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Be Aware

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Be Aware - The Importance of Informal Learning to your Productivity and Profitability.

We are all very much aware about the increasing pace with which change is impacting and influencing our personal and working lives.

Most organisations have in place at least some system of managing and administering formal learning, although some have yet to hear of the concept of 'informal learning' even though intuitively it seems plausible that it operates - it makes sense, of course it does!

When you ask many workers, of whatever organisational level, where they gained the knowledge and skills to do their job, around 80% say, 'at work'.

Yes, most learning does indeed take place on the job, outside the reach of formal learning.

We also have to face the fact that when individuals are formally trained in groups they are challenged by a series of real barriers. Workshops frequently progress at the pace of the slowest participant, the learner often does not need all of the information being delivered, the learning delivery methods cannot be tuned to all of the individuals needs etc.

It is somewhat frightening to discover that on average, newly learned material has a half-life of only 3 days.

So I'm suggesting now is an opportune time to consider or review what role learning should play in your organisation? What elements should be part of your learning structure? These questions are equally relevant to a multi-national or to a micro-organisation employing 6-10 people. How does your learning model related to and serve your organisation's performance measures?

Blending formal and informal learning is certainly an improvement on a position of not taking account of informal learning at all, but the real prize is to 'integrate' the

formal and the informal where the informal learning is repeatable by others and contributes to performance or other important business measures.

This informal learning should be captured, shared and leveraged as well as managed and measured. A continuous learning model provides a blueprint for how this formalisation and integration can take place.

Where to start?

Fundamental to developing an integrated learning model is to have a clear understanding and description of the business strategy and the operational ones that underpin it [where appropriate].

Then choose to go for either the 'big-bang' approach and include all the performance elements in one model or try one or a limited number of 'pilots' with the intention of gradually building up to a comprehensive model.

You will need the support of senior managers and all or some of the other employees to support the change of organisational culture this will probably entail.

With the assistance of capable internal or perhaps external resource using one or a combination of individual interviews, focus groups, self-organised dialogue groups detailed information can be obtained which can then be used to develop a relevant integrated learning model.

Systems then need to be selected/developed to be put in place to capture and facilitate knowledge that is shared or created in informal exchanges and frankly a whole lot more important information which I'll cover in my next newsletter.

A parting point!

There truly is real value in developing a fully business-aligned learning model for your organisation. Taking just a simple example. Assume that the ability to successfully negotiate commercial agreements is vital for your organisation. Developing an integrated learning model covering the whole of this activity may involve, formal training supported by individual coaching and the establishment of a community of practice as well as pod casting. The return on value for operating in this integrated way could be very considerable.

[Acknowledgement is made to some themes in an article by Brenda Wisniewski and Kevin McMahon which appeared in Chief Learning Officer Magazine]