

ALL CHANGE FOR LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Mobile learning is about more than putting an e-learning course in your pocket, says Ara Ohanian.



Organisational learning is at an inflexion point. Things are going to change very dramatically from the way they have been for years, and the reason is simple. New ways of working, supported by new technologies, demand new ways of learning.

TOP-DOWN STRUCTURED LEARNING IS NO LONGER ENOUGH.

Historically, organisations' approach to imparting their workforce with knowledge was to train them. Typically, learning and development departments decided what should be taught, who should teach it, and how workers should be graded after

completion. And learners enjoyed timely access to calendar-based, structured learning activities. If this sounds like the 19th century, it isn't. It all applies as equally to training in the past few years as it did to the Victorian era. Delivery mechanisms certainly have changed in the past few decades or so (with the addition of e-learning and webinars, for example), but the centralised, prescriptive model of organisational learning has remained unaltered.

Perhaps, until recently, this approach was sufficient and this may have been for two reasons. First, there was no external driver, pushing a more effective model. Second,

even if the demand had been there, the systems and technology to support a different model of learning weren't. Essentially the only way to get people trained was as we had done it in the past – albeit perhaps with a slight technical twist added.

Today things are different.

The exploding speed of communications in today's world forces organisations in the public and private sector to keep up with those that consume their services or use their products. The old standby of 'just-in-time training' is no longer adequate. Simply making more knowledge available faster won't do. Learners need the right

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information, delivered in a timely way that is responsive to them.

THE RACE FOR SMART MOBILITY

Globally, knowledge workers are rapidly arming themselves with powerful mobile devices that deliver capabilities far in excess of mere mobile telephony. And this goes well beyond playing a few games on your iPhone.

By 2011, over one billion workers world-wide will be equipped with mobile devices connected to the Internet via WIFI and 4G networks. Enhanced processing power combined with broadband connectivity and GPS is already revolutionising many people's expectations of their mobile phones. This trend will rapidly reach a tipping point, as smart mobile devices/phones permeate every aspect of our life – personal and professional.

Increasingly, organisations which need to keep employees always informed and in collaborative communication are looking for some method of managing knowledge across the enterprise. Where knowledge management is synonymous with document control, things are not going to change. In some forward-looking organisations, however, the Learning and Development function is stepping forward to assume this important role.

These L&D departments recognise that knowledge mobility requires much more than simply putting e-learning on a mobile device. A mobile learning solution must take into consideration the worker's environment and state of mind.

The worker 'on the go' has less time to learn and more urgent knowledge needs to fulfil. Consequently, the source of knowledge is often not the lesson. Instead, relevant knowledge can be generated from a variety of sources in a multitude of forms. The ability to access knowledge from structured and unstructured sources in multiple formats is an approach that we call the 'Fluid Model of Learning' or FML.

FLUID MODEL OF LEARNING - FML

FML provides the knowledge worker with a knowledge acquisition experience where the learner is in control. He or she is perpetually both a learner and a teacher, as are the other members of his or her community. And any person can be a member of multiple communities.

This learning experience is characterised by the learner's ability to find precise knowledge in multiple formats, from various sources. Whatever sources are appropriate, the learner finds the information they need to overcome the specific knowledge challenge they face.

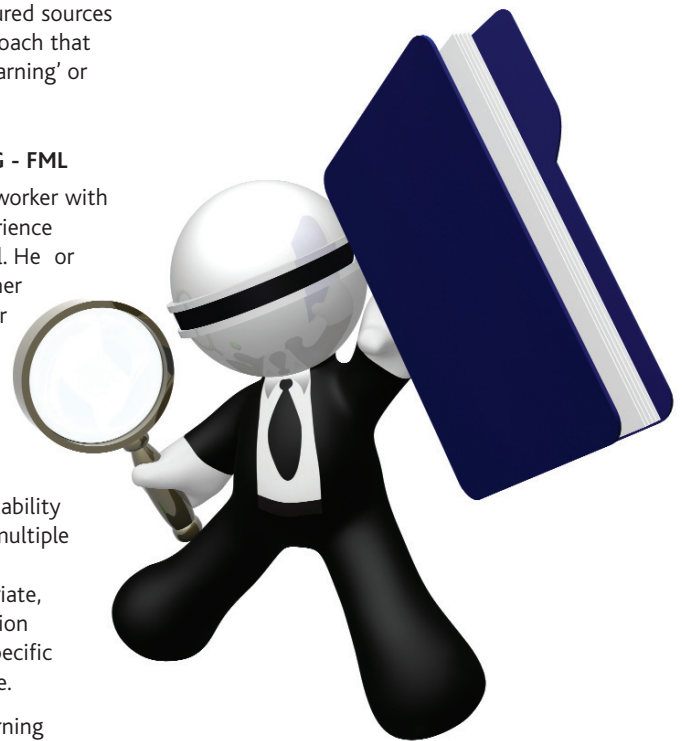
FML augments traditional learning approaches in which learning takes place 'just in case'. The following provide examples of areas in which FML broadens the learning experience to more readily, more rapidly access more useful and up-to-date knowledge:

- From formal learning content to informal learning content
- From structured learning content to unstructured learning content
- From individual-based learning to community-based learning
- From training-driven to performance-support-driven

- From curriculum-driven to search-driven
- From lesson-driven to knowledge-driven
- From employee-centred to audience-centred (including customers)
- From teacher-driven to SME-driven
- From subject-teaching to knowledge-sharing

For FML to be effective, two key innovations are required. One is the development of an intelligent search function designed to fetch and deliver content to smart phones. The other is a Categorisation Engine that will aggregate, analyse and present the content in a relevant and useful manner on mobile devices and smart phones.

Without this, the smart phone user will be presented with an unmanageable mess of information that he or she can make no sense of, and get no value from.



The combination of Intelligent Search and the Categorisation Engine will present content of multiple types within a configurable interface. Not only do users now expect to be able to configure the interfaces of devices they use, this user-driven adaptability is essential.

This enables the user to find the information they want in the way they expect, and put it to use immediately. Different users will want to vary how they receive information – whether they give more emphasis at a particular time to a

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social networking device, for example, to a wiki, a blog or a course.

There is so much information available that the best filter for it is the user's own decision, based on the right channel for a particular occasion.

These combined engines will not only serve content based on what is being searched but will also find relevant and hi-value knowledge links and present them to the user. Such links can connect the user with content in multiple formats coming from blogs, wikis, videos, audio, documents libraries, podcasts, or even structured lessons.

Furthermore, since the system will recognise which community is most relevant to the user, it can connect

him/her to a relevant SME's mobile telephone for a live discussion.

This approach works to the strengths of the smart phone, rather than presenting users with a cut-down version of elearning. We are now seeing mobile devices evolve into knowledge-based performance support tools, where their very portability and connectivity give them an edge over desktop computers. They can deliver context-sensitive information and connections exactly at the point of need.

This is not some far-off vision of mobile learning in the future. It is a picture of learning that we can expect to see emerging in 2010.

It is fluid, it is ultra-relevant, and it is dramatically different from the course-



based learning presented by most organisational learning systems today.

The reason this form of learning will evolve is simple: people expect it, organisations need it and now, finally, the technology exists to supply it.

Get ready for a mobile, fluid, learning future.

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