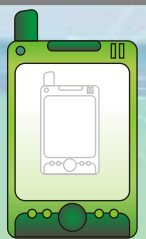




INFOPRO Worldwide Inc.



INFOPRO CORPORATION



m Learning

Expanding Time, Widening Horizons



m Learning

Jason Brown is a salesperson with ACME Products and Services. Typically, Jason takes the subway to his workplace, a 35-40 minutes ride. Once in the office, Jason responds to his emails and voice messages. Next he updates his supervisor on the sales activity. Now, it is time to catch up with the appointments with customers that are lined up for the day. Usually, Jason makes 2 to 3 customer calls in a day and returns to the office by 5.00 in the evening. After filing his Daily Sales Report, Jason is ready to leave for his home.

Overview

1 With the marketplace becoming increasingly competitive, corporations are continually seeking to redefine their competitive advantage by honing their distinctive and distinguishing capabilities, or the competencies that the competitors find difficult to replicate. A natural corollary to sustaining this advantage is learning to do things differently and better. Therefore, the need to learn and constantly build the competitive skill inventory is intrinsic to businesses driven by hypercompetition. However, the very hypercompetition that makes organizational learning imperative is also demanding on the time of the

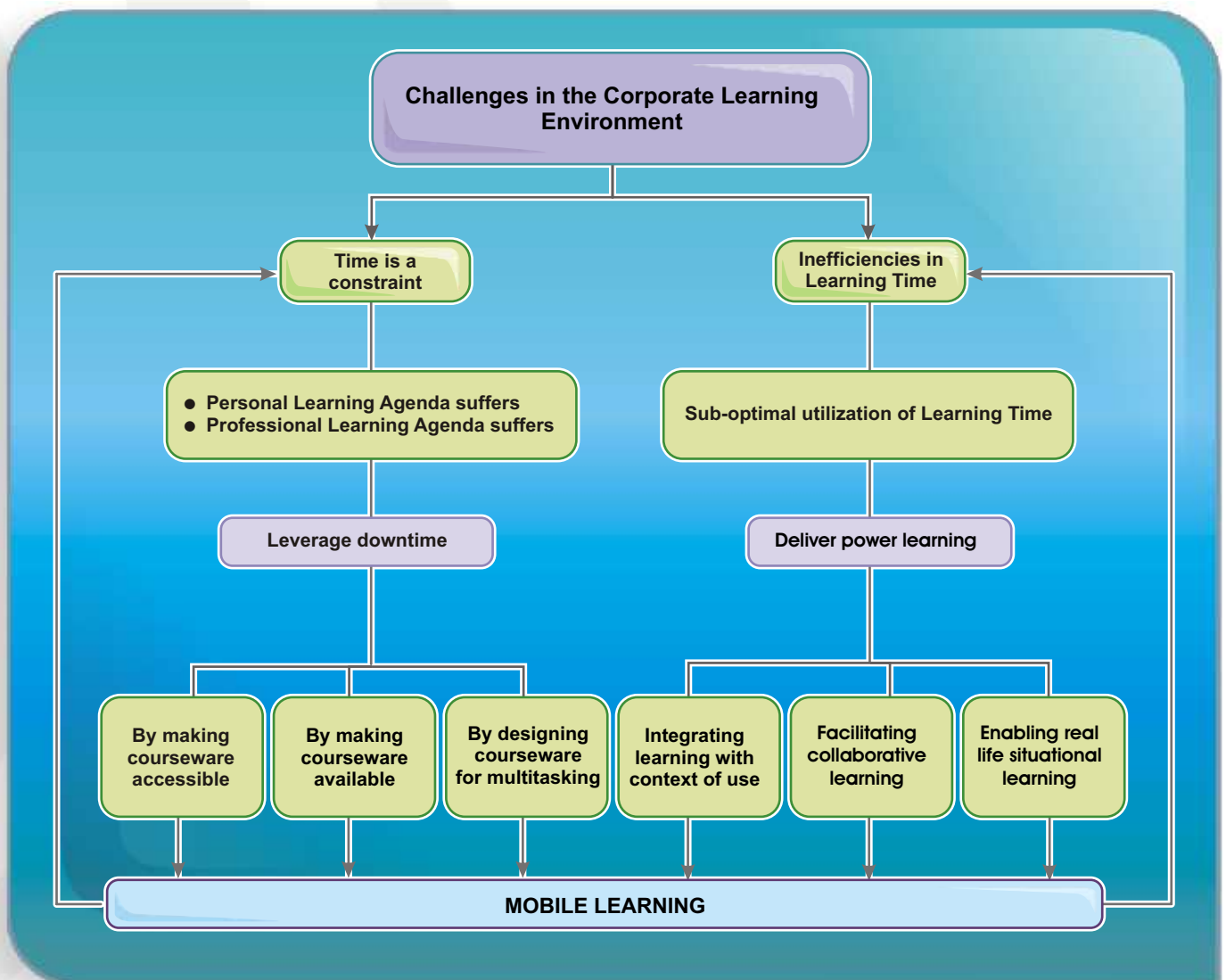
professionals. Not surprisingly therefore, the sheer lack of time on the part of learners, notwithstanding the motivation to learn or organizational appreciation of the desirability of learning programs, is often the stumbling block in making organizational learning happen.

This document investigates the possibility of leveraging the ubiquitous handheld devices, such as cellphones, iPods and PDAs, to enable anytime, anywhere learning and empower learners to break free from the constraints imposed by time.

corporate Learning challenges

Research indicates that time deprivation is a major challenge in realizing meaningful learning intervention. Whether at work or at home, the working professional typically has little time to spare. As a result, the need to learn, inadvertently and unfortunately, takes a backseat.

For example, a training program that requires the learner to take out 30-odd minutes may not necessarily fit in the learner's schedule because of the time crunch, both in and out of the office. Therefore, the training program, however well intended, instructionally sound, and critically required to plug a competency gap, will fail to yield the desired result.





Apart from the training needs that arise from the working professional's current role-related competency gaps or the learning needs that are concomitant to career progression, another latent challenge that faces time-strapped people in the corporate environment is the pursuit of Personal Learning Agenda (PLA). As distinct from organizational bias in the professional learning agenda of a person, the PLA of the person will typically relate to acquisition of knowledge and skills residing outside the organizational domain. For example, the PLA of a person can range from learning to make pasta or a new language, to picking tips and tricks to become a smart investor.

Learner Downtime

- Commuting to work
- Machine downtime
- Business travel time
- Waiting for a meeting

However, this is not to deny that there can be overlaps between professional and personal learning agendas. Continuing with the example, though the need to learn a new language figures on the PLA of the person, the beneficiary of the learning can also be the organization that employs the learner. Benefits accruing from the PLA

of a professional to the organization may or may not be immediately apparent, but there is no denying the possibility that certain PLA element of a professional can be as much part of organizational learning agenda. Therefore, it is important for organizations to take a holistic view of the learning agendas of their professional.

But, notwithstanding the nature of learning agenda, professional or personal, the possible overlap between the two agendas, and the organizational commitment to learning, the crux of the problem is that hectic schedules of professionals leave them with little time to pursue their learning agendas.



Along with time deprivation, improving the effectiveness of online programs through enhanced learner engagement is an important issue. The bottom-line is to maximize the returns on the learning time or the time that is spent by the learner pursuing an online curriculum.

But this is not an easy task with a vast majority of online programs that are characterized by limited collaboration capabilities and opportunities for active learning in which learners not only communicate with each other but also contribute to the very creation of learning. Therefore, online programs, as usually practiced, suggests learning in isolation whereas learning has traditionally been a community activity and the crux of the problem is to resolve this seemingly inherent contradiction with the objective developing engaging learning programs.

Further, the critical issue of learner engagement and the efficiency of learning-ware is also a function of contextual learning or anchoring learning in life-contexts. But in conventional online programs, such contextualization is not very convincing because developers can at best simulate context that may or may not replicate in real-life. Consequently, inadequacies of contextualization adversely impact the engagement potential of learning programs. This may be especially true in case of just-in-time learning, an extension of contextual learning where critical contextual information is required almost instantaneously.

Therefore, it emerges that time crunch on the part of learners and courseware that's engaging, effective, and efficient are two key challenges in the corporate learning environment. Now let's investigate how handheld devices can answer the challenge of delivering Right Time, Right Place Learning (RTRPL) in

Multitasking opportunities

- Lunch/Tea break
- Working out
- Monitoring Activities

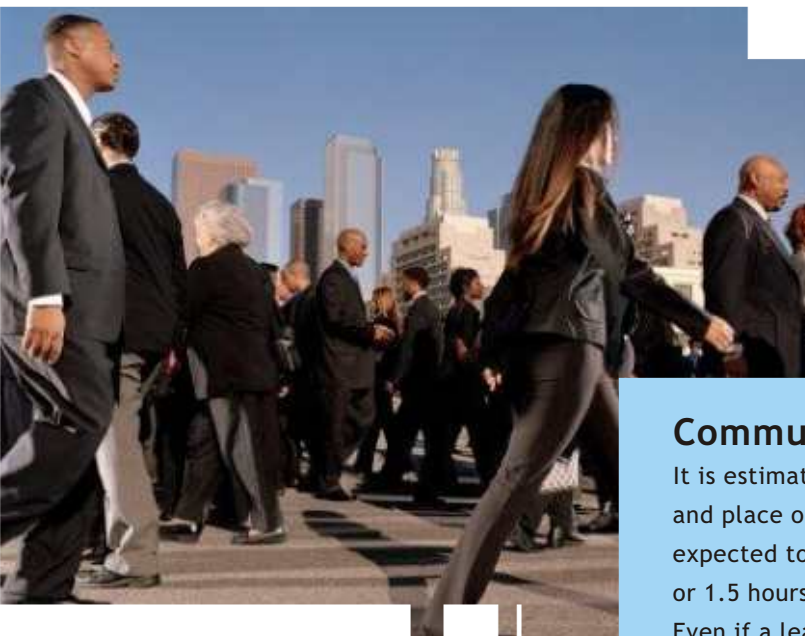
a mobile answer

With mobile phone penetration more than 100 per cent in many countries, ergonomics continually redefining the form factor of handheld devices, the multimedia-capable 3G mobile devices, and interoperability of mobile phones across different networks and countries, the ubiquitous mobile phone offers immense potential for its use for delivering learning content.

Some of the factors that make the mobile device a strong candidate for delivering learning content are:

- Multimedia communication device with SMS for text messaging and MMS for exchanging images and video and Internet access
- Ubiquitous with penetration of mobile technology exceeding that of the Internet
- Interoperability across networks and countries
- Auxiliary storage capabilities.
- 3G networks with greater bandwidth for faster downloads

Corporations striving to reconcile the issues of time deprivation and enabling consequential learning can leverage the ubiquity of mobile phones to access learning-ware during the periods of time during which their professionals are not gainfully engaged. For example, home-office commute or office-client site commute time typically go underutilized because there is no access to learning materials on the go. But, if mobile access to learning resources can be enabled during such times, employees will be able to plug such “holes in time” with episodic learning.



Mobile Learning in Action

Stanford University stores its faculty lectures and learning courseware on the website <http://itunes.stanford.edu/>. The university regularly updates the website, adding new content as and when necessary. Students can access and download the lectures for further reference.

However, this implies that courseware developed for learning on mobile devices should be such designed that it enables multitasking, allowing the learners to go through learning modules while performing routine, daily tasks such as jogging, workouts etc. In fact, with mobile courseware designed for simultaneity between learning and performance of regular routine tasks, working professional will find the much-needed time to pursue their professional and personal learning agendas without interfering with their daily schedules.

Commute Time = Learning Time?

It is estimated that on an average, the commuting time between home and place of work in New York City is approximately 38 minutes and is expected to go up to 45 minutes per side. This represents 90 minutes or 1.5 hours of learning time that the learner can avail of everyday. Even if a learner devotes an hour of this time to learning, it translates into 5 learning hours a week.

Besides enabling the learn-as-you-go paradigm, mobile devices can contribute immensely in improving learner engagement, and the effectiveness of learning-ware, through peer-to-peer collaboration, active learning, and contextual learning. For example, the multimedia capabilities of mobile devices can be leveraged for deploying image or video-based assessments during which a particular piece of media depicting a sales problem scenario can be flashed to learners with the objective of obtaining their strategies to resolve the problem and information sharing and, in the process, facilitating learning.

Such collaborative learning opportunities come particularly handy for workforce operating in the field. And, because the mobile is essentially a communication device, it easily lends itself to collaborative learning initiatives, leading to growth of communities of practice and creation or sharing of experiential learning between peers through personal broadcasting.

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Further, the mobile device with support for multiple communication protocols (GPRS, WLAN, Bluetooth etc) facilitates transference of learning content on to mobile devices on “as and when needed” basis, leading to contextual learning. This enables deployment of learning to real life tasks and the interplay of content and its application enriches the contextualization of learning.

It is apparent that mobile phones seamlessly connect with the requirements of corporate learning strategy with lightweight learning that fits the “holes in time” of the working professional, less learner time, tight coupling with real life tasks, and design for multitasking.

summing up

As the corporate workforce adapts itself to the demands of the market, it is imperative that learning programs respond to the challenge of time-constraint thrown by this adaptation. Mobile devices, because of their origin in communication, their ubiquity, and now their multimedia capabilities seem ideally poised to realize the concept of Right Time, Right Place Learning. When properly implemented, mobile learning redefines the concept of effective utilization of learning time, by making learning available at all times, at all places, and most importantly, to the right person.

about



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