GUIDE TO PERFORMANCE CONSULTING AND THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTENT STRATEGIES

David Lamb

Best practice Business Communication and Workplace Learning strategy consultants use a systematic and holistic approach for identifying the desired future state of technical architecture and infrastructure. The goal: accomplishments of business value for their clients. They consider themselves business oriented Performance Consultants. They operate at the junction of business value and communications/workplace learning.

All effective consultants focus on identifying the business need prior to framing the solution. Their consulting process starts by determining the corporate strategy and business objectives, then identification of required knowledge and skills for key roles, followed by determination of the content strategies for Learning and Business Communications. These findings allow them to proceed with analysis of systems architecture and infrastructure needs. Note that there is an early emphasis on content strategy.

Consultants must ensure that a thorough and complete business analysis is conducted. If all business challenges and opportunities are not identified correctly, the solution will almost certainly be inadequate. For example: "We are deploying mobile devices to all associates, so we clearly need a new technology platform to deliver our content." Note that the focus is primarily on technology with only a cursory nod to content.

Content Strategy is King… and Delivery Architecture, the Queen

Many organizations have developed business cases, received approval, selected technology platforms, tools and methods, and installed the system on time and within budget. Hooray! And then, to have content to deliver, they quickly repurposed existing content that may be of low value and does not meet the needs and expectations of their clients and users. Best practices dictate that we always begin with the end in mind. And the end includes delivering value-laden content. "Content strategy is King… and delivery architecture, the Queen."

It is highly important to develop concurrent content and technology strategies. In fact it should be considered as a critical success factor.

Take Mobile Learning as an example. There are hundreds of good articles, books, and conferences on the subject. The Mobile Learning "gurus" conjure visions of glorious success.

Enliten agrees that mobile technology is a powerful solution. But mobile learning seems far behind other uses of mobile technology. Only about 18% of large corporations have deployed mobile solutions and the vast majority of those are in Asia.

Why is this the case when mobile learning and mobile performance support have the power to provide breakthrough results? Enliten's assessment is that the analysis and planning phases do not receive proper attention. There is a strong business case for mobile learning and mobile performance support solutions if the proper analysis and planning for both technology and content are conducted. There is a synergistic effect. When planned and executed well, the whole is truly greater than sum of the parts.

We see a new dawn. The technologies required for success are available and affordable. There are now some good success stories. New platforms are being approved due to the economics of the business case and business drivers.

But what is exciting is that a new content paradigm is also underway. There is real interest in video-based simulations, sophisticated virtual world gaming simulations, visual mobile performance support, video-based user-generated peer-to-peer programs. We think that there will be a breakthrough soon.

A good analogy is what happened in the movie industry in the 70's. The industry's "tried and true" business process had run its course. Ticket sales were down and they were having a hard time competing with television programming. Many studios were on the brink of failure. Then out of the doldrums of the 60's, a group of young entrepreneurial directors surfaced: Scorcese, Coppola, Spielberg, Lucas, et al. They introduced new and sophisticated graphics and special effects, pyrotechnics, and directing styles. And a new breed of actors surfaced, including De Niro, Pacino, Beatty and Nicholson. They turned the industry upside down and produced such modern classics as Easy Rider, The Godfather, Chinatown, Taxi Driver, Jaws and Raging Bull. Innovation and experimentation reined supreme. There was a huge growth in moviegoers and profits.

We feel that the same is poised to happen in the Business Communication and Workplace Learning professions. Digital omnivores (those who comfortably use multiple mobile devices e.g. smartphones, tablets and laptops) have a passion for new ways to communicate and enable the performance of others. A new paradigm for visual-based learning content is beginning to take shape. This new breed of designers wants learning to be not only highly effective, but also interesting and fun. To do things differently, you have to see things differently. Many are currently focusing on the "gamification" of learning. Learning by doing is powerful. Others are creating learning and performance support apps for smartphones and tablets… and at some point for smart watches and other wearable devices. The fuse is lit. We may reach the tipping point this year.

Top Predictions/Recommendations for 2015

1. Performance Consulting and Content Strategies

Enliten's recommended performance consulting process: First identify the business objectives and required knowledge and skills; then complete a content strategy (including live and on-demand videos); followed by determining the best way to deliver the content. Important point: Consider platforms that can deliver content agnostically (anything, any time, anywhere) as they will more and more often be the platforms that have broad and deep functionality. E.g. training, performance support, information/knowledge management, social/collaboration. The platform will bundle and leverage technologies (mobile, social, the cloud and big data) and provide synergistic solutions that deliver business value far beyond that which is available today.

Are there companies that you can benchmark today? A few. But some companies have well developed strategies and will begin their ecosystem projects this year. Looking forward, 2016 should be a great year for benchmarking Learning and Performance ecosystems.

2. Integrated Talent Management (ITM) Systems

ITM is pervasive in the industry. In addition to the stand-alone systems, most of the over 650 Learning Management System companies have added (or are adding) talent management functionality. In fact, the eLearning Guild has launched a new conference specifically for Learning and Performance Ecosystems. From a functional applications view, ITM seems to be the ecosystem arch stone. It is a very powerful premise where an organization identifies the key roles in a company; then the knowledge and skills

(competencies) required for success in the role; then they use these competencies to select people, develop them, manage their performance and careers, pay them appropriately, etc.

3. **Performance Support Portals**

Rather than training everyone in everything they may ever need to know and do and expect them to be able to recall and apply at the time of need (when all research shows that learners fail to do so up to 85% of the time) … give them access to a portal that can support their performance "Just-In-Time, Just-Enough and Just-For-Me" where and when needed.

Performance support portals are a powerful tool for ensuring performance levels and for supporting performance at the time of need. A portal can host various technologies for supporting real time support. An important aspect of portals is their ease of use e.g.: navigation and search features. The "rule of thumb" is access to needed content within two swipes or 10 seconds. The benefits for providing support in a timely manner are real and measurable e.g.: consistently high performance while reducing training time and costs. The use goal is to make content available in a quick, easy and logical way that enables users to consistently perform well, at the time of need.

Enliten has a bias for visual-based Performance Support.