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TIPS, TOOLS & INTELLIGENCE FOR DEVELOPING TALENT

ENABLING SUCCESS THROUGH LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING

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ENABLING SUCCESS THROUGH LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING

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This *TD at Work* issue is a road map for a partnership between learning and knowledge teams, a partnership that drives an outcome critical to companies and nonprofits: time to competency.

Before going any further, we need to define time to competency. Time to competency is the number of hours, days, weeks, or months it takes for a team member to work independently. For most organizations, a new hire goes through formal training and an informal shadowing period. After a time—and on some teams, that time is measured in months or years—the new hire has enough experience and knowledge to do the job without assistance. In most organizations, this important moment is not well defined. Team members, or the manager in charge of the new team members' competency, will realize that they have gained enough confidence and proclaim that they are ready. Organizations also often do not measure this time to competency, even though it is significant. One final note: Time to competency is an important measure, not only for new team members, but also for anyone acquiring a new skill.

The focus of this issue will be how learning and knowledge teams can partner to significantly reduce time to competency. The advice in this issue applies to anyone on a learning or knowledge team. Whether launching a short project or a significant program, the same approaches apply.

Specifically, this issue will:

- Provide an overview of the current situation and how learning and knowledge teams work together.
- Identify the key forces that are driving both teams to change.
- Deliver a map for understanding the way both teams are adapting to these forces.
- Provide a strategy for building a partnership between the two teams focused on delivering faster time to competency.

WHY SHOULD YOU CARE ABOUT TIME TO COMPETENCY?

The time and effort an organization invests in time to competency are a significant drag on budgets and, in the case of for-profit companies, on profitability. Contact centers demonstrate this drag clearly. Many contact centers bill clients based on team members allocated to customers. If team members have not reached competency, their time cannot be billed. Their time and costs are pure overhead, draining budgets, cutting into margins, and lowering the productivity of the people assigned to mentor or train them. Reducing time to competency is a way for learning and knowledge teams to have an impact on key business outcomes, such as budgets and margins.

WHY PARTNER NOW?

There are two major impetuses behind the current drive to reduce time to competency.

The first category of change has to do with knowledge. The demand for knowledge is increasing every day. Organizations need to adapt more quickly than ever. Adaptation requires access to the deep expertise of the team as the business environment changes. This trend converges with another—the growth in the sheer volume of knowledge available to the team. Every day, teams generate potential knowledge in the form of documents, emails, and presentations. People send more emails on a daily basis than there are stars in the Milky Way Galaxy, according to Klever's video on the demands of knowledge sharing. What's more, the most valuable knowledge organizations have is not necessarily the most recent. Companies such as Amazon and Netflix have huge catalogs of entertainment and make significant revenue from what is called the *long tail*, the catalog items that are older and not on anyone's top 10 list. Finding this older knowledge quickly, particularly for team members who have not been with the organization long, is important to maximizing value for the long tail. These three trends make competency much harder to achieve, because there is much more knowledge to be gained and that knowledge continues to be valuable to organizations.

The other force that is driving organizations to shorten time to competency is demographic-related. A significant number of knowledge workers will retire soon: In 2015, eight U.S. workers will reach the retirement age of 65 every minute, as reported in *CFO* magazine. There will be significant gaps in the workforce, particularly in high-skilled jobs that require deep organizational knowledge. Learning and knowledge teams will have to train more new hires simultaneously than ever before.

WHY AREN'T THE TEAMS PARTNERING?

If the need is so great to reduce time to competency, why have learning and knowledge teams not partnered with each other? Real and relatively simple explanations exist concerning organizational politics and the challenges of bridging silos, but there is another reason that is much more relevant to this situation: They don't know how to work together.

Traditionally, learning teams saw knowledge managers as organizers of information, building categories and subcategories so they could put knowledge into well-identified bins. The interactions between the two teams on large projects, such as the enterprise resource planning projects in the 1990s and early 2000s, reinforce these preconceptions. Knowledge managers controlled the content necessary for the learning team to develop training, managed access to that knowledge, and ensured that all of the knowledge was formatted properly. The learning team saw the knowledge managers as keepers of policies, processes, and procedures for knowledge, not as enablers. The demands of these procedures frustrated learning teams, creating an impression that knowledge managers were more worried about the format and categorization of knowledge than whether it fit a particular need. Learning teams thus created supplementary content to fill in what they perceived to be gaps in the knowledge.

THE LEARNING TEAM SAW THE KNOWLEDGE MANAGERS AS KEEPERS OF POLICIES, PROCESSES, AND PROCEDURES FOR KNOWLEDGE. KNOWLEDGE TEAMS SAW LEARNING MANAGERS AS ONLY TRAINERS, ADAPTING CONTENT THAT THEY HAD CREATED.

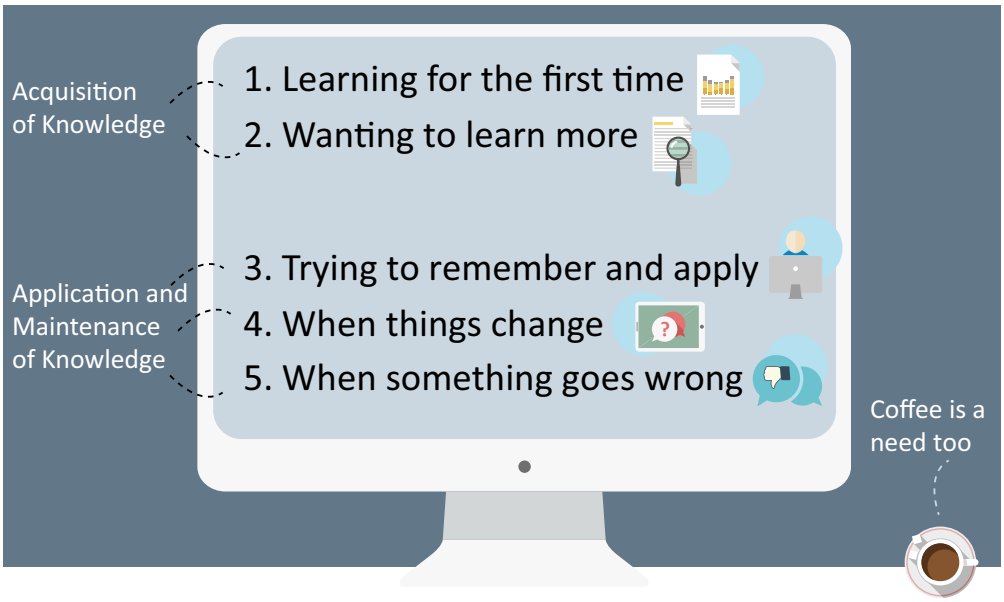
Knowledge teams, on the other hand, saw learning managers as only trainers, adapting content that they had created. Learning teams might change the order of the presentation of knowledge, which would affect the context. Knowledge teams also felt an intense pressure to deliver complete knowledge to the learning team. This was particularly difficult for complex projects in which changes to the deliverables would alter the knowledge required to build training programs, creating numerous interactions between knowledge and learning teams, frustrating both. Knowledge teams were also frustrated by the amount of time that learning teams wanted to build training programs.

Neither of these perceptions is correct. Learning and knowledge teams no longer work this way. But the perceptions remain, for a number of reasons. The most important one is organization; the way the teams interact. These teams behave as if neither has adapted, handing knowledge off and requesting additional information. In track and field, relay runners start to run before they receive the baton from the previous runner. Learning and knowledge teams behave exactly like this, working based on assumptions of how the other will react.

THE NEED FOR KNOWLEDGE

In the course of our work, we encounter specific moments when we need specialized knowledge—answers to questions, subject matter expertise, or familiarity with a process. These moments are important for both learning and knowledge teams. Their shared goal is to provide specific knowledge or ways to gain that knowledge.

THE FIVE MOMENTS OF NEED IN KNOWLEDGE SHARING



THE EVOLUTION OF THE TWO TEAMS

Nevertheless, both teams have adapted to the need for faster access to knowledge in similar ways. Broadly speaking, they are both working to help staff members quickly identify moments when they need knowledge so they can deliver it most effectively.

Development of Learning Teams

Learning teams have adapted their approach to address the need of organizations to train team members faster than ever. The challenge learning teams face is increasing the speed of training without compromising the quality of the knowledge delivered or the experience for the team member.

Bob Mosher and Conrad Gottfredson have shifted the design of learning and development programs from the activity of the learning team to the needs of the team members. Mosher and Gottfredson suggest that there are five moments when team members need their knowledge.

These five moments become the focus for designing learning programs:

- The first two moments of need represent what formal instruction can deliver: Team members need to learn something for the first time, or they need to expand the knowledge that they already have. The effectiveness of learning is judged in its application, and these last three needs all relate to how team members do their work every day.
- The third moment of need is the application of knowledge when it is required. Team members need to easily recall and reuse the knowledge they gained in formal instruction (or through supporting instructional channels, such as on-demand training or tips).
- The fourth and fifth moments of need are about adapting the knowledge the team members have gained to changing situations. When something goes wrong