
An informal history of eLearning

Jay Cross

The author

Jay Cross is the Founder of Internet Time Group, Berkeley, California, USA and CEO, eLearning Forum.

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Abstract

eLearning: snake oil or salvation? Changes in the world are forcing corporations to rethink how people adapt to their environment. How do people learn? Why? What's eLearning? Does it work? This paper addresses these questions and recounts the history and pitfalls of computer-based training and first-generation eLearning. It traces the roots of CBT Systems, SmartForce, Internet Time Group, and the University of Phoenix. It takes a person to five years of TechLearn, the premier eLearning conference, from dot-com euphoria to today's real-time realities. The subject-matter here is corporate learning, in particular mastering technical and social skills, and product knowledge. The focus is on learning what is required to meet the promise made to the customer. While there are parallels to collegiate education, the author lacks the experience to draw them.

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Preface

Intellectual capital has become more valuable than hard assets. Networks are replacing hierarchy. Time has sped up. Cooperation edges out competition. Innovation trumps efficiency. Flexibility beats might. Everything's global. The past no longer illuminates the future. We need fresh thinking. eLearning was supposed to be the answer.

Some of the material ahead is controversial. It's probably better to skip around than to plod straight through. I'd prefer that you take away a few things than that you read all the words. There's no test at the end. That reminds me of a story.

A group of Harvard students was given a paper on urban sociology and told, "Read this. You will be tested." A matched group across campus was given the same paper and told, "Read this. It's quite controversial and may be wrong. You will be tested." The second group did much better on the test. Why? Because uncertainty engages the mind and the senses.

When you come upon an outrageous claim or misspelled word, I may have done it on purpose to help you learn. To engage your mind.

An informal history of eLearning

Forget about college, classrooms, courses, curricula, credits, and the campus. We're going to chat about eLearning. This is corporate.

What is learning?

We really know very little about the process of learning, how the mind works when learning. We're very good at pointing and naming, so we have parts of the brain labeled synapse, neuron and cortex, and theories about how it all somehow works together and enables us to learn, but learning remains one of the life's great mysteries. That aside, in more practical terms, learning is that which enables you to participate successfully in your life and in the environments that matter to you. Learning involves meshing new material into what you already know. Learning creates neural connections and rewires your brain. Successful connections build knowledge to help you prosper. Learning is a series of course corrections to keep you headed in the right direction. Try, fail, succeed, and try again. Learn. It doesn't stop until you die.

Deep thanks to David Grebow, a visionary in corporate learning, for suggesting numerous clarifications and additions to the original manuscript.



The same goes for organizations. When you stop to think about it, organizations are no more or less than a loosely-knit collection of brains. In a very real sense, corporations have a corporate IQ. It goes up and down (and is just waiting for someone to come along and measure it!). Regardless of the number, the organization learns the same way you learn. Hopefully, the successes outnumber the failures, and the corporate IQ increases every year.

How do people learn?

One of the best ways to learn is social; we learn with and from other people. We learn by doing. Aristotle said, "What we have to learn to do, we learn by doing," and Einstein echoed, "The only source of knowledge is experience." (Aristotle added, "We cannot learn without pain.") Confucius said, "I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand." And I'll add that if I hear and see and do and then practice and teach, I understand even better.

Why do people learn?

People learn because they have an innate desire to excel, the promise of reward, the fear of punishment, the lure of advancement, social pressure, peer pressure, curiosity, a quest for understanding, the satisfaction of accomplishment, status, pride and more. You have your own reasons which I'm sure you can name. Corporations fund learning because they want employees and partners to perform faster and better, to create value through innovation, to beat the socks off the competition and to make more money. The value of learning is in the eye of the beholder.

What was eLearning?

Before anyone called it eLearning, in late 1997, learning guru Elliott Masie said, "Online learning is the use of network technology to design, deliver, select, administer, and extend learning." In 1998, I wrote, "eLearning is learning on Internet Time, the convergence of learning and networks. eLearning is a vision of what corporate training can become. eLearning is to traditional training as eBusiness is to business as usual." In 1999, Cisco told us, "eLearning is Internet-enabled learning. Components can include content delivery in multiple formats, management of the learning experience, and a networked community of learners, content developers and experts."

What is eLearning?

Today, five years after I coined the term "eLearning," we live in an e-world. Networks

facilitate virtually all learning. Most corporate learning today is at least in part eLearning. It has become trite to point out that the "e" doesn't matter and that it's the learning that counts.

If you ask me, I don't think the learning counts for much either. What's important is the "doing" that results from learning. If workers could do their jobs well by taking smart pills, training departments would have nothing to do except order the pills and pass them out. Executives don't care about learning; they care about execution. I may talk about "learning" with you, but when I'm in the boardroom, I'll substitute "improving performance." You can tell I've been away from the campus for a while.

Heavier than air

The world you experience, the things you know, the people you love? That's your story. It's all in your head. It's your reaction to the pulses and waves your senses pick up. I don't mean to debunk the mind's internal interpreter, for without its intermediary filters and pattern recognizers, life would resemble the lightshow sequence in Kubrick's *2001*, a jumble of incomprehensible overload and static.

Writing this, I'm in Seat 42G on Air France Flight 083 from San Francisco *en route* to Nice. I look forward to long flights. My seat is a sensory deprivation tank, a great place to be alone without jangling telephones, social obligations, online temptations, or even a dog pleading for a walk. I do my most creative work while strapped into a seat in one of these ateliers in the sky.

I am ecstatic about going to Nice. A free stay with friends in an exotic locale. Fresh sites, culture shock, thinking in a different language, new tastes, intriguing odors, bargaining in the markets, and the joy of pushing outside of the complacency of home. I expect to learn a lot. I always do when I push outside my comfort zone.

That's how learning happens. Outside one's comfort zone. Exposed to new things. Incorporating them into one's experience. Taking life's lessons and adapting them to make the world a better place, and to lead a happier life. Challenge yourself and your brain gets heavier with new neurons.

My flight is lifting off. "*Préparez-vous pour la décollage.*" French comes before English on Air France. Another opportunity for reflection. And for remembering that learning is a whole-body experience. Hormones had me thinking that I was to prepare for the *décolletage*, but that's something different entirely.

The woman to my left, Denise, and I converse briefly. She's off to Barcelona, where her husband's attending a business meeting. I tell her Barcelona's

beautiful, that Spanish waiters regard a heart-felt “*Estupendo!*” more valuable than money, and that I courted my wife just south of Barcelona while Franco was still in power. Denise’s only other trip to Europe was last year. To Nice. And she tells me the walks above the town where restaurants cluster along tiny, twisting streets, were superb.

Conversation gets right to the heart of the matter, no matter what the matter is. It’s a wonderful way to learn. To bad it has been banished from teacher-student dialog, stunting learning and making schooling dull as dishwater. But I’m getting ahead of myself. I’d like to share a bit of the history of eLearning.

The pre-history of eLearning

1984. George Orwell. The Mac debuts. CBT Systems is founded. (CBT = computer-based training).

Bill McCabe, an extraordinary Irish entrepreneur, had come to America to pursue his dream. The Irish tiger had not yet awakened, and Ireland was too conservative to support venture capitalists, IPOs, or entrepreneurs. So McCabe, having failed to become European manager of a software classroom-training firm in the UK, struck out on his own and set up shop in entrepreneur-friendly northern California.

His vision was to train computer professionals with computer-based training, at the time a radical idea. Customers no more thought they should pay for training than today’s cybercitizens expect to pay for content on the web. IBM and UNIVAC and Honeywell and NCR and DEC gave away training with the software they bundled with their hardware. It all took place in a classroom. In the mainframe world, you paid your entry fee and got what you needed. There was no incentive to pay for training. McCabe had been turned down by every major hardware vendor and was ready to return to Ireland when he met someone who had complex software – but no hardware – and certainly not enough people to satisfy the need for folks to learn how to use it.

Lotus Notes in Cambridge, Massachusetts (pre-IBM) became the first CBT Systems customer. Most of CBT’s software was written in Ireland, the India of its day in terms of wages. Training without the cost of instructors and classrooms captivated the imagination of the cyclical computer industry. Other vendors signed up. After a while, CBT Systems offered computer-based training for every major vendor’s software.

Because the vendors needed skilled customers the day a new release appeared, CBT got an inside look at new developments before they were

released in the market, a clear competitive advantage. The firm fielded a superlative field sales force. When CD-ROM became the new training technology of choice in the mid-1980s, CBT Systems converted all of its courseware to the medium and set up a human factory for churning out new titles. As the 1990s closed, CBT Systems offered the broadest array of CD training titles of any company in the world, more than a thousand all told, more than 95 percent focused on IT (Information Technology).

Corporations snapped up CD-based training because CDs were dirt cheap compared to live instructors. And IT was suddenly appearing everywhere, an indispensable part of doing business and staying competitive. The knowledge of how to “do it” was in great demand.

In the late 1990s, rumors began to circulate that the CD-based training courses weren’t living up to expectations. You could visit the IT shop of a company that had licensed the entire CBT Systems library and find no-one who had taken a course! Dropout rates were incredibly high. Most people simply weren’t interested in learning alone, sitting by themselves in front of a box that was a cheap substitute for an instructor in a class. If they got stuck or made a mistake, there was no one to turn to. They missed fellow learners to coax them on. The workshops they used to attend fended off interruptions. That worked better than learning at their desks (amid continual interruptions) or at home (which was generally resented and often accompanied by the distractions of kids, television, and dogs to walk).

eLearning makes the scene

Greg Priest had become President and CEO of CBT Systems in 1998 when the first cracks in the CD model began to appear, and CBT Systems missed its revenue projections. Greg is an off-scale brilliant man, a former Wilson-Sonsini attorney who had graduated top in his class at Stanford Law School and clerked for Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall.

Greg had a vision of what would follow computer-based training. The Web would replace CDs. His model for the future was a project CBT Systems had done for UNISYS. UNISYS had figured out that it could boost revenues \$10 million a year by accelerating the certification, and hence the billing rates, of its computer services staff. CBT Systems helped create UNISYS University, which not only delivered content over the Web, but also provided a personalized learning portal, tracking systems, online newsletters, discussions groups, and just about every other bell

and whistle one could imagine at the time. It was eight years ahead of IBM's Learning On Demand. Greg figured everyone would migrate to this form eventually, just as e-commerce was morphing into e-business in the larger business world. More and more people in Silicon Valley were coming to believe that it would be a web, web, web world.

Greg hired an EVP of marketing who had started and sold a successful software company and later managed major marketing efforts for Novell. Luckily for me, the fellow knew nothing about eLearning, so he entered "eLearning" into Alta Vista, the search engine of choice five years ago, and my name came up nine times, followed by that of Cisco, whose chairman, John Chambers, had just told the audience at Comdex that eLearning was going to be so big that it would "make email look like a rounding error." My career as an eLearning consultant was launched.

Internet Time Group

In the late 1970s, having graduated from business school in the East and migrated to California, I took on a market research project for an outfit in San Jose named The Institute for Professional Development. They asked me to assess the demand for an off-campus business degree program. After talking with Foremost-McKesson, Fairchild Semiconductor, Memorex and others, I reported back that such a program would sell like hotcakes.

The Institute hired me to develop the curriculum and then to sell it. I took a self-directed crash course in instructional design, adult learning, and small group process. I learned about experiential learning and put together a series of 30 weekly workshops, the senior year of an accredited BSBA program. The responsibility gave me nightmares.

The program was adopted by Bank of America, Fairchild, Ford Aerospace, NASA, IBM, Atari, Stanford, and others. We were so successful that we were run out of California by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (which disdained for-profit institutions). I refused to move to Arizona and left soon after we morphed into the University of Phoenix. I'd learned a lot about pragmatic education and experiential learning. Today more than 200,000 students are enrolled with UoP; annual tuition revenues exceed \$1 billion.

In San Francisco, I joined a couple of friends in the training business. We became quite successful, capturing 80 of the nation's largest banks and all of the regulators as customers, winning awards, going global, and thinking big. Like many a training

company, in the mid-1990s, we were seduced by the lure of CD-ROM. We began pouring our energy into building CD-based courseware.

It's difficult to overestimate the impact of CD-ROM on instructional designers. CD brought realistic video to the desktop. You could immerse learners in a mock scenario, branching to different situations based on their decisions. Development was costly but after that, variable costs were almost nil. Our firm undertook millions of dollars of development projects.

Then the Web came along. For me, it was love at first byte. My intuition told me this was where things were headed. I made a nuisance of myself trying to divert some of our company's limited resources to the Web. There are some things you can change, and some you cannot change, and after 12 years, I had the wisdom to know the difference, and left the firm.

I was still drawn to the Web as a moth to the flame. I talked with Netscape, Cisco, Intel, and anyone else who would listen. I wrote about the coming convergence of learning and the Internet. I coined the word eLearning (although I think a number of us did so simultaneously; it was in the air. Weboholic that I was, I posted my thoughts about eLearning on the Web. "Information wants to be free," said Stewart Brand. That's how CBT Systems found me in the top nine slots on Alta Vista.

The early days

CBT Systems had about 250 employees in early 1999, but aside from the Board and a few senior officers, only a handful of us knew that we were preparing to re-orient and re-name the company. We drew the drapes in the conference room when we met and used code-words. I was writing white papers, FAQs, and positioning statements. A team was prepping PR and logos. We wrote and re-wrote brochure copy. I converted Greg's initial vision paper into a customer-ready overview of eLearning.

In October 1999, Greg announced to the analyst community that CBT Systems would henceforth be known as SmartForce, The eLearning Company. Simultaneously, customers and employees at our offices around the world listened to Greg's webcast and popped champagne corks. New signs went up. At the Online Learning Conference in Los Angeles, I signaled the master of ceremonies, Gloria Gery, who read the news to two thousand participants. We distributed cartoon after cartoon of brochures and gave demos from CBT Systems' tiny 10 × 10 booth in the exhibit

hall. SmartForce was the only eLearning game in town.

Learning/training

I'm always ready to learn but there are many times I don't want to be trained. Training is something someone does to me; learning is something I do for myself. To illustrate the difference, I sketch a typical training situation with the trainer in the center with the trainees aligned around him. We know who makes the rules, manages the activities, chooses the subject matter, and administers the tests. In the corporate eLearning scenario, the worker sits at the middle, surrounded by an array of tools, or learning opportunities: Web, peers, instructor, CBT, mentor, FAQ, help desk, etc.

The shift from trainee to worker was long overdue, and would probably have come about with the e-phenomenon. Democracy champions the individual and rules the world. Remember "Brand You" and "Free Agent Nation" and the "Army of One" and the near worship of entrepreneurs? All these are about promoting the individual. People matter.

Learning isn't content. Learning isn't infrastructure. Learning is a process of forging neural links. It's new thought being wired into the brain's network. Hard to believe, given that the brain is a chemical soup shot through with electrical charges, more closely resembling a haggis than a sophisticated network processor. eLearning came along at the right time to embrace the learner-centric view.

eLearning spreads

Come November 1999, Elliott Masie was relating "best practices" of online learning at his TechLearn Conference at Disneyworld. Elliott is a master at cultivating and listening to good sources, adding a bit of common sense, and playing back the message in a convincing, some say charismatic, fashion. Also, he's a truly nice guy, almost as nice as his wife Cathy.

TechLearn 1999 felt like Woodstock. We kept our clothes on, but everyone was entranced. We were in on the "secret knowledge". It was as if our drinks had been spiked with dot-com euphoria. There was no limit to what we could do. Training would finally garner respect. That's R-E-S-P-E-C-T. No longer the flea on the wagging tail of the corporate dog. We're going to change the world, man. Elliott told us everything would be delivered via portals.

Flash forward to the ASTD International Conference in Dallas in May of the following year. From the signs on the bustling floor of the Expo, you'd think every vendor was in the eLearning business. In reality, most of them had invested in little but new signs. The most tenuous connection to the Internet was defined as "eLearning." Some vendors sent email notifications to people taking CD-based training and called it eLearning. Others offered a simple discussion board, called it "mentoring", and stuck on the eLearning label. Dot-com delusions filled the air. Times were crazy. In retrospect, so were we . . .

A year later, TechLearn 2000 brought together some people who'd actually tried to make eLearning work. They'd found that unlike classroom events, where you can tell who showed up and give them a test at the end of the week, learning in cyberspace was a little tougher to get your arms around. Unless you were using something like SmartForce, which was a "hosted" (Web-based) service, tracking was tricky. People at TechLearn wore buttons that read "Looking for an LMS" and "Strategy Anyone?" An "LMS" is a learning management system. LMS come in a lot of flavors. Some are simple registration systems. Others track, deliver, score, bill, bookmark, personalize, and wash the kitchen sink. Fees run from \$250 to \$2,000,000. Everyone felt they needed an LMS. Many spent their entire budget on the LMS and found themselves with nothing left over for training programs.

LMS madness (I think of it as the last gasp of command-and-control organizations trying to keep tabs on the unruly Web) covered over an even greater difficulty. In some quarters, eLearning wasn't doing a whole lot better than CD-ROM training before it. "Learning at the desktop" was nerve-wracking because the phone didn't stop ringing, colleagues interrupted, and to the boss, learning looked like goofing off. Companies suggested taking the learning home, even giving employees computers as encouragement, but this created more resentment than learning. Same wine, new wineskin.

It was high time for evaluation. A fellow with no real-world experience had written his doctoral thesis years earlier on evaluating educational effectiveness. His four levels went from "smile sheets," which are worthless in assessing outcomes to "impact on the organization," which is out of the hands of the training organization. Nonetheless, people were fixated with these four meaningless levels.

TechLearn 2001 featured lots of hand-wringing over "ROI." If you're going to blow hundreds of thousands of dollars, maybe millions, on learning management systems, courseware, more robust

networks, and big bills from Andersen Consulting, your CFO will want to know what's up. The ROI discussions at TechLearn were inane.

The only ROI people talked about was accounting, the set of rules originally cooked up to count merchandise being unloaded from ships in Renaissance Venice and still doggedly holding on, despite the fact that accounting values human capital at zero and counts training as an expense instead of an investment. Conference speakers, some of whom I know to be otherwise bright people, counseled trainers to go to their finance departments to get an understanding of the Rs and the Is. After that it was a simple matter of division. What spectacularly bad advice!

It's not as if eLearning had become a complex capital budgeting exercise. Has any decision maker anywhere ever bought something on the strength of an ROI number, especially one presented by a staffer? ROI is a hurdle, not a race winner. Convince a decision maker you can deliver the outcome at a reasonable price. It's the likely cost/benefit, not the ROI that counts. I've since written a book on the topic (Cross, 2003).

9/11 cast a pall on TechLearn 2001. Some of the Masie staff drove from Saratoga Springs to Orlando. Only half the expected crowd showed up. My personal opinion is that 9/11 put business decision making on hold. It gave every potential buyer a reason to defer. America went from shock to mourning to indecision to procrastination. eLearning thought its strategic role important enough to protect it in stormy times. Not true. 9/11 derailed the eLearning train.

Jack Welch, recently retired from GE and on his book tour, took the TechLearn stage. What's the business case for eLearning? "Building people, increasing the organization's intellectual capital. It's the ultimate competitive advantage." What does it take for an organization to be successful? "On a scale of 100, having the right people is worth about 95 points. Learning technology is important, too, but counts for maybe 3." Few CEOs followed Jack's lead, adopting eLearning as an investment in intellectual capital. Across corporate America, "People are our most important asset" was poppycock to write about in the annual report, not something to act on.

Cautious corporations began to evaluate eLearning expenditures with business metrics. After all, the travel and salary savings of virtual training and meetings were a one-time phenomenon, money that was cut from subsequent years' budgets. A research study by Masie and ASTD found that two-thirds of employees offered voluntary eLearning never bothered to register. One third didn't register for compulsory eLearning. Many of those who did

register dropped out early on. eLearning left a bad taste in their mouths. It was boring. Many people have told me, "I tried eLearning; I didn't like it." They're assuming that all eLearning is the same. This makes no more sense than if I'd said, "I read a book once; I didn't like it. I don't intend to read any others."

A lot of eLearning was – and is – boring, rigid, and irrelevant. People didn't appear to be learning anything. This is nothing new. A lot of schooling is boring, rigid, and irrelevant, too. The yardstick of success in school, grades, is not correlated to later wealth, health, success, or happiness. This is success? Ha!

In mid-2002, "Blended Learning" began cropping up in conversation. At first, blended meant computer learning + classroom learning. People who had short-sightedly defined eLearning as computer-only learning talked of combining eLearning with live workshops. Some people continue to define blended learning as a sandwich made of alternating slices of computer learning and live learning. More sophisticated practitioners were saying the blend might contain chunks of computer-mediated learning, classroom, lab, collaboration, knowledge management, apprenticeship, case discussion – whatever mix is the best way to accomplish the job.

TechLearn 2002 grappled with recession. The tech sector had always been a mainstay of eLearning, usually accounting for more than half the business. Software evolves rapidly; you learn or become obsolete. The world faced a shortage of programmers and systems engineers. Computers were great for teaching computing itself; what could be more natural? So when the tech market cratered and techies were no longer in demand, tech eLearning faltered right along with it.

Ethics popped up on the TechLearn stage as a group of Chief Learning Officers talked about whether good training could have eliminated the shenanigans at Enron, Tyco, Arthur Andersen, and World.com. A senior learning officer from a large bank said everyone had taken a refresher course on ethical behavior. The CEO of a community software company pointed out that, at most, ten people at Enron had lied; the remainder were among the most innovative, pioneering, hard-working people in the nation. Paul Hersey, the sage who invented Situational Leadership, garnered a standing innovation when he observed that people learn ethics at home, not in a course.

Designers deem a dress a success if people say the woman wearing it is beautiful, rather than complimenting the dress. Similarly, eLearning will be successful when it fades into the woodwork and is no longer noticed. That's what we're going through now. Monolithic library publishers are

dead or dying; SmartForce is no more. Companies are pulling eLearning in-house, weathering gruesome economic conditions by using what they've got, even if it requires a lot of patching with duct tape, rather than buying new stuff. The doctrinaire, formulaic approach that mandated total control with an LMS is loosening up. Elaborate multimedia programs have been joined by quick-and-dirty courselets and narrated PowerPoint presentations. Is anybody learning what they need to learn?

As I prepared to head back to Disneyworld for TechLearn 2003, eLearning was in the doldrums. The economy was down, the tech sector way down. Attendance at eLearning conferences was off 50 percent or more. *eLearning* magazine decided to issue six issues a year instead of 12. Two weeks later, they said they would become a quarterly. I haven't received an issue in four or five months. *Online Learning* magazine has ceased publication. Vendor revenues have declined.

Nonetheless, corporations are creating and implementing more eLearning than ever before. Many success stories aren't reported by industry analysts because they are "Home Depot learning" – lots of in-house projects and do-it-yourself jobs. Some organizations are finally putting the eLearning software bought in previous years to work.

TechLearn 2003 was more upbeat than 2001 and 2002. IBM's Nancy DeViney said, "Learning has become mission critical. Learning must support overarching business goals. Learning is part of the overall package IBM offers." Elliott Masie told his audience that learning tech is changing faster than its customers and business units are making more training decisions. "We've bought a lot of Learning Management Systems but haven't done that much Management of Learning." IBM's DeViney again, said "We believe work and learning will become indistinguishable over time."

eLearning is joining an array of tools to improve business performance. Business metrics are replacing training metrics. The success of an eLearning initiative is measured in customer satisfaction, quicker time-to-market, higher sales, and fewer errors. eLearning is proving useful for organizations:

- accelerating business processes;
- making mergers work;
- improving the productivity of sales channels;
- helping customers become smarter buyers;
- enabling vendors and partners to work more closely and quickly;
- accelerating the orientation of new employees;
- bringing new leaders up to speed faster;
- aligning the workforce with current strategy;

- launching new products and services globally;
- rolling out enterprise systems such as CRM and ERP; and
- documenting regulatory compliance.

As author William Gibson has noted, "The future is already here. It's just not evenly distributed." Many concepts in America start in New York or Boston, San Francisco or LA – and hop to the opposite coast. Slowly, they migrate to the center of the country, often taking years to make the journey. eLearning follows the pattern. On the coasts, "e" is a consideration whenever training issues are discussed. In the middle of the country, many companies are skeptical of the world beyond the firewall, and doling out generic courseware passes for eLearning.

Executives who cling to yesterday's haphazard means of developing their people suffer from corporate dyslexia: they can't read the handwriting on the wall. In the age of information, learning is the ultimate survival skill. Bright, knowledgeable people with the mental agility and tools they need to find out what they need to know and do are the key to corporate success. In some ways, the more things change, the more they stay the same. It's how we survived the predators on the savannah, the ice ages, the shifting economic eras and more to get here. Learning has always been humanity's ultimate survival skill. Corporations and industries have replaced yesterday's villages and tribes.

eLearning promises better use of time, accelerated learning, global reach, fast pace and accountability. It's manageable. It cuts paperwork and administrative overhead. But before you sign the contract, remember that at least half the time, eLearning fails to live up to expectations.

Skeptical executives

Your budding 16-year old daughter says she's going to take sex education at school and you're relieved, but she tells you she plans to participate in sex training and you're unnerved. Why? Because outside of the world of education, you learn by doing things. Even college is just academic: "I would have changed my major if I'd known the big philosophy companies wouldn't be hiring this spring."

Small wonder that executives hear the word "learning," think "schooling," and conclude "not enough payback." We need models to describe learning that don't dredge up the bad baggage of schooling. This emperor needs new clothes. We need to cross the chasm between "schooling" and "learning in the workplace".

Next

In researching my book *Implementing eLearning* (Cross and Dublin, 2002), I interviewed dozens of companies and concluded that the best “best practice” of them all is to treat learners like customers. This turns the tables on the traditional, more formal and less personal, school model. Imagine the teacher serving the student.

Knowledge is co-created, so we must keep the individual an equal partner, not a “recipient.” That’s the direction in which we’re headed.

In the next issue of *On the Horizon*, we’ll address the future of eLearning . . . and its customers.

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