

**to be.** At the beginning of a project, you want to know how long and how much. **It's nice to want.** But **don't marry your predictions.**

**If you cast the end point in stone, then when things need to change, the only option is to deliver less.**

**Set markers along the road and reassess throughout the process.**

Then you can capture and use the innovations that are certain to arise as people and technologies inspire each other.

**It's social and technical.. sociotechnical - the watchword of information age success.**

## Chapter 10

# Teach each other

The existing paradigm for developing training has some troublesome core assumptions.

**That's a nice way of saying we're screwed before we begin.**

One of **worst** assumptions is the belief that some **ONE** has the **ONE** answer. The goal, it seems, is to take this one "correct" view of how to do things and clone it. **In a fast paced knowledge based business, this is not going to work. It is a sure road to failure!**

By the time the "**correct**" way to do things has been identified, **the problem has moved on.** In a world where experts are scarce, you are further hampering yourself by **taking their time and energy away from problem solving** and making them be a subject matter expert. **Let them do that voodoo that they do so well!!**

This paradigm is stuck in the industrial age, where things didn't change much and didn't change quickly. That's now how it works now. **Practice (how we do what we do) is constantly evolving.** I know that my "practice" is constantly improving.

**Every time** I undertake a project, I learn how to do things better, more effectively, and faster. Don't you? Don't you think the others working on projects do the same?

So, when you take experts away from their work to be subject matter experts developing training, **you are hampering your best and brightest** not only by taking them away from their practice while a training is developed, **you are making them develop a training that lags behind the latest thinking and probably answers a problem that is already in the past.**

The final problem is what this method **implicitly says about the people in your company.** If you adopt the view there is one single, correct view and it **must be dictated** to those underlings who know not, then it is **obvious that you do not value their thoughts or problem solving abilities.**

**You are shooting yourself and your company in the foot.**

This is not a good way to keep marching quickly.

The **alternative** to building training courses that dictate the “right” answer to the masses is to **build systems that allow and encourage workers to share their new discoveries and**

**understandings with each other - to teach each other, to inform each other, to grow and support each other as they identify and solve problems.** This kind of sharing often goes on now, **but it is usually surreptitious.** It is rarely supported by the company.

**You usually have the skills and knowledge to meet any challenge within your organization.**

What you don't have are the ways and means and mandates to encourage people within the company to “know what they know”.

John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid have written extensively about sharing information within an organization (read *Organizational Learning and Communities-of-Practice: Toward a Unified View of Working, Learning, and Innovation*) . Looking at work by an anthropologist named Orr, who studied Xerox repairmen, they look at ways repairmen solved problems. When repairmen were stuck, they talked to other repairmen and **shared stories** of past problems. Using each other's experience, they often were able to find solutions that **certainly were never documented in the official manuals.**

In my studies of Naval maintenance workers, it was common for chiefs to tell me that when they were stuck, they pulled out their phone book and called someone they had worked with. **This sharing of information and group problem solving is widespread in**

**companies.** It is usually not sanctioned (the Naval personnel had reservations about an online system, as it provided a “paper trail”).

**However, it is often how problems get solved.**

**We know how to teach each other. We know how to solve each other's problems.**

The biggest problem is often finding the right person to talk with and taking the time away from “work” to climb the obstacles to be able to solve the problems and pass the information that needs to be passed.

**Stop blocking this activity! Encourage it!**

**Innovation is happening all around you.** Providing the systems to allow it to spread are **simple and cheap.**

In the case of repairmen, it was an online database that allowed people to add and trade stories. Those that added particularly useful stories were greatly valued, particularly by other practitioners.

In the case of the Naval mechanics, an online directory that allowed detailed information about specialties was a killer app that could save hundreds of hours a year. With the popularity of Wenger's book on Communities of Practice, some organizations are trying to **create** such communities.

**Won't work.**

*Creating* a community has proven to be much like throwing together a bunch of kids and announcing, “OK, now have fun!”

Don't try to set up new communities - **look for naturally occurring communities** - be they online discussions, blogs, lunch conversations, professional meetings.

A very important part of this unofficial trading of information is the **social setting.** They involve people, interactions, environments and information. Knowledge is an interaction in time between people and information. **It is not just the information.** To make that definition even messier, we need to also realize that the **information is inseparable from the social context** from whence it came. Much of the meaning...the thing that causes the moment of A HA! comes from the moment.. not just the moment of time, but the **place that moment occurred.**

**So, encourage interactions. Allow them. Reward them.**

**Innovations will be bustin out all over.**

The next chapter looks at how you spread em around, so that those working on the same ideas can share in the fun, even if they are not in the same time or place.