

CHAPTER 5

THE NEW LEARNING

INTRODUCTION

Since knowledge is the key to competitive advantage in the new economic landscape, education and learning become of paramount importance in the network economy. Though education has been a relatively stable institution regarding its presence and its delivery, the rise of the network economy is responsible for creating new dynamics in this field, among which a true paradigm shift.

ICT, particularly, poses questions, challenges and possibilities to the delivery of education and traditional concepts of learning. Applications of educational technology, which have recently been captured by the term e-learning, are enabling learning independent of time, place, and pace. Entire virtual learning environments are being developed and experimented with throughout education.

Underlying these issues, there's a broader transformation to be observed, namely changing relationships between education, learning and work. The distinction is between work and learning is fading and lifelong learning has become a prerequisite in the network economy, not an option. Hence, the context of learning is severely altering. A variety of learning environments is occurring, comprising a broad range of different learners with different learning styles and demands, requiring different pedagogical approaches.

This chapter can be divided in two clearly distinguishable parts. The first part deals with changes in the view of learning. The new learning represents a educational paradigm that is significantly different from the former educational paradigm. The new educational paradigm includes several profound transformations with respect to learning. Subsequently, the focus will be on The new learning and management learning, and some new, active forms of management learning will be explored. The attention then shifts towards the organization of learning through communities of practice and networks, approaches that seem viable future options from the perspective of management learning.

The second part of the chapter elaborates on one specific transformation within the new educational purview, namely the integration of ICT within education. This transformation will have such a prominent impact on learning and is a factor of such importance to business schools that it deserves some special attention. A range of aspects of educational technology will therefore come up in this part of the chapter. Finally, the focus will return to management education by exploring some

contemporary issues and examples in educational technology that are relevant from a business school perspective.

FEATURES AND PRINCIPLES OF THE NEW LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

In the network economy, knowledge, education, and learning are key sources of competitive advantage. Knowledge workers need to be educated, or rather have to learn, on a continuous basis since knowledge (especially management knowledge) becomes outdated within a short period of time and since the knowledge worker is working in a rather complex and information- and knowledge-rich environment. The need for education will also increase due to global competitiveness, an increase in demand (due to increasing numbers of non-traditional students, existing students staying on, mature-aged workers needing skills upgrading, and firms keen to develop specific research and training programmes, more career changes, and 'recreational' learning), and the wish for enhancing the quality of life in the future. As a result, educational institutions have been confronted by different demands and have been urged to re-engineer education in a way that fits the new economic realities. Major changes have already occurred within the educational landscape, like lifelong learning requirements, changing student demographics, pedagogical changes, and a more mercantile way of delivering education (seeing students as demanding customers and seeing education as a product schools deliver). This mercantile manner of providing education relates to the challenge of transforming education from a public service concept to a more business-like concept. Such a conception of education is characterized by a need for a market-driven and cost-efficient approach, instead of providing education for education's sake (though education does have a crucial role in forming responsible citizens and in providing basic schooling). The commercial market for education has already attracted sizeable players, like the UK Open University, the University of Phoenix, and a lot of business schools, some of which through partnerships with other players.

Some of the most striking challenges, pressures and responsibilities can be grasped by looking at several additional important transformations that can be observed with respect to the evolution of education (cf. Haug (1999), Pilot (1999), and Van Gastel et al. (1997)). These transformations reflect the most important principles on which the new learning is based.

The most obvious transformation is the development of integrating ICT into all fields of education. Extensive interconnected digital communication networks are giving rise to quick and flexible knowledge transfer and cooperative learning, and are offering possibilities for time-, place-, and pace-independent learning. In other words: learning can benefit greatly from the displaced trade off between richness and reach. ICT applications like the internet, which is an integration of different kinds of technologies, are also offering access to information sources, databases, and digital libraries. As the European Roundtable of Industrialists (ERT) says:

"Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is having a profound impact on the way we live our lives – including the way we learn. ICT therefore has an essential role

to play in European education where it can improve individual performance, enhance quality of opportunity and help combat social exclusion. Whilst ICT is only a tool, its use is nevertheless going to result in fundamental changes throughout the whole Lifelong Learning Chain. It will bring about the emergence of a networked learning community where learning can happen at any place and at any time. It is vital for the future of good health of Europe that this transformation takes place now. This involves a major investment in both human and financial terms but if this investment is not made then Europe and its citizens will suffer a serious economic and social decline as a result of their failure to keep pace with the development of the global knowledge based society" (ERT, 1997: 4).

An equally important transformation is the changing belief that effective education is based on teaching towards the belief that effective education is based on learning. It is the learner that moves center stage, while the emphasis on the instructor and assumptions regarding expert-based knowledge transfer come to mature. Learning cannot be characterized by merely transferring knowledge from teachers to learners anymore, but is increasingly being defined by the (social) construction of knowledge (see later sections in this chapter). Taking the needs and characteristics of learners as starting points for education, the role of the instructor becomes one of a facilitator, or a coach. This transformation represents a whole new, more emancipatory, paradigm concerning the education of people.

Related to this paradigm change, there's a shift from individual learning to learning cooperatively, indicating the need for learning environments in which students work together on projects, develop social skills, in which reflection and discussion are stimulated, and in which students are held mutually accountable. In addition to the learning outcomes, the focus is increasingly on the learning process. This cooperation can also be interpreted as the integration of different learning environments, like the traditional learning environment and practice, or professional environments. Cooperation seen from this context offers possibilities for developing advanced learning environments, especially with regard to management education.

A process of integration can also be observed with respect to courses in the curriculum. Instead of offering courses independently and separately, learning activities should be focused on an integrative approach, aiming at integration of knowledge and skills, reflecting real-life professional environments. From such a perspective, learning can, for example, be organized by means of project-based education, problem-directed education, or action learning. In making education more flexible and customer-oriented, there is an additional trend of modularizing and individualizing curricula. Students are being enabled to co-develop their own learning trajectories.

Next, a change from focusing on subject matter towards developing intellectual skills can be observed, particularly in the field of vocational and professional education. Students have to develop the capabilities to learn autonomously from books, each other, and other resources instead of merely learning from a teacher's lecture. This self-directed learning puts the responsibility of learning with the learner him- or herself. Subject matter, of course, remains important, but is now seen as a tool to be used in productive tasks, while the content, process, and context of those

tasks are strongly dependent on the specific fields of knowledge and future professional perspectives (Pilot, 1999).

Learning now means lifelong learning, a transformation induced by rapid changes in the environment. Knowledge and skills become outdated or obsolete within a short period of time and, hence, it's a prerequisite to constantly update knowledge and skills. This transformation is fueled by the rise of the knowledge worker and disappearing boundaries between learning and working. The latter requires a re-examination of the traditional relationships between education, learning, and working. Process-related or procedural knowledge (know-how) and skills (like generic competences for using software packages) instead of mere subject-related knowledge and skills (like learning how to use a specific software package) need to be developed, as well as learning how to learn. Burton-Jones contends:

"The shift to a knowledge-based economy demands that traditional relationships between education, learning, and work are fundamentally reappraised. The long-running debate over whether and to what extent education should be a preparation for work, as well as life, is being overtaken by events, with work and learning becoming increasingly interrelated and interdependent. Systems created in the past to provide and support education are clearly ill suited to cater for the forthcoming explosion in demand for access to learning resources" (Burton-Jones, 1999: 199).

The concept of learning has thus evolved to lifelong learning and just-in-time education, rather than being situated within traditional college years or just-in-case education. Learning now takes place beyond the walls of educational institutions, by different kinds of students, and occurs in fundamental different ways. Since learning will become a lifelong process and one of the major growth markets in the network economy, education has become serious business.

FROM TEACHING TO LEARNING: THE CONSEQUENCES OF A NEW EDUCATIONAL PARADIGM

A focus on teaching provides a different perspective on education than a focus on learning: teaching is expert-based and expert-dominated. Knowledge is, so to speak, handed over by the teacher to the student in a passive way, reflecting the view of students as empty vessels in which knowledge is poured into. Learning in this sense is the mere absorption of knowledge, and this form of education is being practiced in most educational institutions through lectures. Especially from the viewpoint of professional and vocational education like management education, these passive ways of instruction fall short of preferred (or from a customer's perspective: promised) learning outcomes. Business schools have in the course of time integrated alternative ('active') teaching methods into their curriculum, like apprenticeships, simulations, and case studies.

Learning in an active way can be conceptualized by the concept of construction, which is in fact the central concept underlying the new educational paradigm. The construction of knowledge as an educational starting point emphasizes an active role of the student/learner and a coaching role of the teacher. The teacher now becomes a 'guide on the side' instead of a 'sage on the stage'. As opposed to a passive way of learning (which can be labeled as 'instruction') constructive learners take charge of

their own learning. Learning in this sense is student-oriented, and the basic idea is that learners interactively construct knowledge in a learning context that is created by both themselves and educators. Papert describes the differences between instruction and construction as follows:

"There are two basic ideas of education. One is instructionism; people who subscribe to that idea look for better ways to teach. The other is constructionism; we look for better things (...) to do, and assume that [students] will learn by doing. When we say we educate [students], it sounds like something we do to them. That's not the way it happens. We don't educate them. We create contexts in which they will learn" (Papert, 1997).

Traditional classroom education, such as lectures, clearly is just one of many possible ways of learning. Educators have emphasized this passive way of classroom learning for obvious and valid reasons, like cost-based arguments and large groups of students. (And who can sustain the argument that one cannot be truly inspired by a lecture given by an overly enthusiastic professor, telling vivid stories from practice based on state-of-the-art knowledge?) Education based on constructionist assumptions turns learning the other way around. Such a constructionist perspective allows self-directed and active learning to take place. The context in which learning takes place plays an essential role in this perspective.

The question then becomes: what should such a context look like when educators facilitate learning? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to first take notice of different ways of learning. From Kolb's learning cycle, a variety of ways to learn already becomes visible. Additional ways of learning include day-to-day problem solving, experience-based learning, on-the-job learning, action learning, learning through reflection, learning from peer behavior, experimental learning, and learning through conservation, discussion, and debate. Kolb's learning cycle provides some insight into the process of providing adequate (management) education. This 'experiential learning cycle' represents four different kinds of learning processes: reflective observation, concrete experience, active experimentation, and abstract conceptualization. This model combines the need for theoretical knowledge with a need for practical application, hence rejecting the traditional educational belief that knowledge can be rigorously disembedded from practice, transferred to students, and re-embedded into practice. Especially regarding management education and business schools this traditional belief has proven to be an illusive idea.

In a 1996 study, Rajan (1996) identified four types of learning with each type containing four subsets, namely taught learning, mentored learning, distance learning, and experiential learning (shown in figure 5.1). Figure 5.1 shows the percentage of employees that used or were expecting to use the four types of learning over the period 1996 to 2000. Next to the observation that this study shows that 40% of the employees used formal off-the-job classroom-type training routes for their managers at that time, it also suggests that the overall proportion is unlikely to change over the next decade. In contrast, the percentages for mentored, experiential, and distance-based learning routes are likely to grow. Reasons for this include the ascendancy of core skills consistent with the changing market environment and the predominance of self-responsibility for learning in the current



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