

Giving more thought to the 90%

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Evidence that the 70:20:10 model actually works caused controversy at the Learning Technology show. But that 90 per cent of informal training must be supported says Neil Georgeson of KnowledgePoint.

What do you think was one of the main topics of discussion at this year's recent learning technologies show? Further education cuts? Virtual reality in learning? Robots taking over as trainers?

Surprisingly, it was none of the above. The subject that got us all talking was in fact, the 70:20:10 model of learning. The figures represent the ratio of knowledge learnt on the job (70 per cent), from observing others (20 per cent) and from formal training classes (10 per cent).

Of course this concept is far from new – it was first introduced by Morgan McCall in a book called *The Career Architect Development Planner* written by two of his colleagues in 1996. But, until now, one of the main criticisms of the theory was a lack of empirical evidence.

But now the Towards Maturity consultancy has researched the method and documented the experiences of 1,600 learners across the globe. The results, announced at the show, revealed that staff following this model were four times more likely to demonstrate a faster response to

business change, three times more motivated and twice as likely to report improvements in customer satisfaction scores.

However, the study also found that only 47 per cent of learning and development professionals use models to shape their learning approach. Why is this?

Of course many dislike the concept, believing it could be an excuse for budget cuts to training. But this suggests that all the trainers need to focus on the 10 per cent provided by an instructor in a dedicated learning environment. Presumably, they then just throw the staff into the deep end, letting them sink or swim in the workplace as they attempt, not just to make sense of it all but also to pick up best practice on the way.

In reality, both learning on the job and peer-to-peer learning (the main 90 per cent) need some kind of structure, strategy and support, especially in industries with severe skill shortages and an ageing workforce, who may soon be retiring and taking all their hard-earned knowledge with them. Unless this information is captured in some way, a company's pool of knowledge will be badly depleted.

Staff learning "as they go" will retain practical know-how more effectively with the support of round-the-clock access to materials such as

manuals and reference guides. Thankfully, this is now possible using an online platform, which can hold all kinds of training materials to be downloaded at any location, in any time zone and by any authorised member of staff.

Typically, these platforms are built, hosted and maintained by the provider so there is no need to hire additional staff. However, there is a need to put some thought into what kind of materials can support the self-learners who will need fast access to materials to remain productive – ideally from

mobiles and tablets as well as laptops and PCs.

These materials may vary from more formal eCourseware to process manuals and home-grown tips and tricks written by those who have been doing the job for years. However, it is vital that this information can be annotated, highlighted and bookmarked to help retention and for trainees to make it their own record of their informal learning and development.

The technology must also be capable of synchronising these

annotations between devices. This will mean that when it is time for formal classroom learning, employees can use similar materials to those accessed in a different office or at home.

It is natural for trainers and training companies to be concerned that their skills and services will be side-lined if more employees are left to learn by example in this way. However, although supporting informal learning can be more of a challenge, it needs to be 90 per cent of time well spent – and the quality of work produced improved as a result.