

# **The Vision of Enterprise Learning**

By Paul G. Seldes

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## **Introduction**

The learning landscape gets more confusing every day. It has ridden the e-business and dot-com wave. It has given rise to new sages and new prophets. It is now time to cut thru the hype, get beyond the marketing and the jargon and see how effective learning and effective learning businesses can really happen. The events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 changed the world forever. It is now even more important to enable the power of learning within organizations.

A new paradigm is in place. We call that “enterprise learning”. The new paradigm is about more than technology, about more than content. It’s not just about neuro-psychology, marketing, prometrics or instructional design. Instead it’s about all of those things and more. And it’s about new things and new ideas as well. It’s about a learning culture and a learning organization. It’s about things on a massive scale that can be used on a small scale. More importantly, enterprise learning is about us; the people that learn, the people that manage, the people that “need”.

When it comes to technology based learning we tend to get too wrapped up in whatever the current buzz is. For some it is about technology: Java and J2EE and relational databases. For others it’s about being cool: animations and interactions and videos. Yet others see the sanctity of the education model: assessments, psychology and pedagogy. The “new” secret about enterprise learning is that is about one thing ...”Process”. Learning is a “cultural process” and all of those other things are merely optional parts of that process. To really understand enterprise learning, we must realize that it is a collection of many processes and functions that must be synchronized to one end...to serve the ultimate learner.

Enterprise Learning is more than a style, a methodology or a model. It is the very basic way that companies will integrate learning into their core business practices. This is how companies will encourage, promote and require all workers to be “learning workers”. Learning is now seen as core to a company’s competitive advantage.

**An organization’s ability to learn, and translate that learning into action rapidly, is the ultimate competitive advantage.**

*-Jack Welch, Chairman,  
General Electric Corp*

Companies are driven by finances. Success is easily measured by a positive ROI (return on investment) factor. Show the enterprise an ROI with increased (measurable) productivity, improved employee retention or decreased training expenses (while maintaining or improving the quality of that training) and you begin to build an enterprise success story. It is time to develop new methods to show how effective learning models drive ROI in new ways.

When we train and educate in a competitive corporate environment we do so to an end. That end may be to sell more cars, train more programmers or paint blue widgets faster. We must focus on that goal, on the end-state. Our success comes not from the training but the actual selling of more cars. “Start with the end in mind” is what we preach to our customers.

And in light of the 9/11/01 attacks we see a need for another entrée into the learning menu. We have traditional learning (classroom, online, CD, etc), we have “knowledge management and we now have “good enough”. This style is typified by emergency services and first responder training. It is more about “information” than “learning”. It is all about getting critical information distributed quickly. For example, how can doctors in Nebraska compare a lesion on a patient against possibilities for anthrax? Using the paradigm of online learning with rapid development and deployment of information allows that information to get into the hands of practitioners rapidly. And it becomes part of a living, growing and evolving knowledge base.

What are the parts of this thing? What do I need to do, to have, to embrace in order to be successful?

Enterprise Learning is many parts. It is every type of resource, learning event, media object that we can think of. *It is anything that will be part of the process or action of learning.*



Success is found via a focus on performance and return on investment combined with the approach of “just the right content, in just the right context, at just the right time, on just the right device”.

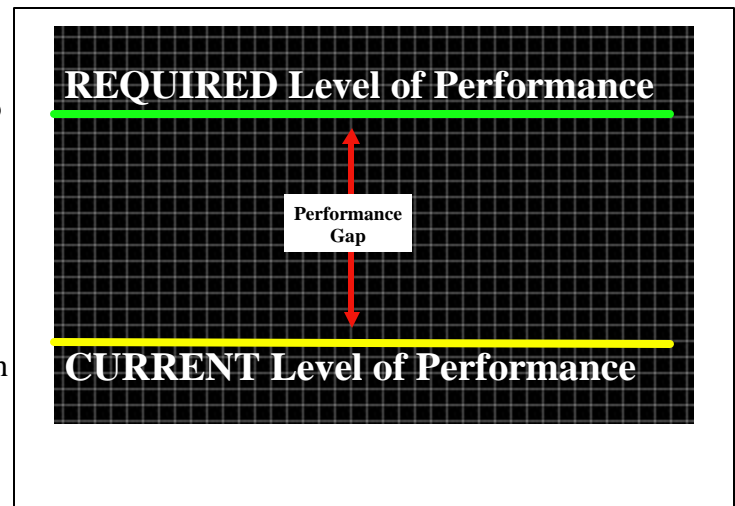
## Learning Needs

Learning is a cultural process. It has a profound impact across an organization and can have a long lasting effect on individuals. It is a life-long process and takes many forms.

When we look at the enterprise organization, we see the need for learning is focused along several discrete needs.

### 1) It's About Performance

Any organization, at any point in time operates at an overall level of performance. There is always a desire to increase that level or improve it. If the current level is deemed “substandard” then improvement is an organizational imperative. It is the “gap” that learning strategies can go a long way in addressing. Improved, sustained performance provides organizations with tangible benefits. And, we’ll assume here, that when organizations benefit, they share those benefits with the employees (allow our fantasy world for the moment!).



### *Performance Case Study*

Let's look at a manufacturing company. Incoming workers need training in a core trade, for example welding. Some workers already know how to weld. They'll get thru the orientation quickly and need little help, if any from the “master welder”. Other workers have no experience. They won't realize that welding is hot, dangerous work. They won't know basic safety protocols.

Imagine taking the basics and creating a repeatable, consistent and measurable e-learning experience that new workers can view, review and “certify”. Our master welders can focus on actual remediation and the slower learners, our students can reach a consistent level of performance “together”.

### 2) It's About Return on Investment (ROI)

The ROI of an organization is its lifeblood. A study by Anderson Consulting showed that in a \$20 billion organization, nearly \$50 million is lost due to inefficiencies. A comprehensive learning strategy can go a long way in recouping some of that by isolating and resolving inefficiencies.

Let's look at some traditional thinking about e-learning. Organizations implement the solution because of perceptions that training costs go down due to lowered travel expenses, training time becoming cycle shifted, etc. And it does (well usually). But very often the costs of training just shift. Content must still be developed, infrastructure must be created, and investment must be made. But, we often see that using an e-learning solution allows a corporate training cycle to be shortened without compromising quality. Think about that for a second. If we can take a 12 week program and turn it into a 11 week program, AND increase the quality of the experience the cost savings can be huge just on direct labor.

And ROI just isn't for business anymore. When we look to more traditional academic environments I'm often told that ROI does not apply. But, when we think about it as "Return on Individual", we realize that corporate and academic learning has more in common than not.

#### ***ROI Case Study***

A company is a large private ambulance company. When a driver "drops" a customer (and it does happen!), by law the driver must be removed from patient care until he undergoes state mandated remediation. The ambulance company does not have a dedicated training department or staff. So, the driver may have to wait days or weeks until a trainer can be available or enough drivers need remediation.

The courseware is review material and drivers are all certified current EMT's and Paramedics. So wouldn't we see improvements in ROI if we moved this constant, standardized training online. Trainers could stay out in the field or doing advanced training. And drivers could come back to work sooner.

### **3) It's about a competitive advantage**

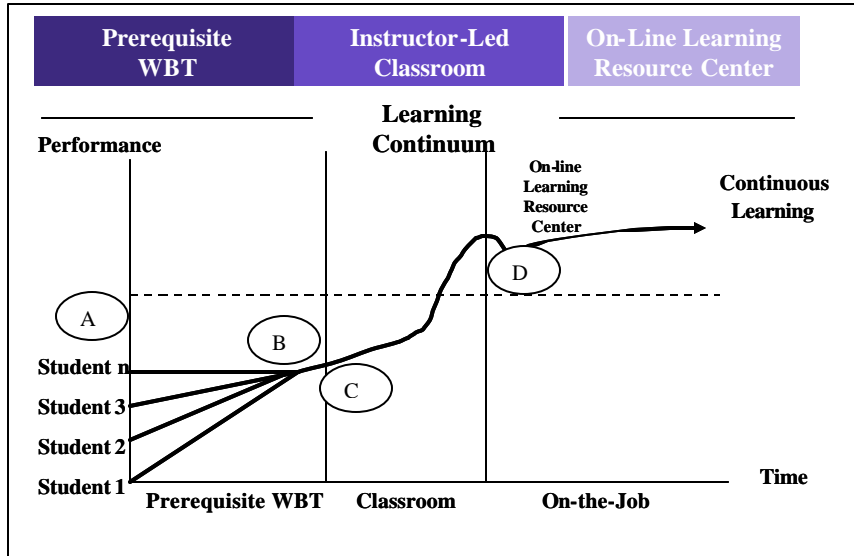
The Internet created a vast change movement in business. Interactions with customers, suppliers and prospects are now enabled every minute of every day. Responses can and often must be instantaneous. Any lag in time can have significant consequences.....or worse.

The "agile businesses" of the post-Internet era are becoming attuned to this new mode of doing business. A critical need in this business is the constant need to "learn". Employees need to learn new systems, new business models, new processes and procedures; managers need to learn new management skills, emerging regulations, changing competition and customers need to learn new ways to interact. With change being the constant factor, the ability for an organization to "learn, unlearn and relearn" is quickly becoming part of the business success formula.

*The illiterate of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn."*  
-- Alvin Toffler

**4) It’s about the long-term**

Learning does not stop. Effective organizational learning starts before employees hit the front door and, ideally never ends.



Here we have a model where learners have a “pre course” set of learning to complete. They all have different relative starting points in the competencies (A). We provide a baseline of instruction to bring them all to the same “formal” starting point (B)

and then start the formal training cycle (C). At “point D”, the learners have completed the initial experience and have achieved a level of knowledge/performance. By utilizing tools and processes to encourage learning after the initial process, performance can be maintained and learning can be a “lifelong” process.

**Summary**

We see that learning is a cultural process yet utilizes the efficiencies that technologies can provide. We also understand that learning is a continuum, a process that must follow today’s workers throughout their lives. Knowledge is the capital of the human workplace and effective learning strategies maximize that capital.

It is the creation; understanding and implementation of effective strategies for learning that provide success for all.

**Bio of Paul Seldes**

Paul Seldes is an industry leading e-Learning strategist. He has been responsible for the strategic and architectural direction on challenging e-Learning projects for Fortune 1000 and Global 2000 companies as well as in the government and defense industry sectors. Mr. Seldes has over 20 years of experience in the technology and business solutions. He was the Chief Solutions Architect at Global Learning Systems where he engineered the strategies for their global enterprise customers. He developed solution strategies for a number of large global companies and government agencies including Lockheed-Martin, IBM, Newport News Shipbuilding, American Red Cross, and FEMA.

As a founder of Savant, LLC, Mr. Seldes developed the learning strategy approach of "start with the end in mind" and focusing on driving solutions based on business needs and requirements.



Mr. Seldes was the Chief Technologist at Transaction Information Systems (now Starpoint Solutions) where he was responsible for the development of major transactional and e-commerce solutions and trading systems. He has held senior positions at several large US multi-national banks (MHT Co., Chemical Bank, Chase Manhattan) where he was responsible for creating global risk, portfolio and trading management strategies. He has provided strategic consulting to major software companies including Microsoft, Oracle, Lotus, Macromedia and IBM. Mr. Seldes has served in an advisory capacity to a number of US government agencies including the Internet Joint Task Force Risk and Vulnerability Working Group and the Federal Reserve Bank. Mr. Seldes' technical expertise includes COM+, JAVA, C++, VB, security and encryption as well as numerous platforms and technologies both in the UNIX and Microsoft Windows arenas. He holds several technical certifications including MCSE, MCSA and MCT.

As an educator his background includes teaching at the American Institute of Banking (AIB) and has served on the visiting faculty of the City University of New York (CUNY). He is a frequent author and guest lecturer at various technology and education conferences. He is a member of CEdMA (Computer Education Managers Association), ASTD (American Society of Training and Development).

He consults frequently to firms in the learning industry and serves on the board of several learning technology companies.

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