



We're all under pressure. Companies are under pressure to create better services and products for their customers and individually, we're under pressure to keep up with the pace of change and the mountain of knowledge we all need to have just to be able to do our jobs.

Research shows that we now spend 25 percent more time at work than we did in the 70s. Yet, we seem to have lesser time to complete our work. Companies are continually employing new strategies and technologies in order to capture and re-capture the fickle customer. They have to. Competition is now on a global scale and organisations are no longer competing with local competitors but with "virtual" competitors located in Asia, Europe or across the street. If it can be done cheaper and better, then it will be.

It is reported that Sony produces over 5000 new products every year – that's two per working hour, while Disney churns out a product every five minutes. Over 30,000 music albums are produced and released onto the US market every year, while at the same time, China lets 350,000 engineers loose onto the market, each earning a monthly salary of around \$100 and all capable of doing our jobs more cheaply than we can.

The pressure's on. In a competence-based society, individuals are under enormous strain to be able to access more and more knowledge and perform more effectively at the critical point of need. We need to know every aspect of the products and services that our employers are offering as well as be able to efficiently use the ever-changing IT systems that are deployed.

How much time do we have to be able to learn and constantly re-learn this needed knowledge? Most of us have barely enough time to do our jobs, let alone continually learn and apply new skills. Time has become the new religion of our age.

Imagine this scenario:

An organisation with 2000 knowledge workers is processing different systems and transactions. Now and again each of them will encounter situations where they have forgotten or

Optimal organisational performance

Simple organisational systems can lead you to a more rewarding office life

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don't know what to do in a certain part of the system. It's not their fault. They have diligently gone through training programmes but they just can't recall what to do at this particular time. It is estimated that each worker will waste approximately three to six hours per week looking for information in just trying to do their jobs.

The general reaction is to ask someone else in the office. Shouts of "Does anyone know how to...?" are common in organisations across the globe. Invariably, someone else stands up and says – "I think, you...eh...umm..." and so the conversation continues.

If we look at how we get people in organisations in touch with the right knowledge, learning and support tools, at the same time as having the inhibitions of less time, we need to apply a mix of clever learning approaches and technologies.

From an organisational perspective, a former CEO of the manufacturing giant ABB puts it succinctly when he said, "If we have 300 tonnes of brain power in our organisation, how can we motivate our people so that those 300 tonnes all move in the same direction?"

To do this, we need look at training approaches to get staff upskilled and

also understand what is termed – "The entire learning continuum". This is a process of:

Communication

Companies are looking to continually inform their people of what is changing and happening. Electronically stored, these communication deliverables can be used repeatedly to drive home the messages and create awareness.

Training

With less time on their hands, companies are becoming smarter with newer, skills-driven training approaches. Organisations are now looking at more blended approaches than ever before to explain the concepts of new systems through a combination of elearning, workshops, assessment and online collaboration and mentoring. Different approaches can be compared in the following table.

elearning is more often used to prepare end users to participate in non-technology based environments such as workshops and traditional classrooms. This ensures the facilitator has a room of people at the same knowledge level.

Even though the use of elearning is proven to yield higher retention rates in users, companies are also seeing the benefit of a combination of activities from non-technological and technological approaches that can appeal to many different learning styles.

Workshops, typically required by power users, mentors and product champions are being used for more complex levels of understanding of systems after the elearning phase is complete. These can either be classroom-based or through online collaboration tools. PowerPoint presentations, manuals (offline and web-based), other reference materials and the continued use of the sandbox are all used as enablers. Online assessment is once again used to store results via the Learning Management System (LMS).

The LMS remains an integral part of the process, allowing tracking, reporting and other administrative tasks.

The focus in the train phase is around blended learning but more importantly about re-usability. The ability for an end user to access the same reference material (albeit in different forms) in all phases of the learn-

Case study

Skanska, a major European construction company with over 20,000 employees have used a clever performance support tool from Swedish software providers, InfoCaption. Called Smart Assistant, the system delivers e-support guides to employees across several countries throughout the enterprise. The system was introduced in the autumn of 2002 and was taken into full use in February 2003 as "The Skanska Guide".

Skanska was about to roll out a new Oracle-based ERP system to over 6,000 users. The change process was going to have a huge impact on how the company

was going to operate and they needed a solution that would not only train the end users but also provide support once they returned to their 'business as usual' environments.

Skanska decided to utilise the Smart Assistant technology to quickly get users trained to follow new and changed processes.

As an integrated tool, Smart Assistant allows organisations to create performance support content called Guides (done by producers), access the Guides through keyword search or application sensitivity (by end users) and then manage Guides through its intelligent back-end database system (by content managers). Guides can also be 'grouped' into courses to create simple

elearning modules, thereby enabling the reuse of learning objects again and again.

Skanska super users, trainers and support personnel were trained to create guides on-demand and during the first month of the project, more than 200 guides were created. In the oncoming weeks, several hundreds more were produced, populating the Smart Assistant database and allowing end users access to support material that allowed them to use the new systems smoothly and effectively.

By introducing the Smart Assistant technology,

Skanska:

- Reduced help desk calls by 35 percent
- Created a faster end user acceptance of the new

systems and thus ROI

- Increased the availability and accessibility of support to create a 'self-service' culture
- Proactively solved end user problems instantly by publishing guides 'on the fly'
- Empowered trainers to produce guides themselves for use during or in conjunction with other training sessions

Skanska have continued to build on the use of the system by producing Guide materials and training packages for other areas such as business ethics, safety at work, rehabilitation of workers, diversity and equality.

SKANSKA

ing continuum is powerful. Reference material showing examples should be used in both the elearning environment as well as during (online) workshops, classrooms, job aids and later on as support material once the user is back at his or her desk.

The re-use of this reference material not only cuts down on an organisation's cost of producing training material, but it also gives a flow to the learning so that the end user feels familiar with the material and how it is being delivered.

Support

Cut your support costs by re-using the reference material once your trained users are back in their workspace, making it easily available. This can be in many forms but typically they are web pages, Intranet sites, job aids, quick user guides and online documentation.

Due to the constant influx of innovative software, there is now a renewed interest in the area of Electronic Performance Support Systems (EPSS) which allows end-users to access the correct reference materials at the exact time they need them without having to leave the system application they are having difficulties in – sometimes referred to as just-in-time training.

Increasingly, organisations are realising that this approach is lifting their ROI when embarking on new technologies and change, but more importantly it is ensuring that their end users feel informed, trained and ultimately supported. The levels of end user frustration when battling with a system are dramatically reduced because:

- They know why they are doing something
- They understand the concepts of doing it and
- They know how to it at the time they need to do it

Supporting performance at an individual level in an organisation is without doubt the key factor to driving business success today.

Let's take another scenario:

Company A is about to implement a new CRM system that will give them greater control and understanding of their client base. The organisation has been informed of the change through various communication strategies.

The users, super users and business people are given a series of elearning modules that prepare them for the up-and-coming workshops and web seminars. The focus is on knowledge, concepts and learners being able to access small reference examples on how to perform tasks within the new system. They complete the suite of learning and their results are tracked.

Once the training is completed the new system is rolled out. A performance support system, containing the same reference examples used in the training is available for users to access instantly should they forget how to do a certain task. It is a combination of a website, Intranet reference centre and an EPSS creating a centralised approach that builds consistency, efficiency and best practice within the organisation.

Imagine the same scenario above and multiply it now by 2,000 workers who usually ring the help desk, ask a colleague

or look for information for at least three hours per week. It's not difficult to calculate the economic impact.

The shift from 'remembering' information to 'accessing' knowledge means the "business as usual" worker no longer has to rely on long-term memory in order to perform at one's job. One is secure in knowing that he is informed, trained and supported in an environment where forgetting critical information simply means re-accessing centrally available and reusable learning objects to allow one to complete his or her task.

This learning approach allows the end user to "understand-know-perform" in a much more cost effective manner, ensuring the enterprise reaches its ultimate goal of optimal organisational performance.

Kevin Lee, national elearning manager

Skills-driven blended learning programme

	Technology-based techniques	Non-technology based techniques
Communication	LMS/email push/Intranet	Flyer/mail/phone
Overview	Email/online collaborative tools	Traditional classroom/credibility
Self-paced learning	Web-based learning/e-books/simulations	Articles/books/job aids/on-the-job training
Query Resolution	Email/FAQ/instant messenger/online collaborative tools	Face-to-face meeting/mentor
Demonstration	Online collaborative tools/elearning simulation	Traditional classroom
Practice	elearning/simulation	Workbook assignment
Feedback	Email/e-surveys/LMS	Face-to-face meeting/print report
Assessment	LMS/web-based test	Print test