Virtual Learning, Web Based Training and Knowledge Management

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ABSTRACT

This work is posited as a work in progress. It describes various speculations concerning the effective strategies that need to be considered when applying learning to a virtual environment whether web based or within a technological forum such as the American based 'Blackboard' programme. The aim of the paper is to develop, for discussion the conceptual framework within which these activities should take place, namely the 'learning journey'. Further it is proposed to place this within a knowledge management context. Examples will be drawn from a variety of sources including the writer's own studies of methods already used within academia, and the UK Government web based learning initiative 'LearnDirect'.

There has been a tendency for learning and training strategies to be seen as an extension of past practice rather than the need to rethink and start afresh. Further, technology has also been seen as an innovation for learning and training becoming at times the driver of the strategy rather than the vehicle. A distinct difference needs to be identified at the outset between information and knowledge. Information and data should be understood within the context of the learning and training hierarchy being at its roots with knowledge and wisdom as its fruits. A framework that fits will be proposed within this parameter or analogy and enables one to evolve from the other. To enable this to occur key criteria has to be considered to enable the learning and training strategy to develop. The key components are proposed within a model STEMS (**S**trategies, **T**echnologies, **E**nvironment, **M**ethods and **S**tructures). This will be presented for discussion. The model further attempts to incorporate the organisational dependencies and strategies. Any learning and teaching strategy has to be an integral element of central aspirations rather than a standalone vision. Virtual learning strategies are in essence similar to knowledge management key enabling principles for information dissemination and knowledge creation.

Within the context of knowledge management the proposed model provides the mechanism for developing a strategic framework for development, not a learning experience. This in turn provides key indicators of how the strategy for web/virtual learning should be developed, ensuring the horse is in front of the cart, at all times. Therefore each specific subject application within the web learning and training strategy has its own unique journey. This journey then becomes the glue that binds the components of the model proposed.

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The paper reflects early work in this area, and seeks to develop associations between the various factors mentioned. It does not purport to offer a definite solution, but to examine the context of effective learning and training strategies presented in a paradigm for further empirical study.

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