

INSIGHTS

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EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES LIABILITY: #WHATSTRENDING

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Maximizing Employee Learning and Development

by Elizabeth A. Carter



Technical and leadership talent development is an \$88 billion business,¹ but some organizations still struggle with providing the right mix of on-the-job training, social learning, and formal learning to cultivate employee growth, retention, and engagement. Technology, time, transparency, and money are the culprits. This article discusses how perspectives on learning and development have progressed through the past, present, and future and recommends ways organizations can effectively use social and formal learning.

The war for talent, employee engagement, and employee retention are some of the concerns that CEOs report keep them awake at night.²

Many organizations are still waiting for the retirement cliff, but are finding the mass exodus of baby boomers from the workforce to be slower than anticipated. This is actually good, because some organizations do not have employees trained and ready to replace their tenured positions. But is also bad, because employees on the brink of retirement may not be fully engaged while they strategize their exit.

While organizations wait for the retirement cliff, they should focus on accelerating preparedness by developing their existing staff's learning and talent and promoting their learning and development programs to candidates to attract the best future talent.

Learning and Development: Past

According to Training Industry, the 70:20:10 model "is a commonly used formula within the training profession to describe the optimal sources of learning by successful managers."³ Also referred to as the OSF (on-the-job, social, formal) ratio, the 3E (experience, exposure, education) learning model, and the FIS (formal, informal, social) model, it considers the different types of learning and breaks them down into three categories: 70 percent of learning comes from on-the-job tasks, engaging with managers, making decisions, and solving problems; 20 percent comes from social interactions such as talking with peers, asking senior employees questions, meeting with mentors, or starting a new project with a team; and 10 percent comes from formal, traditional learning events.⁴

The 70:20:10 model was created in the 1980s by three researchers and authors working with the Center for Creative Leadership, a not-for-profit educational institution.⁵ The ratios are based on adults learning best in "just-in-time" environments, where they interact with people and information immediately available.

Social training has been loose and informal, with best practices gained and lessons learned often while attending staff meetings, by participating in seminars, by seeking and creating a professional network, and while engaging in water-cooler conversations and with people with similar backgrounds or interests. However, according to Tom Whelan of Training Industry, "For some roles, formal training functions as the starting point for deeper learning that will occur later on the job, whereas for others, formal training is a gauntlet that has to be conquered before tackling the job 'for real.'"⁶

Formal training provides some tools that can be readily used, but much of the content is abstract, resulting in these statistics:⁷

- After one hour, people retain less than half of the information presented.
- After one day, people forget more than 70 percent of the information taught in training.
- After six days, people forget 75 percent of the information taught in training.

Considering that the 70:20:10 model is a framework, the right OSF ratio varies among companies, among departments within the same company, and even among jobs within the same department.⁸

"...the right OSF ratio varies among companies, among departments within the same company, and even among jobs within the same department"



Learning and Development: Present

As technology, competitive pressures, and social media enable or encourage organizations to complete tasks faster, the 70:20:10 model has shifted. While on-the-job training is beneficial for employees, it only provides them with the information they need to know at the moment, rather than what they want to know.

Employees often want to contribute to the vision and mission of their organization, so they must understand future trends to make innovative suggestions. However, the present employee population may not have that knowledge to share, or tenured employees may not want to share it because of insecurity and fear—a situation known as knowledge hoarding. Those factors have contributed to a shift toward social and strategic formal learning.

From 2017 to 2018, Training Industry surveyed 1,509 professionals representing a wide cross-section of industries and employee levels from companies around the world. Their research determined that the OSF ratio is closer to 55:25:20 for employees and 40:30:30 for executives.⁹

These are some possible reasons why this shift occurred:

- New hires are bringing more relevant skills to their roles because of the increase in specialized college majors, more robust curriculums, and more situational practice from case studies and business competitions. These employees do not need much on-the-job training.
- Because employees obtain most of the required skills for a job before they are hired, the onboarding process mostly involves learning the cultural environment and key company phrases and acronyms.
- Webinars now provide knowledge 24 hours a day in a manner that is comfortable and conducive to a more focused attention span.

- Social interactions and networking have gained popularity because they have led to the right connections and employment opportunities for people. The social media platform LinkedIn has proven the saying, "It's not what you know, but who you know—and who they know."
- Formal and social learning lines are becoming blurred. For example, attending an industry conference with keynote speakers and breakout sessions may be considered formal learning, while meeting and learning from like-minded individuals from around the world and various disciplines could be considered social learning.
- Social learning theory, theorized by Albert Bandura, posits that people learn from one another, via observation, imitation, and modeling. The theory has often been called a bridge between behaviorist and cognitive learning theories because it encompasses attention, memory, and motivation.¹⁰
- Communities of practice have become a practical way for employees to share experiences and learn from peers. According to Etienne Wenger, who developed the concept, members join a community of practice, or group of people "who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting (with each other) on an ongoing basis," to expand their skills and expertise, to enhance their professional reputation, to gain a sense of professional identity, and to increase marketability and employability.¹¹ Organizations have touted the benefits of communities of practice, including improvements in revenue, profits, and employee and customer satisfaction.¹²

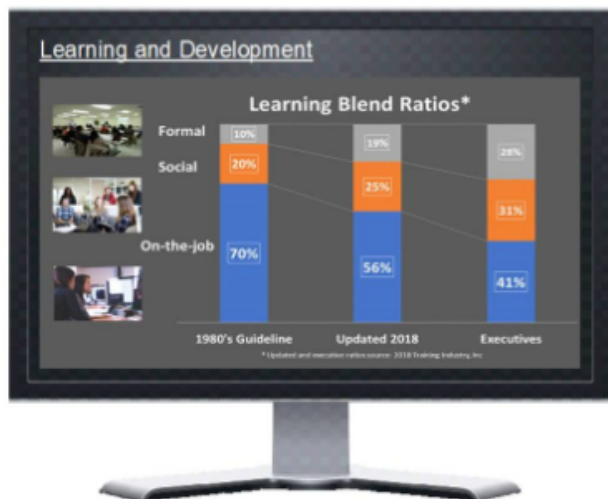
While companies recognize the need for learning and development, they continue to face the challenges of time and money. Many employees are too busy to set aside time for shadowing or teaching, or to attend an educational event. They are often asked to do more with less. The 2018 Training Industry Report indicated that training expenditures in the United States were \$87.6 billion, which is a decline of 6.4 percent from 2017, but a 35 percent increase from the 2013 to 2016 average expenditure of \$64.6 billion.¹³

Also, the ratio of the use of blended learning doubled, providing a lower average expenditure per learner. This savings helped companies improve their bottom line and shift dollars into investments and other programs.

Learning and Development: Future

Organizations can improve social and formal learning programs while optimizing time and money by enabling engagement and the transfer of learning.

For example, communities of practice drive development, engagement, and value at a low cost. They exist in several forms, including professional associations, study cohorts, community groups, business resource groups (or employee resource groups), and learning organizations.



knowledge they learn with their peers and incorporate the tools into the daily workflow or as a special project. This can transfer learning and create a return on the investment. Individuals who facilitate conferences should also consider setting convention registration fees so that employees without company sponsorship have the financial ability to attend.

Community of practice members should review the groups of which they are a member. They should ensure that the group looks and feels like a community of practice and that they get value from participating. They should also share suggestions with the organizational or group leaders that could benefit them, their peers, and the organization.

Community of practice members can help CEOs sleep better at night by reminding them that they are engaged, trained, and ready with a parachute of skills and knowledge when the retirement cliff collapses. They are helping CEOs win the talent war. ■

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