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Learning Leaders Collaborate Through LearnShare

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Chief learning officers and other learning leaders know the value of sharing knowledge and best practices—it's a large part of what they enable their organizations to do. But how do you share knowledge with other learning leaders to ensure you are making the best decisions and the right choices when it comes to learning initiatives? Individual learning departments within companies are often lone islands in a vast sea of industry, but there are ways to connect these disparate masses in order to share knowledge and help drive learning forward.

LearnShare, headquartered in Toledo, Ohio, is a consortium of 27 Fortune 500 companies, which formed the organization in order to share best practices and research, save money through reduced vendor costs and develop comprehensive learning management systems. These companies employ more than 2 million people worldwide and share annual training and development budgets of more than \$1 billion.

"LearnShare was started by the training managers or the chief learning officers of some major Fortune 599 companies," said Lois Webster, president and CEO of LearnShare. "They got together and decided that the old business transaction model—two-way transaction of a supplier working with a corporation—that there was probably another way and a better way to do business. So, they decided to work together, share with each other, share best practices, share content—and they thought that they could really reduce their own cycle time, increase their productivity and increase their quality by working together."

The 27 members of LearnShare cover a wide range of industries and are non-competing companies. They include 3M, Chevron Texaco, Cigna Corp., Comcast, Deere & Co., Eaton Corp., General Motors, Kmart, Levi Strauss, Marathon Oil, Motorola, Northwest Airlines, Owens Corning, Pfizer, Signa, UPS, United Health Group and Verizon, among others.

Initially, member companies shared content, but the functions of the consortium have broadened drastically to include the sharing of not only content, but best practices and research and knowledge of what technologies to implement.

"I think what was appealing to so many of the companies was that they could share trust, and there truly is genuine sharing among the companies and a real desire to learn from each other, learn best practices, share with each other," said Webster. "So they

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started out sharing content, and since then we've increased our scope and our ability to serve those companies."

Because LearnShare works with so many large companies across numerous industries, Webster is in a unique position to see the overall trends affecting learning initiatives in major organizations. She explained that the increasing availability of learning technology and technology-enabled learning was one of the drivers that led the member companies to start LearnShare. And LearnShare can help its companies to develop customized learning management systems, technology-enabled learning content and curricula.

For example, when Levi Strauss wanted to create an LMS, it asked LearnShare and the consortium's member companies for assistance. A teleconference with Pilkington, Eaton Corp. and Deere & Co. covered the issues surrounding the purchase and implementation of an LMS, and Levi Strauss used the ideas from the conference to help establish its system.

Another major trend in learning, Webster said, is a strong emphasis on leadership development. "It's not just leadership training as it may have been defined in the past," said Webster, "but it's people selection, high-potential feedback, coaching and the development of leaders inside a company."

LearnShare helps by allowing companies to share research covering the most effective practices in developing leadership. "We've had, for instance, benchmarking sessions where we've come together as a group and shared the research that's been done within several of the companies," said Webster. "They share their models; they share those things that have worked the best, the things that have paid off and the strengths and areas of weakness where they spent money and it didn't return on the investment."

Webster added that while leadership and leadership development has been a major curricula focus lately, compliance has been receiving just as much attention. "Companies are willing and must put money into developing and tracking their compliance training, driving the right learning," said Webster. "LearnShare is not dependent on any particular company's content or any supplier's content. We can go out, and based on the requirements of a particular company of the consortium, make sure we source just the right supplier or the right course, or even use multiple courses from multiple suppliers."

Because the consortium is so large, member companies see an additional benefit in the ways suppliers are willing to bend to their needs. For example, suppliers provide courses on a pay-by-the-use basis, according to Webster. "We work with the supplier, and it might be three courses we need from their curriculum that we put into the map of our clients, and those three courses are paid by the use," said Webster. "That company pays for one employee's use for a full year—one fee—instead of multiple and large contracts. It saves hundreds of thousands of dollars."

One of the great benefits of the consortium is the ability of members to share best practices and solutions with each other, providing a more comprehensive collection of knowledge than if

they were working alone. The process is managed by LearnShare through benchmarking sessions, conferences, online seminars and teleconferences for members.

Members can also e-mail smaller questions to LearnShare, which then shares these questions with member companies. In this way, members can quickly get answers to their questions based on what has actually worked in other companies.

For example, when John Deere wanted to change its annual employee assessment process, it asked LearnShare members for their help. After one day, Deere received a detailed workbook from Eaton Corp., which helped Deere prepare its own management team in time to conduct the changed review process.

"They value that kind of instant communication with each other," said Webster. "Along those same lines, we set up benchmarking sessions where members come face to face, and they share their research and their models." Benchmarking sessions in the past have covered the elements and structure of members' corporate universities, how to handle the organization of a corporate university and performance management systems.

LearnShare has a bigger view of the world of training and development, Webster explained. "A consortium can set industry standards that they (member companies) can be influential in," she said. "They can be a buying co-op in terms of how they want to buy and what they want to buy, so they have a little more strength. It's kind of a collective strength model. They share amongst themselves, which is better than sharing within their own borders, and we do a lot of work in organizing that. When we know that they have a need, we go out and put them together with the right people. The consortium can do things for them that even the largest companies might not be able to do for themselves."

To find out more about LearnShare, visit <http://www.learnshare.com>.

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News Items:

Employee Satisfaction Surveys Serve As Tool for Improving Productivity, Retention and Profitability

Employee satisfaction surveys provide companies with a valuable tool for improving employee retention rates, workers' job satisfaction and overall workplace productivity and profitability. In a survey of 206 mid to large companies, William M. Mercer Inc. found that in businesses with a low turnover, 40 percent of respondents cited workplace satisfaction and healthy interpersonal relationships with their managers and peers as two primary reasons for staying on their current job. Also, according to The Harvard Business Review, reducing employee turnover rates by just 5 percent lowers operational costs by 10 percent and improves worker productivity by a significant 65 percent.

For more information, see

<http://www.clomedia.com/common/newscenter/newsdisplay.cfm?id=2258>.

IBM Lotus Software Offers New Product to Increase Retail

Store Efficiency

IBM announced the availability of IBM Lotus Workplace for Retail Store Operations, a new software and services offering designed to help simplify and reduce the administrative time spent on in-store processes and training. IBM Lotus Workplace for Retail Store Operations can help streamline access to information, make communication and collaboration among retail employees easier and support rapid building of the needed in-store skills.

For more information, see

<http://www.ciomedia.com/common/newscenter/newsdisplay.cfm?id=2254>.

Saba Publisher 4.0 Sets New Benchmark for Fast, Easy-to-Use Content Publishing

Saba, a leading provider of human capital development and management (HCDM) solutions, introduced Saba Publisher 4.0, the latest release of Saba's content creation and publishing tool, and a component of Saba's learning content management system (LCMS). Saba Publisher now features a new free-form method for creating questions and tests and the ability to create custom forms for data collection. Saba Publisher also allows users to integrate and assemble Macromedia Flash animations into their learning content - without Flash expertise - to provide a richer learning experience. Organizations use Saba Publisher to assemble and publish compelling e-learning content, while saving time and money by reusing content.

For more information, see

<http://www.ciomedia.com/common/newscenter/newsdisplay.cfm?id=2253>.

PeopleSoft Unveils Industry's First Integrated Organizational Development Suite

PeopleSoft Inc. announced Workforce Performance Solutions (WPS), an integrated suite comprised of PeopleSoft's Enterprise Portal and HRMS Portal Pack, ePerformance, Enterprise Learning Management (ELM), eDevelopment and key components of PeopleSoft's world-leading Human Resources (HR) application. WPS enables customers to tie together all the elements of organizational development while tracking the impact of investments in training, employee development and performance on an organization's operating and financial results. WPS also enables organizations to deliver the appropriate training to ensure compliance with current government and legislative requirements such as Sarbanes-Oxley, Series 7 and OSHA.

For more information, see

<http://www.ciomedia.com/common/newscenter/newsdisplay.cfm?id=2246>.

Thomson and IBM to Deliver E-Learning to IT Training Market

The Thomson Corp. and IBM announced they have jointly developed a curriculum that offers IT professionals the flexibility to enhance their skill development while meeting the demands of today's work environment. The new Cisco Authorized Boot Camp is designed to train the nearly 3 million networking professionals who desire Cisco skills and certification every year.

For more information, see

<http://www.ciomedia.com/common/newscenter/newsdisplay.cfm?id=2257>.

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