



Capability Document

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Conversational learning

Although it is not new, the concept of social learning within organisations has grown over the last year or so to a point where Social Learning is fast becoming a large part of organisational strategy for learning.

But for many, these are scary technologies to consider in the workplace. 'Do we allow Facebook, BBM and Twitter?' These are conversations being had in many meetings in many IT rooms, but is that the right place for these decisions to be taken? We must use the information now available to understand the power of conversation these tools hold and harness how we can use them to our gain. The IT departments fear of loss of control from cloud based social systems, needs to be addressed and the power of the social environment embraced.

It not so much as 'do we' but more of 'what if we don't'. The social structure of how we learn has been documented for decades. Albert Bandura's theory is as important today as it was when it was developed in the 1960's after his well-documented bobo-doll experiments.

My current research is into Conversation and the power it has within learning. Do we learn more by having a live conversation face to face or is banter across 140 characters on Twitter sufficient to do the same task? My gut feeling tells me that if we talk face to face we have to get better enrichment and therefore deeper understanding. I know from experiments so far, a conversation face to face is much easier to recall than a conversation had over SMS. This, as we build associations with the conversation and our surroundings as we go along.

I have considered the dimensions of conversation.

- 1d = Twitter. Single dimension broadcast of a size restricted textual communication.
- 2d = Email , SMS, Discussion board or Blog, where the size is no longer limited and a two way conversation is prompted by a simple reply or comment.
- 3d = Telephonic / VOIP conversation between two or more people who can and will interact and interrupt during a live conversation. The third dimension is the inflection one can hear in the voice or the extra dimension of the third person.
- 4d = multidimensional is the face-to-face meeting between two or more people who can both see, hear, detect body language, pheromones etc.

Bandura's work over a career spanning almost six decades, has been responsible for groundbreaking contributions to many fields of psychology, including social cognitive theory, therapy and personality psychology, and was also influential in the transition between behaviorism and cognitive psychology. I for one am appalled that we hear little of Bandura when the concept of Social Learning is discussed. To make matters worse, we do not discuss the behavioral element of Social Learning, which for me is probably the most important. However I hear plenty about the technology. Just another, here we go again moment!.

It is time for a really good review in every organization to build better capability using social technologies as one of the core tools of L&D professionals.