

The Metamorphosis of Continuing Education

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Continuing education needs to undergo change. While there is a place for training, it is currently over-rated. There are other ecological aspects to the learning process – learning is not just about training. Clients want better performance at the workplace, but it is dangerous to draw a direct relationship between training and performance. Performance involves other factors – we need to consider what happens after training has taken place.

After classroom training, a learner returns to the workplace where they get swamped and may not have the opportunities to apply what they learnt. Learning needs to be sustained in the workplace and to do that, a trinity of training, coaching and mentoring at the workplace can help. We are good at the training part, but coaching and mentoring in the workplace need to be put in place for post-training support.

A trainer needs to function as more than just a trainer. A trainer can also be a coach to help bring classroom learning into the workplace. There are still a lot of obstacles that are non-training and non-coaching related. This is where mentoring is important in order to give learners the skills to navigate the obstacles they face at work. The difference between coaching and mentoring is that coaching is more skills based and task focused, with a results oriented view of learning. Mentoring, however, looks at the learner as a whole, considering their well-being and developmental needs.

This trinity of training, coaching, and mentoring could escalate performance, but it needs to be framed up in the “curriculum”. Here, the idea of curriculum is a relationship among the learners, the trainer, the coach, the mentor, and the entire workplace. The workplace can become the curriculum. Change cannot happen overnight, but we need to start somewhere to reach a bigger goal.

Are we placing too much emphasis on the notion of training? Change is present in all aspects of life - this includes continuing and lifelong learning. We are too immensely familiar with providing training to boost competencies and work performance. And we are too well acquainted with, even overly reliant on, the Standard Curriculum used in training. But is that all there is to continuing education and learning?