



**70-20-10**

# Driving Business results through Performance Support

**BOB MOSHER**

CHIEF LEARNING EVANGELIST, APPLYSYNERGIES



*This is a summary of the presentation delivered by Bob Mosher to the **tts** Forum for Thought Leaders in Cologne, April 23 2015. Bob had been invited by **tts** as a follow-up to a meeting which took place at the Performance Support Symposium 2014 in Boston, where*

*Bob was excited to learn about the **tts** performance support solution. It became evident that Bob's vision for performance support is close to what **tts** is striving for – to offer our customers a complete solution.*



# The 70-20-10 concept

Bob Mosher has been involved in education for 33 years. He is Chief Learning Evangelist for his consulting company, APPLYSynergies, a title he also had while working at Microsoft. While there he had an epiphany, or perhaps it is better described as a “rude awakening”. According to Bob, “It saved my career. I had spent so many years as a senior executive in e-learning and training, creating courseware and certifications for Microsoft and, to be honest, in the end I found out that training alone is not enough. I felt beaten up by the fact that so often, three months after taking a course, people could not perform in their jobs as hoped and expected. And worse, they often blamed the training.”

Bob left Microsoft and “stumbled upon” the discipline of performance support. He now says it was the most powerful discovery of his professional career.

The idea of 70-20-10 has been around for some time but it was evangelized by the leading expert and practitioner in workplace learning, Charles Jennings. Basically it states that learners – Bob prefers to call them performers – pick up 70% of the knowledge they need to perform their jobs informally. They acquire another 20% of the knowledge socially, mainly through colleagues and online, and only the remaining 10% through formal training.

The math made sense to Bob but his question was, “What is the best way to do this 70%?” When people asked him if he could do it he was forced to answer in the negative: learning professionals are

only trained to produce material for the 10% of formal learning.

Yet most people will tell you that the most important and challenging things they learn in life, the things they do really well, they learn on the job, through exploration, trial and error, perseverance and observation. This is where Bob decided he wanted to make an impact.

This is not to dismiss the 10%. It can be extremely helpful: but the most meaningful learning at work is done in the workflow. Performance support is essentially all about enabling this kind of learning. It takes investment, but it can be created, deployed and scaled in organizations, and its impact can be measured.



# The learners' journey

It is one thing to know something but it is quite another thing to be able to do it. So the learners' journey has only just begun when they have completed the formal 10% of learning. It is only when they come to apply knowledge that it actually becomes useful. The application of knowledge is competency but the great challenge for the performer is that it takes time to achieve competency, and in the course of this journey, knowledge diminishes. This is a subject that has been researched for many years, and the result is always essentially the same. No matter how good the formal training, after two hours the learner only retains about 48% of what was taught, and after that knowledge tails off fairly rapidly (illustrated by the red area under the curve in Figure 1). After two weeks, it is down to a mere 17%.

"Typically we hear from learners that they 'don't get it'. These are demotivating words for a trainer. But in fact, it's not that they don't get it, or they don't know it. The real problem is that they can't apply it – a problem that retraining and refresher courses won't fix," says Bob. The problem is further compounded by

the reality of the modern world, where technologies and processes change so fast that by the time people come to apply what they have learned, what they have learned is no longer current, valid or useful. Trainers in the 10% zone cannot keep up with the pace of change themselves!

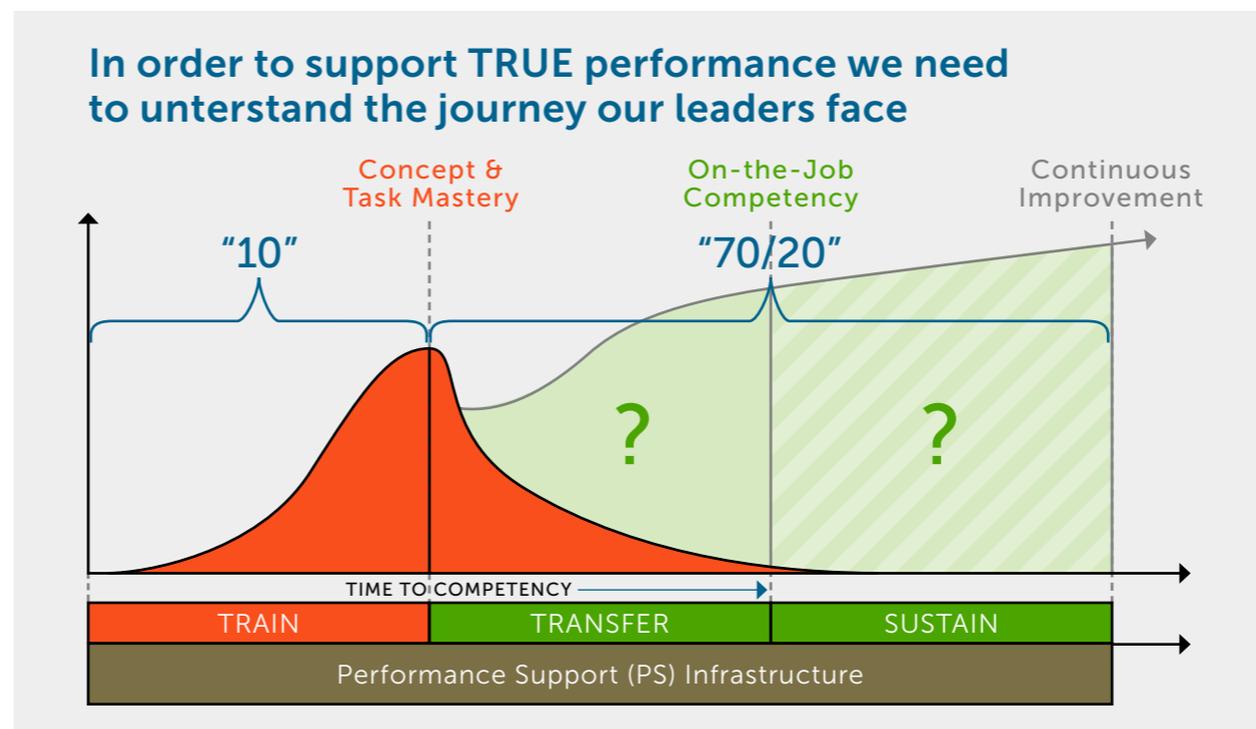


Figure 1

Source: APPLY Synergies



# Extending the journey

Performance support can therefore be regarded as extending the learner's journey through the application of knowledge, which is precisely where it matters (and from the trainers' point of view, extending their reach and influence over the course of that journey). When performance support is applied to almost any learning situation, two very powerful things happen. First, time to competency is typically reduced by half. There may still be a dip in your knowledge after formal training, but performance support enables you to recover from this loss.

Second, the amount of time that needs to be spent on training is reduced by half (Figure 2). Bob recalls a soft skills rollout at a large public sector organization that initially consisted of five days of classroom training and 1,000 PowerPoint

slides, each slide with 14-16 bullets. "After we put this course through the rigor of the performance support methodology we reduced the formal part of the training to two and a half days and just 125 PowerPoint slides," he says. More importantly, the ability of the trainees to apply that content rose exponentially. In its original

format, the five-day course covered knowledge that was not mission-critical and could be learned on the job – right down to how to use email – but in the cut-down class participants were focused on the really important content, the content that related to the employees' core responsibilities.

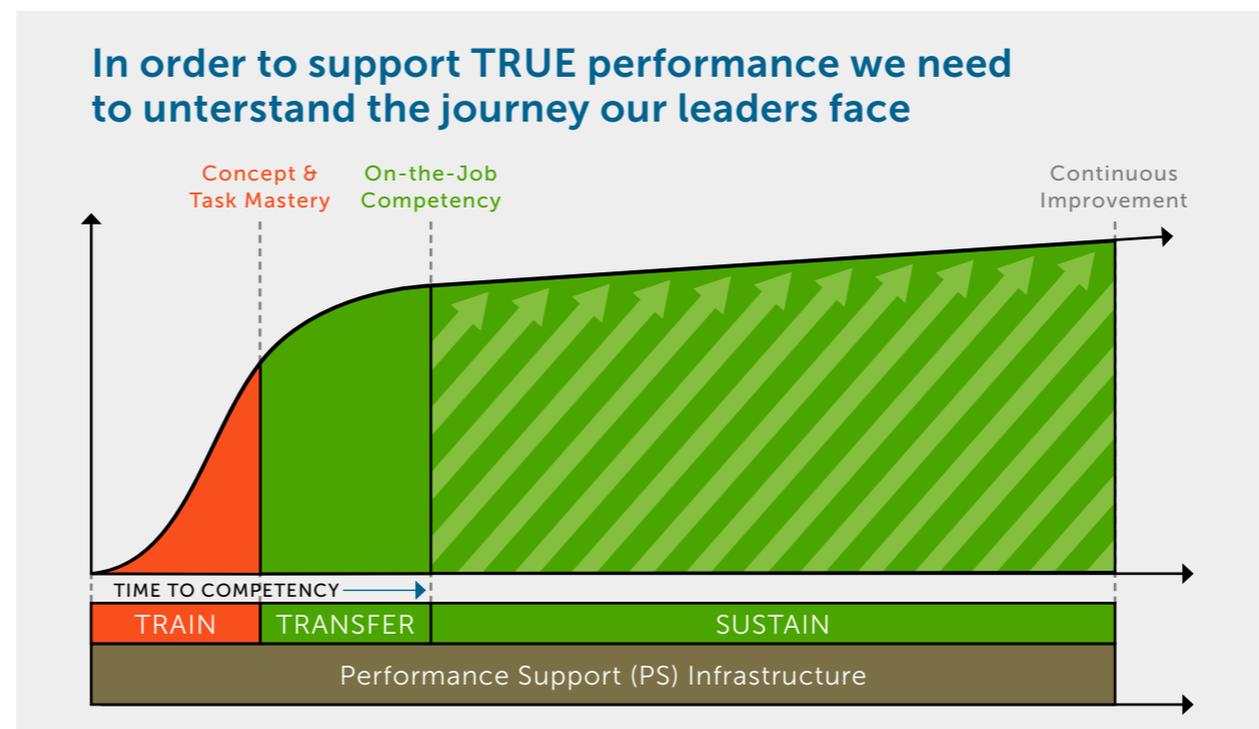


Figure 2

Source: APPLY Synergies



# From content to context

Bob's business partner Conrad Gottfredson identified that in order to move from a formal training-focused model to a performance support-focused model we have to switch our attention from learning content to learning context. The old model was based on how much content the trainer could write, and how much content the learners could absorb. The new model pays more attention to the context in which the learning is needed. And essentially, there are five learning "moments of need": when we learn for the first time, when we want to learn more, when we are trying to apply and/or remember, when something goes wrong and when something changes (Figure 3).

Formal instruction (the 10%) makes sense for the first two of these, but performance support (the 20% and the 70%) makes

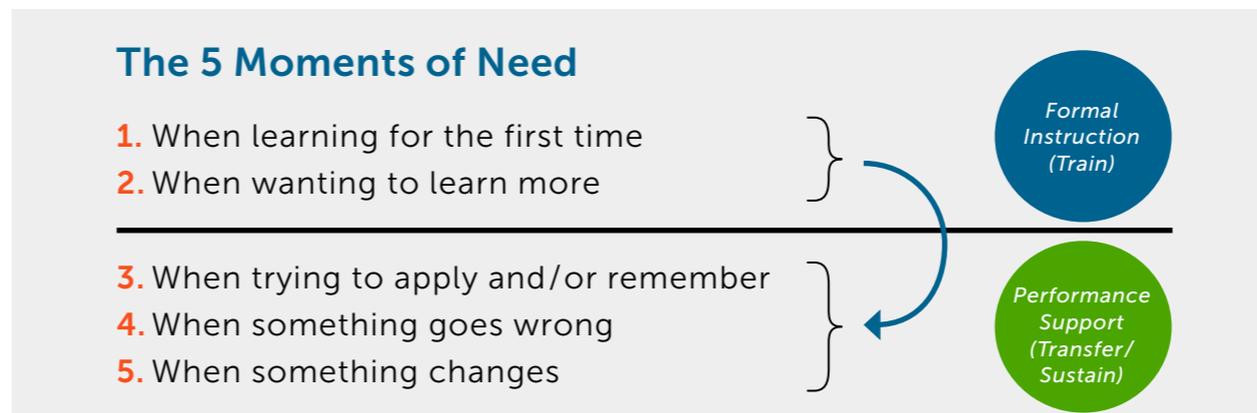


Figure 3

Source: APPLY Synergies

much more sense for the last three. "What you want to avoid is producing too much formal learning for Needs 1 and 2 and then lobbing it down to people when they are performing on the job and confronted by Needs 3 through 5," Bob says. Yet this is a common approach: people complete a course of instruction, we give them a course manual and leave them to get on with things. "No matter how much they love the book while they are doing the course, they will often leave it behind at the end, or if they do take it away, they

simply put it on a shelf or in a drawer and forget about it. The reason is clear: it might be a stunningly well designed and executed piece of content for Needs 1 and 2, but the trainees know it is going to be pretty well useless thereafter," he adds. Books are difficult: they are hard to search, they don't stay current and in a world where many of us are mobile workers, they are hard to carry around.

**Course books sit on shelves behind us, but our work is in front of us.**



# Performance support: a definition

In recent years electronic performance support systems (EPSS, though they may go under different names) have become one of the hottest topics in corporate learning, but Bob insists that nobody has come up with a better definition of the term than the one coined by Gloria Gery some 25 years ago.

**“An orchestrated set of services that provide on-demand access to integrated information, guidance, advice, assistance, training, and tools to enable high-level job performance with a minimum of support from other people.”**

GLORIA GERY,  
ELECTRONIC PERFORMANCE SUPPORT SYSTEMS, 1991

Gloria Gery came from a financial background and moved across to corporate learning. This is significant, because she was motivated to improve the cost-efficiency of training. Hence “minimum of support from other people” and “on-demand”: both imply greater speed of access to the information that makes people more effective in their jobs, without consuming more and more training time, and thereby reducing costs. Independent, enabled learners was the way to go; if they need help, they can seek it out, but that should not be their first response when they hit a problem. However, for this to work, performance support has to be orchestrated: it needs to be structured so that people can go directly to the information they need, at the moment of need. There has to be a strategy behind it.





# Two clicks, ten seconds

The world of the classroom is comfortable and safe. Deliberately so, because we want learners to be able to focus on what has to be learned. We have time to interest them in every dimension of a topic and its history. But that's not life. Life is scary and stressful. You don't have time. So the mantra of the performance support discipline is not "take your time, read this book".

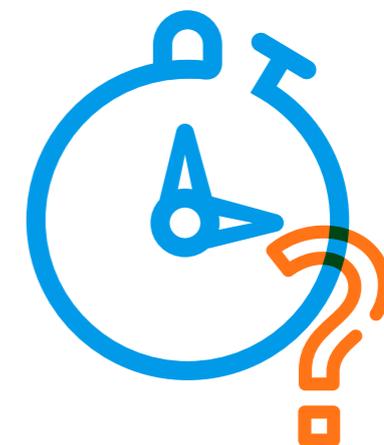
People faced with an immediate challenge in the workplace have two main characteristics. First, they are selfish. It is all about me. I want to be an effective and productive employee. Second, they are very impatient. They want the answer now. If they cannot access support quickly at their place of work, they will not go after it. If the support is not relevant to their role, they will not go after it. And if

they have to read a lot of stuff that is irrelevant before they get to what matters, they will not go after it. The mantra of performance support is therefore "two clicks, ten seconds" and to enable this, it must meet three design criteria:

1. **Embedded** in the workflow and readily available at the moment of apply.
2. **Contextual** according to specific roles and varying access needs.
3. **Just enough** in the form needed to effectively perform inside the business process.

What passes as performance support in many organizations is not orchestrated effectively enough to meet these criteria,

so it is bad. There are plenty of resources (job aids, FAQs, blogs, SharePoint, podcasts, recorded lectures etc.) but when faced with a real practical challenge such as how to adjust the margins in Word, eight out of ten people will go to the resource that they are most comfortable with or enjoy most, not to the one that will be most effective in solving the challenge. (This has been revealed time and time again in the study of metacognition, strategies for learning and problem solving.)





# Designing for the 5 Moments of Need

Learning systems need to be designed around the five moments of need identified in Figure 3. If the learner/performer is facing Needs 1 or 2, training is the appropriate solution. If on the other hand the learner/performer is facing Needs 3 through 4, performance support is the appropriate answer. The essential difference to be observed when designing these solutions is best illustrated by a pyramid. In the case of training (whether classroom, virtual classroom or e-learning), it is an inverted pyramid (see Figure 4).

The learner needs to be led from the general to the particular: from an understanding of the training objectives (“In this lesson you will learn ...”) through conceptual practice, deeper detail, and finally to specific steps in practical task.

In the case of performance support, the pyramid goes from the particular (“My

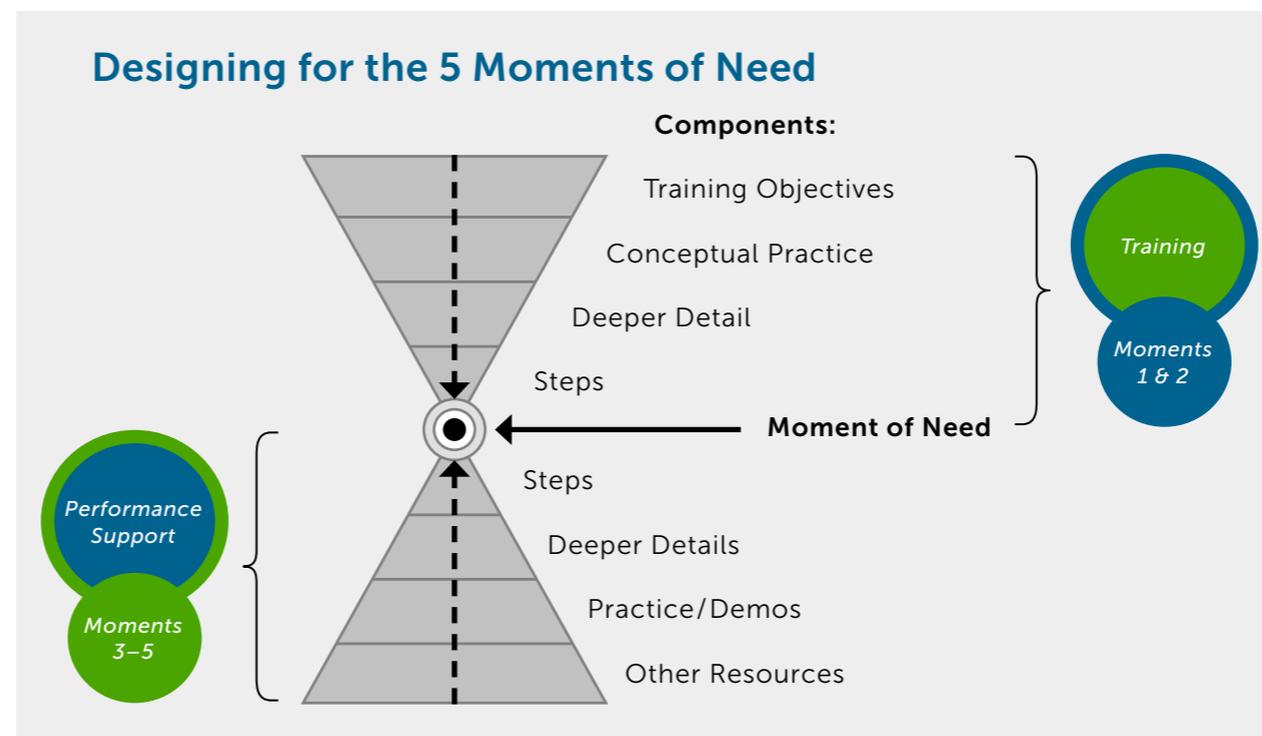


Figure 4

Source: APPLY Synergies

urgent priority is to execute this step in the task so I am currently selfish and impatient”) to the general (“I wonder why it is done that way, how can I find out more?”).

Performance support does therefore include access to deeper details and other resources, but the performer is still

in a hurry. An effective EPSS “brokers” these additional materials, taking the performer to the resource that is most relevant – it does not simply dump the performer in SharePoint, for example.



# Flip learning

Bob firmly believes that the complexities and speed of change within modern organizations require them to fundamentally readdress their approach to learning and staff performance. He cites an IT implementation at a major corporation as an example of best practice. The company was rolling out the largest IT implementation in its history and needed to train thousands of employees who fell into several different categories. They had just one shot at training; to minimize the business impact, when the staff returned to work they would be using the system online, without any testing environment. The CIO decided that it was simply not possible to build and run training in a classroom or e-learning environment. Instead, the company used the “flipped learning” approach, where the focus is almost entirely on the

learners’ activity, and hardly any on the teacher’s content.

For just half a day managers and staff practiced how to deal with scenario after scenario based on the most critical work situations. “The instructors who walked around the room were not allowed to answer any questions,” Bob says. “If they did, they were taken off the assignment. The helpdesk people were also told that they were not allowed to answer a question. There was no system manual. The learners’ only resource was the EPSS. And it was the most successful learning project in the company’s history, because the EPSS directly helped managers and staff in their real work environment.”

## Not just for IT

A common misconception about performance support, and EPSS in particular, is that it is only of relevance to IT systems. It can equally be applied to leadership skills, soft skills, on-boarding and countless other non-IT processes. Companies are building dashboards providing managers quick and direct access to support for the range of competencies that they need to do their jobs such as hiring, appraisals, and product and sales management. “So long as they embody the principles of contextual and adaptive design, performance management systems can be deployed in most areas of activity to turn good managers into super-competent managers, and employees into top performers – and with minimum intervention from other people,” Bob concludes.



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Would you like to find out more  
about performance support?  
We'll be happy to advise!

**tts**

16th Floor Portland House

T +44 20 7869-8022

Bressenden Place

E [info@tt-s.com](mailto:info@tt-s.com)

Victoria, London, SW1E 5RS

Experience performance support live:

[youguideme.com](https://youguideme.com)

