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Performance Support – the cure-all for the costly 'forgetting-curve'

The golden rule when it comes to employees and learner knowledge: it's all down to the mix

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Distracted, overwhelmed and impatient – the information overload hinders efficient learning in the workplace. Manuel Walker, Senior Consultant Professional Services, **tts**, analyzes which scenarios call for formal training and which situations are suited to knowledge transfer via Performance Support. A two-pronged plan of action often proves to be impressively successful in boosting workplace performance.

The latest statistical surveys paint an ugly picture: employees are interrupted every five minutes in the workplace. They spend a whopping 41 percent of their workday dealing with matters that have no direct bearing on their actual duties. They devote 25 percent of their time to e-mails. In addition, two-thirds of employees complain of excessive stress, meaning that they have insufficient time to do their job. Not only that, but they unlock their smartphones up to 150 times per day, and watch videos for up to four minutes. Content has to capture their attention within five to ten seconds, or else they move on. Against this backdrop of distraction, impatience and

the feeling of being generally overwhelmed, they can only dedicate one percent of their working week to formal learning. So, what can be done to make learning more efficient?

Smart learning from the beginning enables it to remain relevant over time

"The traditional approach has taught us that the 'forgetting-curve' is very steep indeed," explains Manuel Walker. Whenever employees acquire a certain level of knowledge via formal learning in the run-up to a big event – such as a product rollout or software go-live – their new-found knowledge rapidly fades away if it's not applied.

"Employees then work in the expensive on-the-job learning curve and that is costly," continues Walker, "as they strive to remember what they learned just a few weeks earlier. In the worst-case scenario, all that earlier knowledge has been completely forgotten." This is where Performance Support comes into play: only a little is learned at the start. Instead, employees receive specially tailored assistance – which is directly linked to the respective business application and precisely focused on the process at hand – for the moment in which the knowledge is required. This way, they not only get to refresh their knowledge, but even expand it beyond the initial level, thereby en-

abling them to deliver optimal performance as 'can-do' employees.

Various resources via three media
Classic Performance Support measures include: job-helps and quick reference cards, step-by-step guides, short web-based training and documentation, as long as they have a fragmented structure and can be easily found in the system. It's also a good idea to facilitate jumps to various communities, chats and helpdesks, just in case the learner fails to find the way forward with the existing resources. These learning aids are disseminated in-house via an 'Electronic Performance Support System' (EPSS) client, such as a **tt** guide, and/or via a web portal which, thanks to the wonders of mobile access, can also provide field staff with the required content and assistance on demand.

Benefits of formal training
"So is formal training dead and buried? Of course not," responds Manuel Walker to his own rhetorical question. Formal training is indispensable and useful, particularly when dealing with really complex change processes, for example the rollout of a new bank core system, stresses the Swiss expert. Its many advantages are demonstrated when companies aspire to bring about a behavioral change, such as in management behavior or when encouraging sales staff to approach people in a different

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Facts & Figures

Performance Support...

- works in a gradual way: a little learning content at the start, but continuous support when the need arises
- offers customized help that is precisely focused on the process at hand
- empowers employees to help themselves
- should be complemented with formal training, particularly when a big change is on the cards

manner. Formal training also has the edge in scenarios where networking and feedback play an important role in attaining learning goals.

It's all in the mix
When weighing up the options regarding formal or informal learning, it's a good idea to use the '5 Moments of Need' model from educational psychologist Linda Gottfredson. Whenever (1) something is learned for the first time, or (2) knowledge is expanded, it is normally covered by formal learning, "Be it via classroom training, a webcast or e-learning," asserts Walker. However, when the goal involves (3) applying what has been learned or remembering what may have been forgotten, Performance Support is the number one choice for targeted, quick learning. And it's also a perfect fit for (4) when things don't go according to plan or (5) when slight changes are introduced, or tasks that are rarely performed have to be mastered. The **tts** expert goes on to recommend a two-pronged approach to the learning method when handling issues such as release changes or product training: "Start off with formal training to raise employees' knowledge to a certain level and then let Performance Support work its magic when it comes tobuilding on this knowledge."