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

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1. Do you really know what informal learning is?

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

Colley, H., Hodkinson, P., & Malcolm, J. (2003). Wihak (2009)

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Terminology Easily Confuses

Common Terms	What They Refer to
Formal learning	Classroom instruction Diploma- and degree programs Certification programs Certificate programs
Informal learning	Self-study programs with or without a stated goal Programs offered by arts organizations Formally structured programs, but outside of a school structure and with no formal recognition at the end
Nonformal learning	Programs offered by arts organizations Formally structured programs, but outside of a school structure and with no formal recognition at the end Accidental learning in non-learning contexts
Incidental learning	Accidental learning in non-learning contexts
Self-directed learning	Self-study programs aiming towards a goal (usually overseen by a tutor and formalized with a *contract*)
Ubiquitous learning	Always available learning, especially through social media and mobile devices
	(If you observe duplication, it's not an accident.)

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For Our Discussion

Term	Use
Formal learning	Instruction in which the instructor or some similar "expert" sets the objectives and determine the requirements for successful completion
Informal learning	Instruction in which learners set the objectives and determine the requirements for successful completion, usually it is purposeful
Nonformal learning	Learning that happens incidentally, accidental learning in non-learning contexts
Incidental learning	Same as nonformal learning
Self-directed learning	Self-study programs aiming towards a goal (usually overseen by a tutor and formalized with a *contract*)

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2. Is informal learning really new?

Before formal schooling	1960s and 1970s	1970s and 1980s	Early 1990s	Late 1990s	Late 2000s
De-facto and formal apprentice-ships "School of life"	Self-directed learning	Informal (then free-choice) learning Adult learning theory	Performance support	Knowledge management	Informal learning

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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

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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?

?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?
Orient workers to the technical aspects of a job	Orient workers to the values and culture of the group	Expand the scope of assignments a worker can handle	Build workers' proficiency	Help workers deal with undocumented problems	Update workers' skills	Help workers choose career goals	Prepare workers for the next job

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A variety of formal, informal, non-formal, and self –directed techniques available to support each goal

Technical training OJT Observation and feedback on the job	Onboarding Social activities Stories and Experiences	Gaming-simulations Performance support	Performance support Tips and tricks Seminars Forums to ask questions Coaching Lunch and learns	Case studies "Communities" Peer learning Seminars Independent research and study Trial and error Documentation	Update classes Conferences Seminars News Observation and Feedback Coaching Lunch and learn	Mentoring Coaching Internships Informational interviews Job shadowing Internships	Education Developmental assignments Credentialing Job shadowing Internships
Orient workers to the technical aspects of a job	Orient workers to the values and culture of the group	Expand the scope of assignments a worker can handle	Build workers' proficiency	Help workers deal with undocumented problems	Update workers' skills	Help workers choose career goals	Prepare workers for the next job

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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)

?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?
Orient workers to the technical aspects of a job	Orient workers to the values and culture of the group	Expand the scope of assignments a worker can handle	Build workers' proficiency	Help workers deal with undocu-mented problems	Update workers' skills	Help workers choose career goals	Prepare workers for the next job

Guiding Principle: Time to Performance

Time to performance

None   Extensive

Extent of intervention

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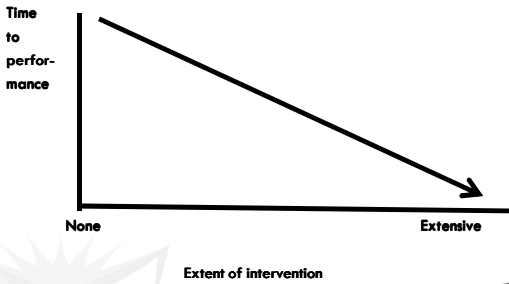
If you're on a schedule

- 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
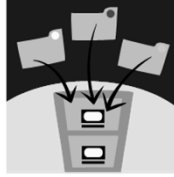
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And Which Workers?

- 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

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5. Are you looking for learning or information sharing?

Online communities

versus

online repositories

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6. Technologies to Support Informal Learning

Method	Technology
Case studies, stores	Online videos, blogs, wikis
"Communities"	Wikis to create, blogs to report and comment, Facebook/LinkedIn
Documentation	PDF, content management systems, RSS
Gaming-simulations	Simulation tools, virtual worlds
Lunch and learns, seminars	Webcasting
Mentoring	Online dating tools
News	Content management systems, RSS, Facebook/LinkedIn
Observation and feedback	Performance monitoring and analytics software
Onboarding	Asynchronous tutorials for technical topics, webquests
Social activities	Webcasts, Facebook/LinkedIn
Tips and tricks	Blogs, wikis, Facebook/LinkedIn, content management systems

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7. 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)

?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?
Orient workers to the technical aspects of a job	Orient workers to the values and culture of the group	Expand the scope of assignments a worker can handle	Build workers' proficiency	Help workers deal with undocu-mented problems	Update workers' skills	Help workers choose career goals	Prepare workers for the next job

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My assessments

(1—extremely easily, 5—extremely difficult)

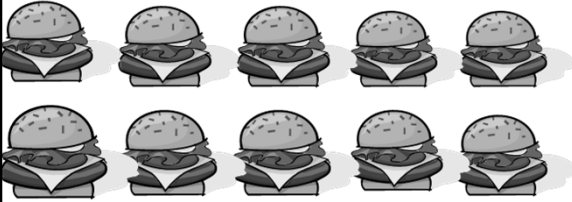| 1	4	3	3	5	2	4	3
Orient workers to the technical aspects of a job	Orient workers to the values and culture of the group	Expand the scope of assignments a worker can handle	Build workers' proficiency	Help workers deal with undocumented problems	Update workers' skills	Help workers choose career goals	Prepare workers for the next job

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

Getting help with a computer application
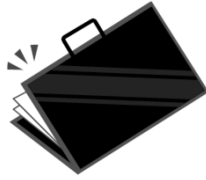
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9. What is your ability to un-do incorrect learning?

The McDonald's Hamburger Makers

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10. Do you need to track the learning?

- Hours
- Assignments
- Satisfaction

versus

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Take-Aways

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

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Acknowledgment

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

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Learn More about Informal Learning
(Provided by Christine Wihak)

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