

Web 2.0 Tools' Impact on Learning

How are Web 2.0 tools going to change how learning is delivered? Will my company really benefit? What skills are needed? These questions are on the minds of savvy individuals responsible for corporate learning and training functions.

First, let's take a step back to level set and briefly discuss what is Web 2.0, and the tools we are talking about. The term Web 2.0 describes the changing trends in the use of World Wide Web technology and web design that aim to enhance creativity, communications, secure information sharing, collaboration and functionality of the web. Web 2.0 concepts have led to the development of "tools" and the evolution of web culture communities and hosted services, such as wikis, blogs, social-networking, RSS feeds, podcasts, and video sharing sites.

So, how is Web 2.0 going to change how learning is delivered? Let's begin to paint the picture of the future. Instead of showing up in a classroom or providing eLearning, the future will be more learner-centric. Give a worker the tools to obtain information needed when it is needed, not having to interrupt work or attend a class in hopes the content fulfills the need.

Wikis can be established to serve different learning needs. A human resources subject matter expert can sponsor a wiki on a number of topics such as time management skills, how to deal with difficult co-workers, how workers can support the company vision, and ask others to contribute content. A software application expert can sponsor a wiki on how to perform common and not-so-common business tasks.

Podcasts can be used to transmit new product information to sales personnel directly to the PC or personal mobile device. Need to quickly inform personnel how to perform a software task due to a newly applied system patch? Try RSS feeds that can stream instructions directly to everyone's PC.

Establish communities of experts within each of the major functional business areas where someone from Accounts Receivable, Legal, Distribution, Manufacturing, etc. knows how to access experts for help with specific questions. Use social networking or knowledge management tools to structure the interactions.

So will my company benefit if we deploy Web 2.0 tools to facilitate learning? Companies are all different, of course, but for those that rely on disseminating information quickly to remain competitive or gain a competitive edge will certainly benefit. For others it might provide a way to capture institutional knowledge, or to be able to provide learning to personnel where it never existed before because the company could never afford training.

What new skills are needed? As with any type of tool the challenge is not in the implementation and operation of the tool, the challenge lies in the proper business analysis, tool selection, and change management, to deploy and maintain the tool. The skills then are not so much software development and implementation, as are the business analysis skills, community building, collaboration strategies, information design, performance analysis, knowledge management, and outsourcing or vendor management skills.

Taking a leap to any of these Web 2.0 tools is a commitment to provide new skills to those that will lead the charge, allowing the organization the time to adapt, and supporting over the long term a new way of providing learning.