

the **HRDIRECTOR**

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the **HRDIRECTOR INTERVIEW:**

Bernard Buckley -
HR director, Cable & Wireless

FORUM: **LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT**

Tailoring for that perfect fit

INNOVATION

Not just a buzzword, more a way of life

CARBON EMISSIONS

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CASE STUDIES THIS MONTH

Carphone Warehouse
Henkel
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PerkinElmer

Pictured: Bernard Buckley
HR director, Cable & Wireless

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EDITORIAL

DON'T MISS NEXT MONTH'S ISSUE WHERE WE LOOK AT: EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT; CONTACT CENTRES; BENEFITS; H&S – ADDICTIONS AT WORK; COACHING... AND MUCH, MUCH MORE



LEARNING FOR ONE

JOHN G. HIGGINS, VICE PRESIDENT FOR SOLUTION STRATEGY & INNOVATION AT ACCENTURE LEARNING, AND DR CRAIG MINDRUM, VISITING RESEARCH FELLOW FOR ACCENTURE LEARNING, TAKE A LOOK AT THE MOVE AWAY FROM MASS LEARNING TOWARDS INDIVIDUALLY TAILORED COURSES, FACILITATED BY TODAY'S NEW INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY.



The recent history of enterprise learning solutions is one that describes an inevitable march toward greater granularity and focus in the way learning is designed and delivered. Like the packaged consumer foods companies that sell individual servings like 'soup for one', the field of enterprise learning is evolving toward 'learning for one' solutions – learning that is flexible enough to be applied to broader workforces, then more narrowly to specific roles, and then finally to individuals themselves.

The primary driver for this development is the increased focus on the business impact of learning. Senior-level management is ever more aware that the measure of training success is not in a generic average of test scores from a workforce. Fewer decision makers and budget managers care now whether a sales force or customer contact staff is, *on average*, well-trained. What matters is a specific sales person speaking to a specific target client, or a particular service agent delivering an effective experience to a specific customer. With apologies to Shakespeare, the slogan for corporate learning is no longer *"the readiness is all,"* but rather, *"the performance is all."* And business performance is, at its core, the sum of individual performance.

TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENTS

A second driver, in addition to the increased business demands on enterprise learning, is that the technologies themselves are making it possible to customise generic training more narrowly. Learning management system providers, for example, are enabling the creation of custom learning paths. Traditionally these paths have been specified at a macro level – at workforces or skill family levels. As learning management systems continue to evolve, learning paths will be able to be created at a personalised, individual level.

Another exciting technology development that will have a big impact on personalised learning paths is with the consumer MP3 players such as the iPod, which are nearly ubiquitous with younger people. The behaviour needed to create 'music for one' – customising a personal play list – is already well-established with millions of people around the world. Thus it is easy to envisage these same people choosing from a menu of training offerings and creating a personalised 'learning list' as well.

Now, a couple of cautionary notes must be sounded here. First, according to recent Accenture Learning survey research, take-up of MP3

player-based learning is still lagging at the corporate level. We asked about 70 corporate CLOs to look into their crystal ball about the use of leading-edge technologies and techniques such as podcasting, gaming and blogging, and the results were somewhat underwhelming. About three per cent of those surveyed anticipated using podcasting in their learning programmes by 2008. To be fair, such results are subject to rapid change and could increase dramatically over a short period of time. However, even a more recent experience – asking for a show of hands at a US conference of CLOs – turned up only a few learning executives leveraging MP3-based learning to any significant extent.

Second, the most frequently-cited use of podcasting – downloading university lectures – leaves significant room for improvement. The fact that a non-interactive lecture from a college professor is also available as a downloadable MP3 file is unlikely to revolutionise either higher education or corporate learning. In every technology field, there is an inevitable early phase where people feel obliged to take a 'new wine in old skins' approach. The early use of filmmaking technology set up a static camera to record stage dramas; only gradually did pioneers use the technology to invent a new art form. Early use of CBT merely took training manuals and created a static, page-turning version of the book. So, in a similar way, early use of podcasting is mostly delivering old stuff in a different way.

“different strokes for different folks”

What is likely to be a more effective 'learning for one' use of MP3 technology? First, podcast-based learning will need to be designed and delivered as highly engaging bursts of training measured in two- to three- minute segments. There is a reason why national public radio features, for example, are short: because the human attention span for aural learning is about that long. When designed in a more human-friendly format, podcast-based learning offerings will help corporate learning departments advance toward a goal that leading thinkers have advocated for years: offering training in multiple formats to be used by people depending on the 'learning styles' most effective for them. Some people are visual learners, others are aural, others are some combination thereof. By offering 'different strokes for different folks', enterprise learning can be made more effective at an individual level.

Second, and equally important, formats such as podcasting (and other technologies such as simulation and gaming) will enable learning designers to apply principles of learning reinforcement – something which today, to quote Shakespeare again, is *“more honoured in the breach than the observance”*. By reinforcing critical training experience at intervals following the primary training offering, retention is dramatically increased and students get the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge in a practical way.

As students exit a class, assessment exams will define which components of the course require reinforcement for a particular student. Then, organisations can distribute different kinds of digital class components, customised for learners based on those assessment results. An online course or a podcast will provide short reinforcing nuggets of knowledge and practice. The flexibility provided by smaller learning nuggets will provide for a greater ability to customise and package content for a specific student's needs.

Other technology developments are helping organisations support the performance of their mission-critical workforces in real- ➤

SOUL TRAINING

So why is enterprise learning moving towards 'learning for one' solutions?

- The primary driver is the increased focus on the business impact of learning. Training success cannot just be measured as an average of test scores. What really matters is that a particular service agent delivers an effective experience to a specific customer.
- The second driver is that technological developments are making it possible to customise generic training. For instance, learning management systems are evolving, making it possible to create personalised, individual learning paths and MP3 technology opens up the opportunity for other 'learning for one' solutions. Podcast-based learning provides a way of offering training in multiple formats to be used by people depending on the learning style most effective for them – thereby making enterprise learning more effective at an individual level.
- Changing learning governance principles will also make a difference in the 'learning for one' movement and overly centralised learning governance must be loosened up. Advances in rapid e-learning development have helped leading companies meet the needs of their people more quickly.

At Health Care Service Corporation, a US based health and life insurance company, for example, the training department refers to these short-turnaround designs as *“performance interventions”*, where employees from a specific workforce may be falling short on a particular performance measure. In one pilot development, instructional developers and designers were sent directly to the sites where such intervention was needed. Working directly with subject matter experts onsite, practitioners designed and developed new web-based training in only about a month. Such courses are well received because they have exactly the right content needed, and the design provides for interaction among participants, even those in remote locations. The company can also put the course out on its LMS and track and monitor who has completed it.

> time with applications that combine learning, knowledge management and other key functions. The dream of customised, role-based performance support has been around for well over a decade; today, technologies are finally allowing the dream to become a reality. Leading practitioners such as BT Retail are offering support for mission-critical workforces such as customer contact agents, enabling them to provide higher levels of customer satisfaction. BT and Accenture developed a role-based portal, or what we call a 'performance workspace', to ensure workers could perform better, faster, with less risk and lower costs.



A performance workspace delivers a workforce-specific, role-based desktop environment comprised of knowledge, content, legacy applications, productivity tools, learning, collaboration and expert network capabilities. These solutions also provide embedded performance management tools to motivate workers through clearer links to organisational objectives and performance metrics. Together, these functions accelerate optimal performance by individuals, teams and the entire organisation.

BT Retail, for example, was able to improve customer satisfaction by 15% and they also enjoyed a 55% decrease in the numbers of customers dissatisfied with agents. Agents' confidence in their ability to perform improved by 23%, and their ability to recommend the right product or solution to customers increased by 16%. The company also reduced call handling time, repeat calls and transferred calls. Overall, a rigorous metrics programme applied by BT detailed more than £3.65 million of benefits to the company.

GOVERNANCE DEVELOPMENTS

In addition to the capabilities made possible by the evolution of learning technologies, evolving learning governance principles will also make a difference in the 'learning for one' movement. Organisations are increasingly finding that today's fast-paced marketplace and business environment makes it impossible to anticipate every performance need on the part of mission-critical workforces. What this means is that stricter and overly centralised learning governance must be loosened up a bit. When the heads of a field sales force realise that people need training and support for a new product or mode of selling, they don't have six months to wait for approval. They need it now. Advances in rapid e-learning development have helped leading companies meet the needs of their people more quickly.

Wikis, blogs and online social communities will also have an impact on 'learner-directed learning' with employees themselves becoming the subject matter experts who can contribute to the more effective business impact of learning by being closer to the frontline needs of the workforce. As social network environments such as MySpace and Face Book continue to promote virtual social networking, and as our culture becomes increasingly accustomed to making virtual connections, we will see contribution to the total body of knowledge grow exponentially.

To be sure, this new virtual world order isn't without its risks and concerns. Looser learning governance is important, but how do we prevent 'loose' from becoming 'chaotic'? Who plays the role of editor-in-chief for learner-directed learning? How can one be certain that material being contributed is in fact accurate, relevant and fact based? How long will blogging remain popular? Recent research

from Gartner, the US technology analyst, suggests that the number of blogs in cyberspace peaked toward the end of last year. Perhaps it was a passing fancy; or perhaps blogging can now get more serious and productive as organisations apply it to their learning and knowledge management needs.

"an important balance must be found between centralisation and decentralisation"

In addition, delegating more power and responsibility for learning to the employees themselves, does not mean totally abdicating responsibility. And in some industries such as financial services, government regulation can be a significant inhibitor even for applications such as instant messaging. As always, an important balance must be found between centralisation and decentralisation. Learning departments are still learning, too, after all.

HARNESSING THE POWER OF 'LEARNING FOR ONE'

It is clear, however, that the movement to individual-based and individual-driven learning is a powerful one. A great deal of the energy driving this movement is coming from the popular culture, represented by the growth of MP3 players, blogs, wikis, and online social environments.

It would be foolish to ignore that power, as long as it can be harnessed and channelled to corporate learning applications that maximise the business impact of learning, by helping individuals learn and perform more effectively to execute business strategy.

For further information:



John G. Higgins
Vice President for
Solution Strategy & Innovation
www.accenture.com



Craig Mindrum
Visiting Research Fellow
www.accenture.com

