

Use e-learning to provide effective on-the-job training

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E-learning is commonly viewed as a low-cost alternative to classroom-based training. However, to unlock the full potential of e-learning it should not be viewed simply as a replacement for classroom training, but as a tool for embedding learning into an organisation's culture and business processes.

In the financial services sector e-learning is now the de facto delivery method for regulatory compliance training, due to its ability to quickly deliver consistent, measurable outcomes in terms of learning and knowledge transfer. As with any form of training, the effectiveness of an e-learning programme is dependent on the quality of the instructional design, but e-learning has fundamental advantages of rapid, consistent delivery and automated record-keeping across firms with geographically distributed workforces. For such compliance training initiatives, e-learning offers a clear return on investment over classroom-based alternatives.

Classroom-based training programmes do have several advantages: fewer distractions, networking opportunities, immediate feedback and interaction between learners and instructors, and value as a perk to outperforming employees. However, off-the-job training of this sort inevitably involves the risk that the learning is not transferred back to the workplace. The half-life of newly learned material is about 3 days; if learners do not use it immediately they lose it (Cross and O'Driscoll, 2005). In context of Kirkpatrick's 4-level model for measuring the effectiveness of learning programmes, classroom training often delivers the reaction and learning required for levels 1 and 2, but may not achieve level 3 application of the learning and so fails to deliver a good return on investment.

The most effective learning takes place on the job. This is a key factor in the success of the Apprenticeship programmes discussed in the last issue of Skillsmatters. However, the quality of on the job learning taking place across an organisation can be inconsistent. Individual experiences within the same firm can vary widely. It is also difficult for the learning and development department to gain visibility over the extent of learning that is taking place.

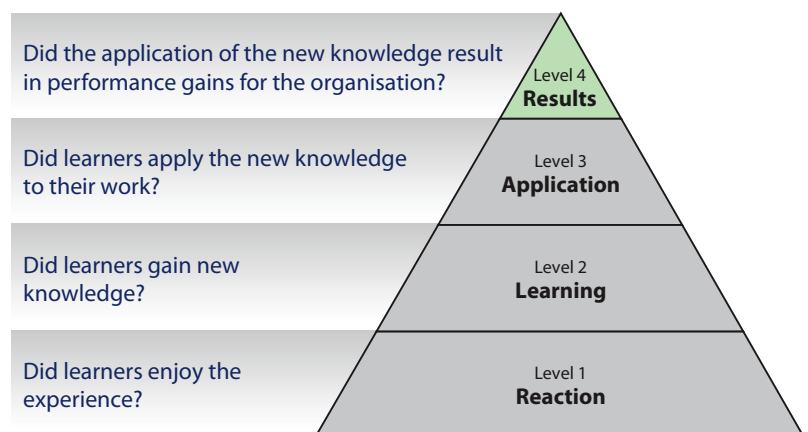
E-learning is now being used to offer consistent and measurable on the job training to employees when and where they need it. Many firms seek to provide this type of performance support by licensing generic, off-the-shelf libraries of e-learning content, but such content is often under-utilised.

To achieve the best results, e-learning needs to be highly relevant, and carefully positioned in context of employee job roles and workflow. The process for creating an e-learning curriculum should be no less rigorous than for classroom training programmes.

This requires a capability to produce cost-effective e-learning content in-house, or a solid partnership with an external supplier, and a close relationship between the learning and development department and the rest of the business. The e-learning team needs to gain a clear understanding of the training requirements for each business area, then extract the tacit knowledge from internal subject matter experts to create tailored content which has a real impact on the performance of employees and the business as a whole.

References:

"Workflow Learning Gets Real",
Cross and O'Driscoll, Training, February 2005
"Evaluating Training Programs – The Four Levels",
Kirkpatrick, ASTD, 1975



(Based on Kirkpatrick, 1975)