Embedded Learning:
Is it ‘Learning’ or is it ‘Work’

Based on the article by Michael Littlejohn, in TD, Feb.2006, p.37-39
Replacing the age-old model of “learn-then-do” with

A newer “learn-while-doing” model
Define Embedded Learning
Definition

• Learning that is based on the premise that the more contextual learning is to the job or task, the more an individual is motivated to learn.

• If organizations make critical learning available at moment of need, an inherent “teachable moment” – an ideal time to leverage learning without having to remove learner from work - is created.
Embedded Learning

- Provides immediacy
- Stresses collaboration
- Leverages non-learning technologies – instant messaging, intelligent search, and content management
- Integrates learning with knowledge management
Immediacy

• Today’s work environment – fast-paced and ever-changing

• No longer supports a model where staff can take courses on topics that they might use in the future

• Formal structured learning events time-consuming

• The most immediate answers obtained by simply asking the person next door

• Extending the ability to ask a question of someone across the floor, the next floor, in the next building, or even across the country
Collaboration

- Underlies embedded learning
- Distinguishes it from performance-based learning programmes
- Impossible to capture, store and catalogue “institutional memory” of staff
- Embedded learning captures what exist in the minds of others and facilitates exchange, thereby formalizing knowledge
Leverages non-learning technologies

- Unnerves learning technology vendors
- Technologies supporting embedded learning already available – email, instant messaging, search engines, online directories and portals
- Can be easily and cost-effectively deployed to support embedded learning
- Requires tight integration into workplace tools and portals and not a simple “drop-in” solution
Integrate learning with knowledge management

- Providing access to tacit and explicit knowledge is the key
- Knowledge presented in many ways – data, FAQs, websites, papers, stored video, stored audio, and presentations
- Sorts and presents knowledge based on the needs of the learner
- Knowledge is captured at the scene
Overcome Barriers
Organizational Challenges

• Transforming an organization’s culture towards collaboration and knowledge sharing

• Information “hoarding” viewed as a key to success

• Difficult for staff to be given new roles and responsibilities required for collaborative success for supporting embedded learning
Embedded Learning

- A completely different paradigm than the “learn-then-do” environment
- The role of learning managers shift from content provider to content intermediary, ensuring access to a variety of sources in the best means possible
- Learning professionals must possess a deep understanding of the work process
- Involves decentralized learning coupled with centralized direction establishing standards and principles
Shift from learning to working
Changing nature of work

• Employers require greater productivity and fewer hours on activities that do not provide immediate results

• They recognize that traditional e-learning programmes may not be ideal because they often require participation outside the work context

• They cannot afford to send staff to class nor afford to have staff spend hours on e-learning activities that do not directly support the task at hand

• Traditional e-learning must be broken down into byte-size learning objects so that they can be easily embedded into the work flow
Formal Learning and Embedded Learning

• Not substitutes

• Formal learning - both individual and group - plays a key role in the long term capacity development of staff

• But they will be geared towards supporting long-term competency development (behavioural characteristics important to success)
Change the future of learning
Embedded Learning

• Integrated into staff work flow as technology evolves at a rapid pace
• Learning methods need to reflect this evolution
• Empower staff through different learning tools
• Staff acknowledges the value and commitment to learning
Implementing Embedded Learning

Requires careful planning and coordination
Questions to assess readiness for embedded learning

• Has the amount of formal training declined in recent years due to costs and productivity pressures?
• Has the pace of required learning increased due to changes in organization and work environment?
• Are there frequent changes in work processes and work rules?
• Are the institutional knowledge of staff effectively tapped?
• Are you staff geographically dispersed?
• Is key expertise being lost due to competitive pressures or retirement?
Embedded Learning: *Learn while doing*

**FORMAL**
Acquire knowledge & skill through a blended-learning approach

**ENABLED**
Accelerate time to competence through guided workplace learning experiences

**EMBEDDED**
Accomplish work through learning delivered at the moment of task execution