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### **What an Experience!**

*All about experience-based learning technologies*

In the emerging knowledge era, organizations must understand the relationship between technology, education and work. Developing and understanding this relationship allows organizations to offer experience-based learning - a seamless combination of learning and work. However, to offer experience-based learning, organizations must have access to the appropriate learning tools and technologies.

Learning program developers are fortunate in that they can now choose from a myriad of new tools and technologies. Smart technology simulation, contextual collaboration, workflow management and business process modeling - as alien as these terms may sound, work places will soon require a blend of these tools.

The need to create experience-based learning is greater than ever before. With workplaces becoming automated, real-time interactions, virtual work collaborations and business process and activity management are becoming daily necessities. An individual's work experience too is growing increasingly complex and demanding. With time and resource constraints, alternating between virtual and physical work places and an increase in first-person experience and productivity expectations, employees are required to adapt to rapidly evolving workplace needs. Besides subscribing to the theory, the only way an employee can hope to adapt to such dynamic and demanding workplace needs is if the organization invests in experience-based learning tools and technologies.

#### **What about experience-based learning technologies?**

Experience-based learning in the business world is learning that maps directly to everyday work-life. Experiential learning tools, systems and applications support a merger between what employees learn and their experience at workstations. Learning content too is based on an individual's real time work experience. Such learning aims to cater to both work tasks and the work environment. Experience-based learning theory has been around for some time in the form of situated learning. Corporate learning professionals use situated learning for vocational and rehabilitation training. Other closely related theories include those of problem-based learning, work-based learning, service-based learning, engaged learning, active learning and contextual learning.

The emphasis that situated learning places on connecting the learner's experience with real world problems and needs differentiates it from traditional learning theories. David Kohl, Professor of Organizational Behavior in a school of management was the first to introduce experience-based learning to the business world. He based his theory on the studies of John Dewey who believed that the most effective way of creating a complete learning environment is by offering experience-based learning.

#### **Back to basics**



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Getting back to experience-based learning technology, all tools systems and applications capable of combining learning with employees' work experience while they are performing their tasks qualify as effective experiential tools and technologies. Common workplace technologies include instant messaging, expertise mining, prairie dogging, tele-collaboration, visual communication and ambient intelligence.

### *Instant messaging*

A recent survey found that the growth in instant messaging in the corporate world is as high as 71 percent annually. The most common of experience-based learning tools, the USP (unique selling proposition) of instant messaging is that it can be used in both real and virtual work environments. With approximately 40 percent of the workforce being well-versed Internet users, program developers can use this tool to improve the quality and frequency of learning interactions.

### *Expertise mining*

The latest collaboration technology to hit the market, expertise mining, as the term suggests, gleans knowledge from human experts and connects a learner either to expert knowledge or to the experts themselves. Having 'mined' for experts or knowledge, developers use instant messaging to get in touch with their learners. First seen in the call center industry, expertise mining is considered an offshoot of skill-based routing.

### *Tele-collaboration*

Oxford Technologies developed a wireless tele-collaboration solution for the US Navy called the *Remote Technical Assistance Support System (RTASS)*. This solution offers learners real-time links with field experts the world over and performance support. With the use of wireless broadband connectivity, computer imaging and collaboration software, this solution provides "over-the-shoulder" presence of remote experts and supervisors. The reduction in traveling costs and the availability of real-time expert advice right at the desktop qualifies tele-collaboration as the ideal experience-based learning technology.

### *Prairie dogging*

Ask corporate learning professionals to make the most indispensable learning object, and the answer would likely be the human expert. 'Prairie dogging' is the technology that makes optimum use of human expertise. The term literally means finding the best qualified person who is available readily to help the employee or customer in accomplishing a task. Mapping human expertise within the organization creates an environment for prairie digging.

### *Visual communications*

Visual communications are about creating a visual link between an activity point and a consultation point. One company that specializes in visual communications offers an experience-based learning tool called SightLink. Field personnel stationed at remote areas can instantly access experts. With easy access to expert supervision, even from a distance, the need for their physical presence during task performance is considerably



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reduced. This saves organizations training costs and reduces training cycles. The use of sophisticated two-way visualization software gives learning the much required personal touch.

### *Ambient intelligence*

Also known as smart technology, the use of ambient intelligence is no longer confined to white-collar employees. Oil tankers, warehouses, auto repair workshops, power plants, factories, shipyards, construction sites and mines use smart technology to integrate learning with work. A few smart technologies are described below.

Forklifts mounted with touch screen computers are a boon to forklift drivers in a warehouse at Ohio. The computers track inventory, provide navigational aid and decision support and evaluate employee performance.

At Honda's automobile workshops, technicians wear a wireless head-mounted computer system. The system beams images on the retinas to provide real-time access to repair information while the technician is working on the car. The system is programmed to glean information from electronically stored repair manuals, vehicle histories and work orders. The technicians can even use instant messaging to contact remote experts. All this without moving away from the job at hand!

Medical assistants are also being aided by this technology. The use of Tablet PCs in the health care industry has revolutionized the way physicians and nurses attend to their patients. Computers store patient medical histories and medication information, explain complex procedures, reduce drug administration errors and provide clinical guidelines. Such real-time patient and medical education eases the stress and workload of taxed medical practitioners.

Experience-based learning is set to replace traditional training practices. With computer technology growing pervasive and becoming cheaper and simpler, organizations can soon invest in systems, applications and tools to develop experience-based learning programs for their employees.