Using Multi-Media to Promote Skill Formation in Learning Organisations

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Keywords

This paper addresses the use of multi-media technology to develop skills in the application of Learning Organisation principles. It offers insights into the practicalities of using a series of forums on the Internet to develop an innovative set of multi-media learning tools which will initially be made available as a CD-ROM product, and will ultimately be delivered through the Internet.

The problem of raising skills and competences, especially at intermediate level (craft and supervisory) is the focus of Project DEVELOP (Development, enskilling, learning organisation package). The objective is to create a learning organisation package to be used as a framework within enterprises to raise skills and competences. Each module of the package will be an interactive multi-media learning experience, supported by a variety of communications technologies.

With funding from 1997 to 2000 under the Leonardo da Vinci Programme of the European Commission (DG XXII), project DEVELOP is coordinated at Napier University and involves

eighteen partners from five countries (Germany, Greece, Italy, Norway and the UK), including employers, social partner representatives and academic institutions. The partners, organised into working groups according to special interests and expertise, are involved in research as well as piloting and evaluation of the courseware.

The key principles which are recurrently associated with the concept of Learning Organisations have been identified from a review of the extensive literature (e.g. Senge 1990). Similarly, the standard features of training needs analysis have been summarised (e.g. Bee and Bee 1994). Thirdly, the project draws upon best practice examples of qualification and enskilling programmes (Jevne 1997). These reviews form the basis of the generic modules of the package:

- Learning organisation approaches and experiences

- Methods and problems of training needs analysis

- Systems for qualification, enskilling and development.

Three sectors are represented in the European partnership. Clothing manufacture is included as an example of the most labour-intensive industry which is undergoing significant restructuring and in which European enterprises can only remain competitive through raising skills to improve quality and delivery (Taplin and Winterton 1997). The chemicals sector constitutes the most capital-intensive industry, where enterprises depend upon raising competences to maintain the utilization of expensive plant (Winterton and Winterton 1997). The difficulties of learning and development in SMEs are well documented (Hendry et al 1995), and this is especially the case with management development (Winterton and Winterton 1998).

The sector-specific aspects are concerned with identifying best practice examples and elaborating progress made towards the priorities for intermediate skills development in the following areas:

- Multi-skilling of craft and process workers (chemicals)

- Supervisor training and developing teamworking (clothing)

- Management development (SMEs)

By including these three sectors and the five countries, the intention is to subject the content of the generic modules to robust empirical testing, thereby increasing the scope for generalising the package to other sectors and other member states.

The paper will report on the progress to date, demonstrating the use of the Internet in developing the tools, and will offer an interim assessment of the utility of Learning Organisation principles for skill formation in a cross-European context.

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Staff Online Skills -
A Case Study in Networked
Learning

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In February 1998, the Staff Online Skills (SOS) project was launched at the University of Sheffield. The project aims to provide both staff and students with high quality on-line training and education materials through a networked open learning environment. At present the main areas of focus are information technology and personal and management development, but provision will expand to support other areas such as research and teaching. SOS operates on an existing network structure and has a potential market of 25,000 users. Materials are available for PC and MAC users, and via the RATS system which allows access for network users working from remote sites off campus. All 40 current packages were commercially available from either National Education Training Group (NETG) or AC Interskill. However, there is the potential for developing customised materials to meet user needs. A model has been developed for effective user support. Present research focuses on both monitoring patterns of use while testing the effectiveness of the model. Future developments will include establishing links with industry schools and colleges and local communities.