Learning in the Workflow

Executive Summary

An unending challenge for L&D professionals is overcoming the wall between training and work. The way we learn to do our jobs may start with formal training (how to install the wiring on a 757, performing basic functions in Excel, assigning the criticality of a help desk call) but on the job, much more learning occurs as we apply what we know alongside other humans and in ever-changing real contexts. The worker installing the wiring will encounter coworkers who offer shortcuts or find that the color of wires provided doesn't match what was shown in training; the call center staffer will have to navigate the unspoken politics of which managers always get pushed to the top of the "urgent" response category; the casual Excel user may need to locate a tutorial every time she uses it, or may find that the next time she accesses Excel there's a new iteration and the interface doesn't look quite like it did in the training class. The key takeaway is that performance and learning are not separate endeavors. A great deal of workflow learning comes not from learning everything from scratch, but from workers refining and recalibrating what they already know.

This report looks at tools and approaches that support and enhance learning in the sense of improved performance and, in some cases, in the sense of learning as permanent behavior change. The focus is on newer technologies and ideas, or those that have been getting a lot of attention in recent years, such as microlearning and social learning.

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