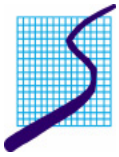


Learning Systems for the New Millennium

By Ray Svenson, CPT

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We all know that what we used to call the training field, or instruction, is quickly changing. But what is it changing to? A recent article titled “The Future of the Field Formerly Known as Training” raised more questions than it answered. I intend to weigh in with at least some partial answers.

First, training was, and still is, a way to support learning. Training is not the only way to learn, and it often is not the best way. Second, the need for learning is not going away; it is increasing. Every time an individual or group encounters something new, there is an opportunity, and often a requirement, to learn. This can be a new job, a new task, a new business strategy, a new customer, a new product, new competitor behavior, and so on. The list is endless. Third, we can take a systematic, performance-based approach to managing learning, not just training, in our organizations.

Organizations and individuals must learn faster and more effectively to adapt to the rapid pace of change. *The learning capability of an organization will make a strategic difference in its performance in the face of change. A highly developed learning capability will confer a competitive advantage to the organization.*

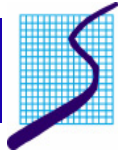
The challenge for our organizations in the new millennium is to evolve from managing training to managing learning. This is not a trivial shift. Training alone is too slow and too inflexible for much of today’s work environment. Some of the

nontraining learning strategies being employed today include

- Coaching (by managers, professional coaches, and coworkers)
- Knowledge management
- Informal learning strategies
- Holistic workplace learning strategies
- Communication as a learning strategy
- “Action” learning
- Electronic performance support systems
- Performance-based qualification systems

Most of the organizations I am familiar with today do not systematically deploy these strategies along with training to meet the learning needs of the organization and its individual performers. They still focus heavily on training solutions, because that is what they are trained for and organized to provide. In many cases, their internal customers are not ready to sign up for nontraining learning solutions.

Managing a balanced and integrated array of *learning strategies requires* a stronger role to be played by the managers and leaders in the workplace. Managers have been conditioned over the years to let the training department do it, and the training departments have responded. One of the biggest challenges of the transition from managing training to managing learning is gearing up the workplace organization itself to



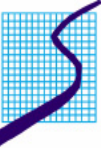
shoulder a major share of the responsibility. They do not traditionally see this as their role, and they are faced with a seemingly ever-increasing workload due to downsizing and pervasive change. For them to play their role in managing learning, they will have to learn how to do it and believe it will actually relieve the work pressure on themselves and their high performers. I believe that this is one of the best areas in which the new breed of *performance consultants* can cut their teeth and demonstrate their value.

So, how can an organization plan to transition from managing training to managing learning? I have provided a quick overview of a proven approach below.

- Engage an executive sponsor and an executive steering team, and provide them with a project plan and business case couched in the strategic interest of the business.
- Follow a systematic process using a team of key stakeholders.
 - Analyze the learning implications of business strategies, goals, and challenges.
 - Analyze the population dynamics, demographics, and characteristics of the learner populations.
 - Assess the capabilities of the existing learning systems.

- Design a new learning systems architecture that meets the business needs.
 - Integrated learning strategies
 - Supporting infrastructure
- Develop a multiyear implementation plan and a business case to support it.
- Keep the executive steering team as a Learning Systems Governance Board to oversee implementation and to continue the link to the business drivers.
- Rebuild the training staff to become a learning and development staff.

The new millennium will be more about learning systems than training systems. It will build on what has been learned while managing training systems. New strategies, roles, and skills will come into play. The people who are managing performance in the workplace will also find themselves managing learning with methods, content, tools, and consulting support from the Learning Departments.



About the Author

Ray Svenson, president of Ray Svenson Consulting, Inc., is a recognized leader in Business-Driven Learning and Development Strategy for major corporations. His book, *The Training and Development Strategic Plan Workbook*, won the ISPI award for Outstanding Instructional Publication in 1994 and is a standard desk reference for learning leaders. Ray can be reached via mail at 1110 Waters Edge Road, Racine, WI 53402; via phone at (262) 995-7100; or via E-mail at raysvenson@qtm.net. Ray's Web site is www.raysvenson.com.