

Using Learning Technology for Work Based Learning

Work based learning is a complex topic to define. Stanley (2012) suggests it is not a “conventional subject” (p.1), as it is not supported by an established group of speciality teachers and it is not backed up by text books, while Boud and Solomon (2001) suggest it is a “disturbing practise” (p.225) disturbing the perception of academic identity and setting. Jennings (2011) describes it as a “messy business” that differs from one organisation to another and from one person to another. Illeris (2003) defines the elements that make up work based learning as the learners or employees in the organization; the learning content or the knowledge required for work practice; the social context or the groups and teams in the workplace; and the other learning stakeholders, such as the organization or society. Wang et al. (2010) argue that an effective workplace learning application should take the four elements outlined by Illeris and their interactions into consideration.

The traditional role of corporate learning and development departments has been to develop and deliver work based training, however the move to a more knowledge based economy (Article 2007) and the speed of market change Capara (2011) has altered the way training is delivered. Organisations are realising their learning needs cannot be met through formal training alone Mallon (2009). With the move towards an increase in informal training (Article 2007) contend Learning and Development departments need to change their role to that of support with a thorough understanding of technology which they suggest will become more central to the learning experience. Mallon (2009) agrees, suggesting high impact learning organisations require the appropriate tools and platforms to support content efficiency and timeliness and he contends learning and development departments require new skill sets to cultivate social learning and manage the level of content creation within the organisation. This new skill set includes becoming “system architects/designers” incorporating learning theory into the use of technology, London & Hall (2011a, p. 112), becoming facilitators of knowledge and guides, Ketter & Pace (n.d.), having business and financial skills to align learning with work (Article 2007) and the ability to communicate and interact with other professionals and interest groups Slotte & Herbert (2006) and Pack (2002). The increase in use of learning technology to deliver training can prove difficult for learning and development departments. Ketter & Pace (n.d.) acknowledge the pace of change in technologies is challenging for learning professionals and Holcombe (2005) acknowledges they struggle to create innovative content using technology. Littlejohn et al. (2008) suggest understanding how technology may be used is evolving and they contend teachers are in the position of learners as they explore how technology may be used effectively to deliver training. Holcombe (2005) contends there is a tendency to use a technology oriented approach to training rather than the use of technology in tandem with other strategies to deliver training. Wang et al. (2010) suggest this focus on technology has led to a perception that e-learning content is poorly designed and lacking in quality.

Rosenberg (2006) suggests that although technology based learning is here to stay, it would be both “misguided and wrong” (p. 4) to believe that there is no further need for classroom training. Learning that is designed by utilising a mixture of classroom and e-learning is known as blended learning Mitchell & Honore (2007), however Rosenberg (2006) argues our definition of blended learning needs to be extended to include the convergence of training, information repositories, communities and networks, experts and expertise and performance support. Dublin (2011) also argues for a new approach to blended learning which he suggests is driven by the demand for training solutions that reduce time to understanding, avoid information overload, increase transfer of learning and are easily accessible and relevant to work. Dublin’s suggested approach centres around merging learning processes and on-the-job performance together Dublin (2011). Dublin’s position builds that of Marsick and Watkins (1999) who emphasise the need to incorporate learning into workplace practises and processes and Park & Wentling (2007) who contend that workplace learning cannot be separated from the context where the knowledge and skills are used and there is an expectation that training will result in positive changes in workplace behaviours and job performance.