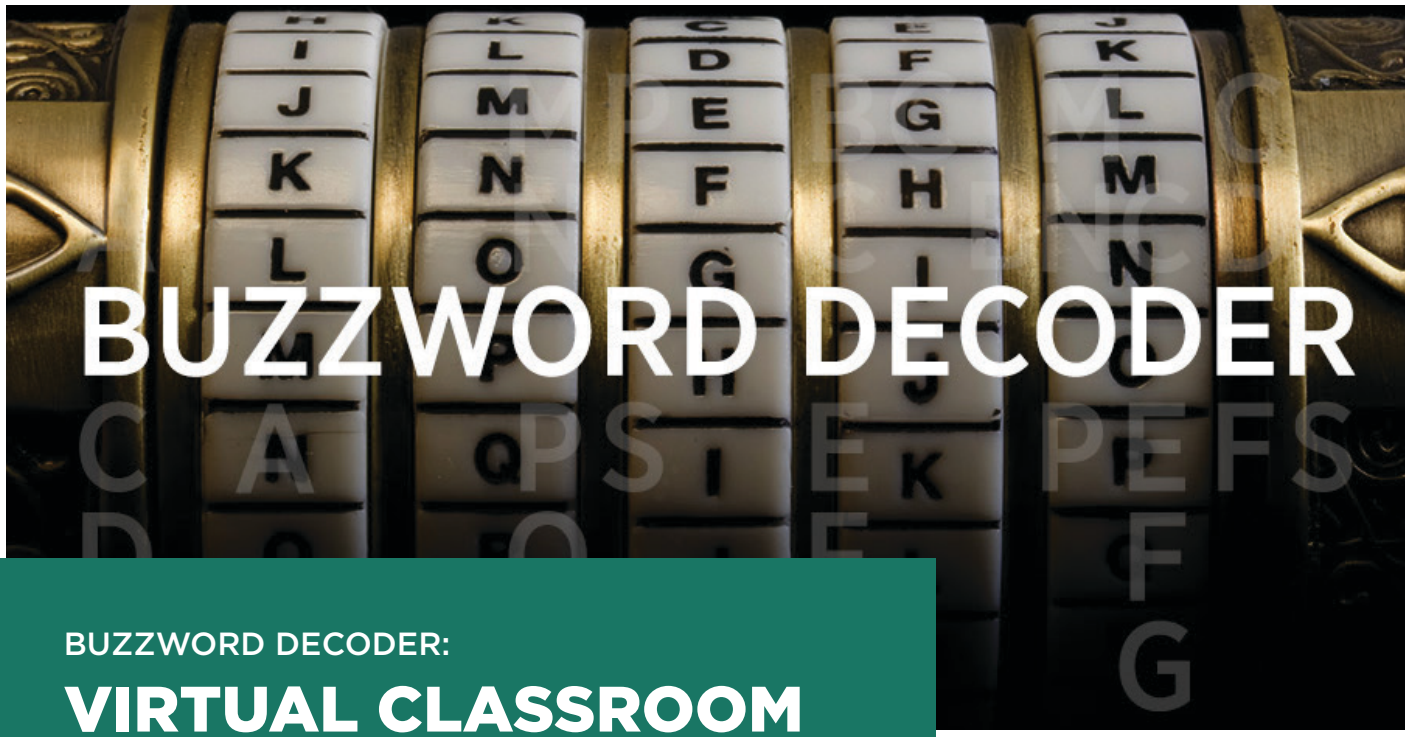

BUZZWORD DECODER:

VIRTUAL CLASSROOM

A virtual classroom is an online learning environment where synchronous learning takes place among geographically dispersed instructors and learners. The instruction, a virtual classroom platform, might use any of a variety of technologies:

- **Webinar**—a seminar or presentation that is streamed over the Internet
- **Web conference**—Internet or software-based technology that enables the instructor to share screens, applications, and content with learners
- **Live streaming**—transmission of live video and audio over the Internet
- **Conference calling or VoIP**—audio-only eLearning can use telephone- or Internet-based conference calling

What these disparate technologies share is that they facilitate **synchronous** eLearning. The instructor delivers live or recorded content, at a predetermined time, to a group of learners. The learners can be anywhere, as can the instructor. The instructor might deliver information to a group of learners in a single location or to learners scattered across multiple locations. But all learners can access the streamed content at the same time.

Virtual classrooms often supplant physical classrooms where instructors and learners complete in-person training. Converting in-person instruction to virtual can save travel costs and make it feasible to offer the training to many more learners, particularly in companies with multiple sites or a mobile or remote workforce.

While at its heart virtual-classroom-based instruction consists partly or entirely of synchronous learning, it can also augment an **asynchronous** eLearning program. Unlike asynchronous eLearning courses, synchronous sessions provide instructors with opportunities to offer immediate feedback to learners, encourage discussion of different viewpoints, and foster community, according to Martin and Parker (see References).

Thus, a "best of both worlds" approach might combine elements of synchronous or in-person training with elements of asynchronous eLearning, creating a virtual-classroom-based eLearning program that follows a "flipped classroom" or "blended" model.

Asynchronous activities paired with virtual-classroom-based eLearning could include a shared site for curated content, a discussion board or blog, or a private group on an office or public social media platform. Learners would perform assigned or optional asynchronous activities on their own or in groups, outside the virtual classroom space and time frame.

Many virtual classroom platforms include tools that allow discussion, polling of learners, and sharing the screen among instructors and learners; this is true of dedicated virtual classroom or online meeting tools like Adobe Connect or Cisco WebEx as well as full-fledged learning management systems (LMSs) like Canvas or Blackboard.

Not a magic bullet

Creating quality virtual eLearning is not as simple as transferring in-person instruction online by streaming live or recorded lectures. The absence of physical cues that tell an instructor whether learners are engaged, confused, bored, or even no longer present demands a different approach.

For starters, many in-person sessions are 45 minutes or an hour long; virtual instructors can follow this format—or they can nod toward the microlearning trend by offering virtual sessions that are short and tightly focused.

Virtual instruction also requires that both learners and instructors be technically skilled enough to navigate shared whiteboards, chats, breakout rooms, and other tools of the medium. For learners who are uncomfortable with social media or technology in general, the frustration and distraction of trying to get things working can overshadow the learning or discourage participation.

Instructors are advised to prepare and practice well ahead of the sessions and to become familiar with all the tools in the platform that they intend to use. The tools can greatly enhance synchronous sessions, turning a one-way presentation into a discussion or offering learners the opportunity to write on the shared whiteboard, vote in polls, present their work, and contribute in other ways.

A virtual classroom is a valuable tool in an organization's eLearning strategy, but it is not a magic bullet. Virtual classroom instruction excels when the material:

- Invites or requires display and discussion of information
- Is likely to trigger many questions
- Can be practiced or applied in small group assignments or projects, preferably related to the real-world job needs of learners

Some types of eLearning won't fit well in the virtual classroom paradigm. For example, a fact-heavy information "transfer" is better suited to a mobile job aid than a synchronous virtual classroom session. The right eLearning solution depends on the goals of the training, the content of the training, and the makeup of the learner community. While a virtual classroom won't meet every eLearning need, it is a versatile tool that can enhance any instructional designer's toolkit.

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Pamela Hogle, December 13, 2016

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REFERENCES

The links below will bring you directly to the original white papers, articles, conference, and online archives, most of which offer additional references and links.

Learning and Performance Ecosystems: Strategy, Technology, Impact, and Challenges (white paper)

Quinnsights: Musing on the L&D Ecosystem (*Learning Solutions* article)

Thinking Systemically About Learning Ecosystems (conference archive)

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One Size Won't Fit All: The Future of Personalized Digital Learning (*Learning Solutions* article)

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Fundamentals of Social Media Support for Learning (*Learning Solutions* article)

Buzzword Decoder: Virtual Classroom (*Learning Solutions* article)