How to Maximize Learning in a Resource Constrained Environment through Informal Learning

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Maria Cseh, Ph.D.
Has no financial interest or relationships to disclose.
Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of this activity, the participant will be able to:

1. Describe the meaning of informal learning
2. Identify informal learning strategies
3. Compare informal learning strategies across professions
4. Discuss characteristics of learning environments that support informal learning
The Meaning of Informal Learning

- Everyday experiences that lead to learning
- Degree of control of the objectives, content and process of learning
- Reflective processes
- Forms of informal learning impacted by intentionality, awareness, consciousness:
  - Social learning
  - Self-directed learning
  - Experiential learning
  - Incidental learning
- 70-90% of learning in organizations is informal (Cross, 2009)
  - Institute for Research on Learning, the Bureau of Labor and Statistics, the Education Development Center of Massachusetts, Capitalworks, the eLearning Guild, and Canada’s National Research Network on New Approaches to Lifelong Learning

Small group exercise – Q&A
Informal Learning Strategies

- In-person (personal relationship-enhanced learning)
  - Story telling
  - Cognitive apprenticeship, Mentoring, Coaching
  - Proximal learning through meaningful conversations (conventional thinking usually fails during unconventional events; identify and integrate diverse experiences; exchange information about these experiences, coordinate activity, establish clear & flexible goals, work together to solve problems) (Kayes, 2003)

- Social media (technology-enhanced/mediated learning)
  - Blogging – sharing individual insights/information through a webpage (e.g., personal journals, interactive knowledge-exchange and communication)
  - Using Facebook
  - Using mobile technology (e.g., PDAs, mobile phones, iPods)

*Small group exercise – debriefing – Q&A*
Informal Learning Environments: Systems Challenges

Five systemic tensions that need to be balanced when designing effective learning solutions:

- employees’ desire to learn versus the pressures of the job,
- investing in strategic learning initiatives versus the need to keep organizational operating costs low,
- formal learning versus informal learning,
- maintaining flexibility within a local context versus organization-wide standards that create efficiency and accountability, and
- people versus technology (Smith & Young, 2009)
Informal Learning Environments

- Informal meeting places (comfortable, relaxing spaces based on the “water-cooler” phenomenon and communities of learning/practice)
- Flexible mobile learning environments (accessible 24 hours from anywhere)
- Cultures/policies/processes supporting creativity and innovation (needs learning committed leadership; experimentation, trial and error)
  - Facilitating others’ learning: providing feedback; role playing; observing; listening; asking questions (the ‘what do you think and why’ investigative questions); talking things through (explaining and seeking understanding); walking through things step by step (‘you drive’, I’ll take the passenger seat); seeking others for knowledge or additional insights as needed; sharing materials and resources; using examples; removing obstacles; broadening perspectives; being a role model; and, focusing on the big picture (Ellinger & Cseh, 2007)

Purpose: developing systems thinking & professional competencies, building relationships - developing adaptive expertise for complex fast changing situations

Small group exercise – Q&A
Bibliography

Bibliography (cont.)


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