WE NEED TO LOOK TO MORE EFFECTIVE WAYS TO BUILD WORKFORCE CAPABILITY AND PERFORMANCE

PUSH TO PULL: EXPLORING TRAINING MODELS

Doctor Dolittle's hairy friend, the Pushmi-Pullyu, could never be sure which way it was facing. Both heads were always trying to go in opposite directions.

The world of training and development is currently very like the Pushmi-Pullyu.

Formal, structured learning, designed, developed and delivered by formally qualified instructors in a course or curriculum—the push model of training and learning—still predominates in most organizations.

However, the push approach is creaking under the strain with the demand for faster, faster, faster in a world where change is the norm and where the information ocean is rising and changing at an alarming rate. Push learning simply can't deliver in many situations.

An increasing number of experts believe that the push model of education is past its sell-by date. Davidson and Goldberg, professors at Duke and the University of California, say in their recent publication 'The Future of Learning Institutions in the Digital Age':

"The future of conventional learning institutions is past—it's over—unless those directing the course of our learning institutions realize, now and urgently, the necessity of fundamental and foundational change."

The world of training is at the same critical point. The cost and speed (or lack of speed) and the overall ineffectiveness of much of the formal, away-from-the-workplace training delivered by training departments has led me to the conclusion that the future of this age-old model is over as well. We need to look to more effective ways to build workforce capability and performance.

From Push to Pull

There's a bright side to the coin. We're finding that informal and workplace learning approaches—based on the new world of pull—are proving both more appropriate and more effective channels for learning and workforce performance improvement.

Our understanding of the power of pull is increasing every day. The development of informal and workplace learning approaches such as experiential learning, ePSS, business process guidance, and the use of conversation and sharing through social networks has expanded exponentially in the past few years.

My colleagues in the Internet Time Alliance have been looking at some wider influences and the development of what we call "workscapes." Workscapes are the merger of learning and work, where learning becomes part of work and work is learning. These are driven by the individual worker's knowledge and skill needs. As such, they are predominantly pull.

I see workscapes as the future of training. Where pull learning and support is available on-demand, and the push course-based approach is only used where it works.

Charles Jennings is the director of Duntroon Associates, a training & development and human capital consultancy company. Charles is the former chief learning officer for Reuters, where he was responsible for developing 55,000 professionals. E-mail Charles at charles@duntroon.com.