

Need for Change:

The opportunity for change that I have noted within my organization is to move from a largely Behaviorist approach to learning to incorporating Social Constructivist methods. As learning is a social process that is situated within in a given context (see Lave and Wenger) the Behaviorist approach is limited, with its focus on completion of a specific task based on prescribed cues that are learned out of context for employees. Within my field of practice this equates to learners focusing on successfully applying skills and behaviors based on specific circumstances that may or may not reoccur on the job.

The role of the employee requires critical thinking skills to be applied given unique situations. The current training and organizational focus is primarily on observable, measurable behaviors that are rewarded, or punished, based on set criteria. Only recently has there been a slight shift in the method of evaluating performance that includes more judgement of application given the context, as opposed to a "check-box" mentality indicating whether or not a given behavior was exhibited by an employee.

We currently are not creating opportunities for our employees to be constantly learning through their interactions with customers and colleagues and making decisions based on their ever-expanding knowledge. Rather the focus is on stimulus-response methods where a cue is the expected trigger for the appropriate behavioral response (see Skinner). While there are certain areas within an employee's role where appropriate application of knowledge is dependent on prescribed policies, there are more instances where the ability to adapt knowledge to the situation is critical to success (see Lave and Wenger). In these cases the Social Constructivist approach to learning would support the development of the ability to apply judgement and critical thinking skills based on the given situation and supported by a community.

By limiting the amount of experience-based learning available and focusing training on stimulus-response triggers, employees' ability to "think on their feet," engage the community, and adapt to new situations is greatly reduced. As no two customer situations are exactly the same this approach fails to prepare employees to be flexible, causing employee, customer, and leadership to be dissatisfied with the results.

Proposed Change:

The proposed change is to begin building learning experiences for employees that are based on realistic experiences (see Dewey, Piaget, and Papert) and focus on learning how to learn and interact within a community. These experiences would either be situated within the actual context of the role, or within a close approximation, and include opportunities to work as a team and to pause and reflect on the process of learning that they have applied. This metacognitive approach will help to stimulate the employee to understand their own learning process and continue to apply adaptive learning skills while on the job and make the learning process explicit. An Understanding by Design approach would help tie together necessary learning objectives with overarching concepts (Big Ideas) that empower learners to continue to learn beyond the scope of a particular activity.

Beyond the instructional design practices that need to be changed to support this model, there is a need for a shift in organizational understanding of social constructivism and the need for a support structure that allows each individual to continue to learn as an individual within the context of the community. Making the community of practice for employees obvious and legitimate (see Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder) and providing support for its growth will be critical to the success of ongoing employee learning and development.

To support these new models of learning, technology will be employed, including new design tools that promote social learning processes. These may include Mzinga Social Learning Suite, Microsoft SharePoint, and/or a comparable system that allows for ongoing social learning interaction.

Evaluation of Change:

Success in this change will be evaluated by several methods, including qualitative and quantitative data.

- Qualitative:
 - Employee sentiment
 - Customer response
 - Leadership feedback
- Quantitative:
 - Key Performance Indicators, including, but not limited to the following:
 - Customer Issue Resolution, Satisfaction, Quality Scores, etc.