

What's ahead for training?

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My work takes me to several training conferences every year. I'm impressed with what I see. Training conferences provide rich experiences for participants and presenters. Training professionals share their lessons learned. They chat, network and set up partnerships. A nurturing spirit infuses these conferences. It's wonderful to be part of attending conferences sharing information, helping others and advancing the training profession. . For the last several years I've met with scores of public sector and private sector clients involved on training. I've been leading a floating training focus group. And participants have been telling me how they see and experience training.

There is a lot happening in the training world.

Emphasis on performance. Many organizations are adamant that money spent on training must contribute to individual and business performance.

Coaching. People at all levels are realizing the power of a professional coach to help them grow personally and professionally.

Instructional design processes. Some thought leaders are telling us that highly structured instructional design processes, such as the ADDIE model of analysis, design, development, implementation and evaluation are dead. Some organizations are now using a less structured process called rapid prototyping.

E-learning. Many organizations are experimenting with e-learning, and some have made huge investments in a learning management system, or an LMS.

Senior management. There is new interest from senior management. So you need to develop a good business case for changes to training programs, whether you are moving to performance-oriented training, coaching, rapid prototyping, or e-learning. Senior managers what to hear that e-learning will bring products to market faster, increase sales, reduce costs, increase customer loyalty. You as a training professional are in the right spot to make that happen. To figure out the rewards from e-learning and to spell them out.

With all this change, it's difficult for one person to have his or her pulse on the entire training industry. Being a courageous soul I'm going to go out on a limb and make some predictions about where we are going in the training profession. I have a dubious record for predicting trends. I have a spare beta VCR stored in my basement. I owned a Russian Lada for short time. And I bought tech stocks at the wrong time. But, when it comes to

training, my meanderings in the public and private sectors in Canada and elsewhere give me a good idea of what is happening. I'll share with you my observations and predictions. Perhaps you will be able to use this information to orient your career or your business.

Prediction #1. Technology will continue to be a yin yang phenomenon. By that I mean it will be composed of hot and cold, strong and weak, good and bad as the Taoist yin yang circle explains reality. The introduction of this yin yang technology will show both driving and restraining forces. As for driving forces, good technology will drive out bad. For example, faster, broader bandwidth will replace slow dial-up lines. Performance-oriented software with helpful wizards will assist us to perform our work. Wireless technology will connect us to the Internet and provide job-performance information through our personal digital assistants.

That's it for some of the driving forces. The positive side of things. What about the restraining forces? From the Kurt Lewin force-field model, restraining forces are the factors that impede progress.

New technology rides a bumpy road. VCRs (beta and VHS) that flash 12:00 attest to technology's bumpy road. High drop-out rates in e-learning courses might reveal weaknesses in the course design or delivery of such programs. Trainers and educators are not always the first to adopt new technology. I'm not blaming anyone here. It's just the way it is. I was first sensitized to this phenomenon in grade 3. Our teacher insisted that we learn to write with nib pens. We learned to dip our pens in the ink well, use a blotter, wash our nibs and all sorts of skills that we did not need to learn because we had fountain pens. It was much the same story a few years later. Although there were plenty of easy-to-use ball-point pens, our teachers insisted that we use messy, old-technology fountain pens. Ink bottles that spilled. More ink blotters to soak up spilled ink. Messy stuff for 11-year olds.

The lessons for anyone associated with implementing new technology are simple. Keep up with what's new. When new technology simplifies your work use it. If using the old technology causes you grief, don't use it. Look to the future, not the past. And as in the case of the flashing VCR, a beacon to resistance to change, make sure that people are taught and motivated to learn new technology.

Once again, prediction # 1 is that technology will continue to be a yin yang phenomenon with driving and restraining forces controlling its successful implementation.

Prediction #2. E-learning is changing the face of training and education but it will only grow modestly. Forget the growth predictions of the snazzy reports from the investment firms and the prophecy from the economic forecasting firms. Don't assume that your organization will have the success with e-learning that is claimed by Cisco, IBM and other early implementers of e-learning. Some firms, especially large ones, are heavily into e-learning. They are reporting success. And there are plenty of lessons learned in the literature. However, in most firms you're not going to see 50% of training delivered via e-learning. Classroom training is alive and well. There is plenty of work for instructors.

Seventy percent of training is delivered in the classroom. Eighty percent of training (conventional and e-learning) includes an instructor. These trends will continue.

Instructors, leaders, facilitators ♦ interaction with people who challenge our ideas and beliefs and teach us new skill ♦ that's what learning is about. Socrates taught us that two millennia ago?

A report from the American Society for Training and Development, dated February 2001 based on 1999 data, from 365 organizations tells us that e-learning was 9.1% of total training delivered in '97, 8.5 in '98 and 8.4 in '99. That's right. The high water mark for e-learning was 1997! ASTD further investigated these numbers and discovered that declining enrolments were as a result of negative experiences that learners had with e-learning. On the brighter side, if you are an e-learning advocate, leading firms that spend heavily on training delivered 14.9% of training via e-learning in 1999. In Canada, the conference board has been forecasting growth in technology-assisted learning that has not occurred. So e-learning is not dead! Nor is it a runaway phenomenon.

Although e-learning is not a galloping force, it is bringing change and working with e-learning requires new skills. If you plan to instruct on-line you probably need to learn new online facilitating skills. If you are designing Web-based training, whether it be self-paced or instructor-led, you need to learn new software and new delivery approaches.

To summarize. Prediction #2 is that e-learning is changing the face of training and education but it will only grow modestly.

Prediction #3. Training professionals are adapting to the new training reality. We are avid learners and living models of how people and organizations can benefit from life-long learning. As master learners, in the New Economy we are adapting to the need to learn new skills. We are responding to the challenge of the New Economy. We are learning about e-learning. How to use it beneficially. We are emphasizing performance. We are learning to put together business cases for our new training programs. Some of us are using personal coaches and others are developing our coaching skills through certification programs. We are learning to modify stringent ISD processes and replace them with flexible rapid prototyping. We are cooperating with our information services colleagues and helping organizations make decisions about big ticket items like learning management systems. Some of us are getting the ear of senior management. We develop good business cases for performance-oriented training, coaching, rapid prototyping, or e-learning. Some of us are acknowledging that more learning occurs outside of the classroom than inside. So we are investigating informal learning. We see the virtue of well-designed Web sites that provide quality information ♦ not training.

Once again, prediction #3 is that training professionals are adapting to the new training reality.

As we look back on our years in the training and education fields and as a learner ♦ even back to grade 3, we realize that there are some things that work and others that do not work. We know how we learn best. We know what approaches produce results in the classroom and we are learning what produces results online. We need to pay attention to our intuition and our experience as we move forward, as training professionals and in all our roles.

Working together. Helping each other learn about training. Working with our minds and our hearts is helping to paint a brighter picture for our training profession. Everyone can contribute.

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