Informal Learning: 10 Issues to Consider

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Opening Activity—Part A

In self-selected groups of 3 to 5 people:
1. Introduce yourself to the other people in the group
2. As part of your introductions, share at least 3 tips for shopping with one another.

Opening Activity—Part B

Going around the group again, each person indicates where he or she learned each of the shopping tips shared.
Debriefing

About this Presentation

- Present 10 common questions about informal learning
- Help you determine the extent to which informal learning supports your overall learning efforts

1. Do you really know what informal learning is?

Process (who controls and assesses the learning process)
Location (intended for learning)
Purpose (is learning a primary or secondary goal)
Content (abstract or technical, or related to a practical, everyday skill)
Consciousness (awareness that learning occurred)

### Terminology Easily Confuses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Terms</th>
<th>What They Refer To</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formal learning</td>
<td>Classroom instruction, diplomas- and degree programs, certification programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal learning</td>
<td>Self-study programs with or without a stated goal, formally structured programs, but outside of a school structure and with no formal recognition at the end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonformal learning</td>
<td>Programs offered by arts organizations, formally structured programs, but outside of a school structure and with no formal recognition at the end, incidental learning in non-learning contexts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incidental learning</td>
<td>Accidental learning in non-learning contexts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-directed learning</td>
<td>Self-study programs aiming towards a goal (usually overseen by a tutor and formalized with a contract)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ubiquitous learning</td>
<td>Always available learning, especially through social media and mobile devices</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*If you observe duplication, it's not an accident.*

### For Our Discussion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Use</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formal learning</td>
<td>Instruction in which the instructor or some similar “expert” sets the objectives and determine the requirements for successful completion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal learning</td>
<td>Instruction in which learners set the objectives and determine the requirements for successful completion, usually it is purposeful</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nonformal learning</td>
<td>Learning that happens incidentally, incidental learning in non-learning contexts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incidental learning</td>
<td>Some as nonformal learning</td>
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<td>Self-directed learning</td>
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### 2. Is informal learning really new?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before formal schooling</th>
<th>1960s and 1970s</th>
<th>1970s and 1980s</th>
<th>Early 1990s</th>
<th>Late 1990s</th>
<th>Late 2000s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>De-facto and formal apprenticeships</td>
<td>Informal (then free-choice) learning</td>
<td>Performance support</td>
<td>Knowledge management</td>
<td>Informal learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“School of life”</td>
<td>Adult learning theory</td>
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</table>

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About the New Interest—From Industry

- Studies show that 56% of work-related learning occurs outside of formal contexts (Conference Board, 2009)
- Organizations seeking to continue reducing cost of learning
- Belief that informal learning processes can be harnessed for learning

About the New Interest—From Academe

- Studies show that 56% of work-related learning occurs outside of formal contexts (Conference Board, 2009)
- But how?
- And what are they actually learning—and what aren’t they learning.

Activity II—Part A

In different self-selected groups of 3 to 5 people:
1. Introduce yourself to the other people in the group
2. As part of your introductions, name at least one thing you learned by accident on the job.
Activity II—Part B

Going around the group again, explain (a) how you used that information and (b) how you felt about learning it.

Debriefing

3. What is your goal?

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<table>
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<td>Orient workers to the technical aspects of the job</td>
<td>Orient workers to the values and culture of the group</td>
<td>Expand the scope of assignments so workers can handle</td>
<td>Build workers' proficiency</td>
<td>Help workers deal with undocumented problems</td>
<td>Update workers' skills</td>
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A variety of formal, informal, non-formal, and self-directed techniques available to support each goal

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Technical training</th>
<th>OJT</th>
<th>Observation and feedback on the job</th>
<th>Onboarding</th>
<th>Social activities</th>
<th>Gaming-simulations</th>
<th>Performance support</th>
<th>Case studies</th>
<th>Conferences</th>
<th>Socializing</th>
<th>Offsite training</th>
<th>Communities</th>
<th>Peer learning</th>
<th>Update classes</th>
<th>Conferences</th>
<th>Seminars</th>
<th>Mentoring</th>
<th>Coaching</th>
<th>Internships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Guiding Principle: Time to Performance

Time to performance

None

Extensive

Extent of intervention

4. Do workers need to learn on your schedule?

In each of these situations, rate the level of patience with learners setting their own pace of learning

(1—high patience, 5—no patience)

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<th>Build workers’ proficiency</th>
<th>Help workers deal with unanticipated problems</th>
<th>Update workers’ skills</th>
<th>Help workers choose career goals</th>
<th>Prepare workers for the next job</th>
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**If you’re on a schedule**

- Without external “intervention,” many learners:
  - Start self-learning programs without finishing them
  - Fail to identify the take-away messages of a learning program
- Without allocating work time for learning, many workers may have to complete courses outside of work

**And Which Workers?**

- Good news: WALL studies found that 33% participated in the past month and 93% in the past year
- Rate of participation varies by:
  - Occupational status
  - Educational level

**5. Are you looking for learning or information sharing?**

Online communities vs. online repositories
Technologies to Support Informal Learning

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<th>Method</th>
<th>Technology</th>
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<td>Case studies, stories</td>
<td>Online videos, blogs, wikis</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Communities”</td>
<td>Wikis to create, blogs to report and comment, Facebook/LinkedIn</td>
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<tr>
<td>Documentation</td>
<td>PDF, content management systems, RSS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gaming-simulations</td>
<td>Simulation tools, virtual worlds</td>
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<td>Lunch and learn seminars</td>
<td>Webcasting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td>Online dating tools</td>
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<td>News</td>
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<td>Observation and feedback</td>
<td>Performance monitoring and analytics software</td>
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<td>Onboarding</td>
<td>Asynchronous tutorials for technical topics, webquests</td>
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<td>Social activities</td>
<td>Webcasts, Facebook/LinkedIn</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tips and tricks</td>
<td>Blogs, wikis, Facebook/LinkedIn, content management systems</td>
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6. Can the material you want to teach be explicitly taught?

In each of these situations, rate the ease with which the content can be explicitly taught?
(1—extremely easily, 5—extremely difficult)

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<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
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My assessments
(1—extremely easily, 5—extremely difficult)

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7. How much do you trust your learners to learn on their own?

What watching museum goers tells us

Getting Help with a Computer Application

8. What is your ability to un-do incorrect learning?

The McDonald’s Hamburger Makers
9. How much support do workers need for learning?

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- How much should you expect at each stage?
- How much can you expect at each stage?
  (1)—No support, 5—Strong support

Although Independent, Informal Learning Is Not Solitary

- Some of the support needed by learners
  - Providing work time
  - Providing external incentives and recognition to motivate learners
  - Setting expectations, especially with mentoring, informational interviews, and internships
  - Suggestions for learning
- Some of the support needed by facilitators (managers, coaches, and mentors)
  - Providing rubrics for observations
  - Training facilitators to provide useful advice
  - Training mentors for their roles

Transfer of formal learning primarily relies on informal methods.
# How much should you expect at each stage? How much can you expect at each stage?

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<th>4-5</th>
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10. Do you need to track the learning?

- Hours
- Assignments
- Satisfaction

Take-Aways

Name one or two insights you will take from this presentation to your workplace.
Acknowledgment

Thanks to Christine Wihak for her generous assistance with the preparation of this presentation.

(And hoping her dad recovers from his surgery.)

Learn More about Informal Learning

Provided by Christine Wihak


More Sources from Wihak


