

# THE IRRESISTIBLE RISE OF 70:20:10

Peter Gray explains why  
70:20:10 provides the  
framework to champion the  
learner experience.

Is it because the learning technology business always likes a fad (new or old) on which to hang a new bit of thinking? Or is it because (having been around for a number of years) organisations and advisors have concluded that 70:20:10 is a genuinely good concept? The answer has to be the latter.

The benefits of adopting the 70:20:10 model for learning (70% experiential: 20% working with others: 10% formal instruction) are becoming more understood and practised. And increasingly there seem to be two camps developing around the framework. The early-adopter first camp has, in the case of some very large organisations, already moved to a highly tuned level of maturity incorporating the model into everyday learning environments.

The second camp is less clear about the model and how it might work in individual organisations. For learning technology professionals 70:20:10 represents an alarmingly simple way of articulating many mantras promoted by some learning technology companies over the past decade. More must be done to ensure understanding of the concept for organisational performance and by the learning community at large. Otherwise for some people it might remain just a set of numbers.



### INFORMAL NOT HAPHAZARD

High profile promoter of the model, Charles Jennings, says it's not about the numbers it's about change: "It's a simple and extremely helpful framework for changing focus and aligning resources to support workforce development and learning, where most of it already happens – in the workplace."

We should adopt Jennings' initial definition – to change focus. That is, to think about the alignment of resources and understand that there's a mountain of research concluding that up to three-quarters of vocationally related learning takes place in the workplace.

It is worth recognising that Jennings acknowledges the work done by Jay Cross, in developing his 80/20 model, which asserts that 80% of learning is informal, the remainder formal. With the increasing awareness that most learning happens through our on-the-job experiences, let's just be sure what these guys mean by informal.

They call informal learning self-directed learning or undirected learning. They say: "It's not learning in a haphazard or random way". Of most interest to the learning technology community is the core belief coming out of the informal learning debate; that informal learning is more effective, less expensive and better received than its formal counterpart.

### FRAMEWORK FOR CHANGE

In the main, learning technology has been preaching this mantra about learning technology deployment into the workplace for a long while now. Of course, the key is to create (within the workplace or elsewhere) an environment that is sufficiently engaging to attract the interest of the learner while ensuring the informal learning process can

flourish. So how does the 70:20:10 framework overlay the 80/20 theory?

The numbers are a useful reminder that most learning takes place in the workplace, rather than in formal situations; and that learning, as Jennings says, is "highly context dependent". This is all that the framework should be used for – simply an acknowledgement that most learning occurs in this way. Formal learning accounts for the 10%. The 70% and the 20% refers to the way in which we can exploit workplace and social learning to deliver the business driven L&D need.

Without question the 70:20:10 model's greatest contribution is its effectiveness as a change agent. Organisations adopting the model find themselves better able to search for solutions in the workplace learning space than in the more traditional and expensive formal learning arena. However, 70:20:10 won't work if it's just an HR/L&D driven process. It must have enthusiastic buy-in right up to the top.

All senior key stakeholders must embrace the concept and support the delivery of change. In doing so they create the right environment for L&D, HR and performance professionals to provide the tactical solutions required. For too long, organisations have embraced the concept that having learnt something, the 'know what' equates to having the 'know how'. Perhaps this misconception is the greatest challenge to new adopters.

### CHAMPION THE LEARNER EXPERIENCE

This is the proverbial old chestnut that to have 'pre-learnt' some e-learning, attended a course, and provided a satisfactory test result (even online) is deploying real behavioural change into the learning space. This is simply not the case. All this process has done is test knowledge recall. We have no idea how well we have embedded long term behavioural change.

70:20:10 promotes a shift to 'know how', most likely gained from workplace experience. We're looking for actions that demonstrate learning. Often this requires organisations to understand that by building a wider understanding of embedding real learning, they can better adopt learning technologies to assist the process. It's all about championing the learner experience. The L&D professional can see this as something of a challenge at the outset. This is because 70:20:10 demands that the L&D

function can really only have input into the 10% part of the framework. The remaining 90% is far more detached. It cannot be managed in the same way but it can be supported. And there is a wide variety of learning technology tools that can help. The most likely outcome is that learning professionals have to think less about designing, building and deploying what they see as traditional L&D pieces, and spend more time thinking about how, for example, to support line managers to deliver more effectively.

### EMPOWER MANAGERS

Indeed, employing a 'user centred' design methodology, where line managers and learners are involved in design as an iterative step in the overall process, may well be a new focus for L&D professionals. Empowering managers to deliver the 'know how' in the workplace is where we should be headed. Providing them with truly 'easy to use and understand' learning technology will be a huge help.

Line managers are undoubtedly best placed to manage and implement informal learning to staff. Few would argue that they are the key to performance improvement across the organisation; but only if the right environment is deployed in the form of championing the learner experience. A simple toolkit specifically for line manager support and use looks like a real learning technology need in waiting!

If L&D staff are to be called on to support managers in facilitating social learning, it follows that the traditional skills on which they rely will also have to change. In particular, how they think about the learning need relative to the business need, and how to fulfil this need via the 70:20:10 model.

The model properly acknowledges that regarding the delivery of change, the most significant groups are senior leaders and line managers. It is the job of learning technology providers to test frameworks such as 70:20:10 and, if found to be sound, ensure that they provide technology based tools that underpin all stakeholders. Above all we must champion the learner experience.

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