



Your Short Cut to Knowledge

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CHAPTER 2

Introducing Podcasting into Your Organization

Do you intend to introduce a new learning technology like podcasting to your organization? If you do, you can expect to have to answer several fair questions. The next two chapters will give you the background and perspective you need to develop answers that make sense for your organization. The discussion here ranges beyond podcasting to help you find the proper application for this new tool.

You can expect the first question from the sponsor of any training program if you propose podcasting, or from one of the associated nontraditional learning deployments like e-learning, CD-ROM-based learning, simulations, or Webcasting.

“I understand that you need to conserve resources and manage costs, but my initiative is critical and requires classroom training. Why should it get the second-class treatment?”

Your colleagues who raise this question are trapped in an outdated way of thinking about organizations and learning. They need to be sensitized to some major *constraints* of modern organizations. We will provide you with a bare-bones coach’s “fundamentals” handbook.

The second question is one you will ask yourself after you have a feel for the full *buffet table* of learning deployment technologies:

“There are so many different deployment tools; how can I select the right tool for any particular training objective?”

To assist you here, we will provide a simple decision tree.

After you understand the correct niche for podcasts, you will be prepared to answer a third question:

“Granted that podcasting can take up the slack from some existing methods of training, but is it particularly well suited to anything in particular?”

In short, this chapter will help you determine *where* to introduce podcasting to training and learning. The following chapter addresses the *how*: approaches that will help you introduce podcasting to your organization successfully.

Rethinking Training in the Organization

Amnesia, that classic device of the soap opera, will give us a quick lesson in recent organizational history. On a fine summer evening, John Q. Manager emerges from his favorite bistro only to receive a nasty blow to the back of the head from a mysterious assailant (perhaps his ex-wife, or his new paramour’s ex-husband). Refusing to go to the hospital for observation, John Q. rests for a day and then sets out for the office where he has been working these 30-odd years.

Within a few minutes, John and his coworkers realize that something is dreadfully wrong, and the *Twilight Zone* theme begins here. With the help of a calendar and interrogation of another veteran, the puzzle is solved: John has apparently forgotten everything that occurred during the past 25 years. He expected to enter a 1981 office, and instead found one in 2007. Doggedly determined,

John insists on “catching up” on what he has missed. He begins a list of observations and questions, from which we excerpt:

1. Our company has been acquired, three times, and has a new name.
2. We used to operate out of three offices in California; now we have 89 offices in 53 different countries.
3. I no longer have a secretary, or an administrative assistant; it appears I am expected to write my own letters, file my own expense reports, schedule my own travel, and so on.
4. I remember that a few hobbyists had small computers, but *everyone* here has at least one. And what happened to all the file cabinets?
5. What do they mean by “e-mail,” “Internet,” and “the company network”? People here are talking about them all the time.
6. For that matter, what is “supply chain management,” “customer resource management,” “SAP,” “Six Sigma,” an “LMS,” “Sarbanes-Oxley”?

The episode ends with a scene of the haggard-at-only-22 years old HR intern, assigned to bring John Q up to speed, downing a couple stiff drinks. The poor kid was already lost in his own alphabet soup of three-letter initiatives at this company, and he shudders at the thought of explaining them all to this relic of a man...

Time for Change

Enough. You get the picture. Large organizations have undergone absolutely incredible change in the past quarter century. Everyone knows this. Upon a little reflection, everyone also recognizes

that this change is probably above all the effect of competition. The elimination of trade barriers and the development of new markets, propelled by revolutions in the telecommunications and computing industries, and the “reengineering” of workforces to squeeze out inefficiencies to drive greater productivity—all these have changed the ways that just about everything is done in large organizations.

What is not so obvious or widely understood is that this change has completely altered the landscape for those responsible for training and learning in these organizations. Then, most of the training we delivered to employees directly improved their ability to discharge their primary responsibilities. We taught sales professionals to sell better, we taught engineers how to design, and we taught technicians how to fix. We brought them into a classroom for three or five days to do this, but everyone agreed that we were making them better at what they do. Now, ask a training manager how much of her curriculum makes employees better at the jobs they were hired for, and how much is required by enterprise systems, quality initiatives, and regulatory requirements. Expect a scowl.

In fact, in our passion to do everything consistently (the foundation of any quality system), efficiently, and with as few support staff as possible, modern organizations are grinding out new training requirements at an increasing rate. Consider those “enterprise” systems, including SAP, Oracle, Siebel, PeopleSoft, and others. In a near-vicious cycle, these products expand functionality in never-ending new releases, each of which must be taught again to employees. True, 20 ago we used mainframe accounting and payroll systems, and these also continually evolved, but then our only training audience consisted of payroll and accounting clerks.

Now virtually everyone in the organization touches these ever-expanding applications. And should there be local offices, on whatever continent, that continue to “do it the old way,” these are eventually sniffed out and forced to participate. Find yourself acquired, and expect to migrate to and learn a whole new set of enterprise systems, or at least a set with completely different interfaces to homegrown, propriety systems. Multiply all this enterprise system training by that required for new desktop applications, new regulatory requirements, new internal productivity initiatives, and, perchance, new versions of the company’s actual product, and you understand the plight of the training manager: way too much training, and way too little time to do it in.

The Podcasting Solution

Why bring this up in a book about podcasting? Organizations typically assign leadership of these many initiatives to general, nontraining professional managers and experts. These individuals typically arrive at the training manager’s door with some strong preconceptions: “My program is essential for our organization, and proper employee training is essential if the initiative is to succeed.” They also arrive a bit myopic: “I’m really not much interested in the other training that is going on.” But if you intend to consider podcasting and other new training delivery models as alternatives for learning in your organization, you will need to be prepared to enter a dialogue with these initiative managers.

The good news is that most of these managers will have a general understanding of productivity and customer support and their importance in maintaining the organization as highly competitive. They will also understand that taking employees off the job for training (and the travel

associated with training in many organizations) or for any other reason is costly. As gently as possible, you will need to point out to each of these managers that

- ▶ The catalog is full of training on equally mission-critical programs.
- ▶ A half-day training session for her initiative might not have major impact.
- ▶ In combination with all the other required initiatives, we have a real problem.

But, of course, you also offer a solution. You explain that the brick-and-mortar classroom is no longer the only effective way of training, and that your role, as a “learning consultant,” is to help identify the appropriate delivery method for each program. In fact, just as your colleagues in finance have an obligation to all stakeholders to ensure that organization funds are properly managed and conserved, your responsibility as a learning professional is to ensure that all employees’ time, especially time on the job, is properly managed and conserved. With this background, you can now begin to formulate answers.

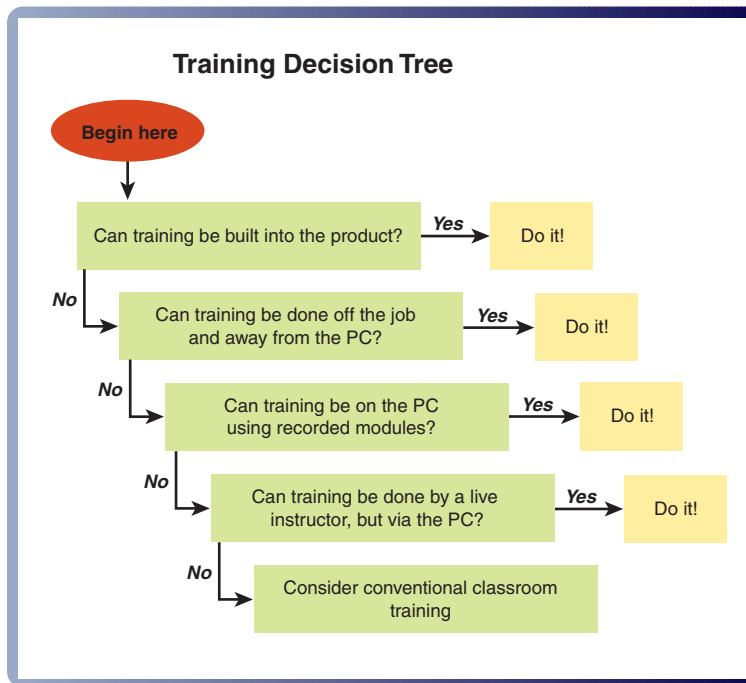
Question 1: “I understand that you need to conserve resources and manage costs, but my initiative is critical and requires classroom training. Why should it get the second-class treatment?”

Because the learning industry has established beyond question that employees can learn outside the classroom and still retain knowledge. Moreover, the potential drain of training on organizational resources, with our responsibility to stakeholders, compels us to select deployment methods that minimize time off the job or away from the customer. In short, we no longer have the luxury of ignoring the full range of learning technologies, especially those far less intrusive upon the organization’s primary mission than conventional classroom instruction.

Selecting the Right Training Method

Many readers will have had occasion to visit a physician with a knee or elbow complaint. If the first words out of the doctor’s mouth had been, “We normally start out by recommending joint replacement,” most of us would have had the good sense to run out the door despite our sore knee. In treating our own bodies, most of us prefer the rule “begin with the least disruptive and dangerous therapy.”

FIGURE 2.1
Training decision tree.



Granted, the comparison is a bit dramatic, but in determining which training solutions to prescribe, you as the expert consultant need to begin by examining the least disruptive to the organization and asking, “Will this work?” In this section, then, we begin by briefly describing those methods that are least disruptive and proceed to the most disruptive, presenting you with a simple decision tree (see Figure 2.1).