



Work-Based Learning-the Platinum Promise

Article contributed by Mike Saunders, Former Director, Tiro Consulting Services Pte Ltd

E-mail : perlita@tiro.com.sg

Taking in data, processing it, making sense of it, using it to engage in new behaviours, reviewing the results. This is the process of learning. Applying this to our business lives means better use of resources, more informed decisions, improved point of delivery service.

Current ideas on knowledge management, the learning company, natural learning, creativity, entrepreneurial management all underpin the need for the learning process to be cultivated at individual, group and institutional levels. Learning is essential to survival. As change is inevitable whether evolutionary or innovative so is learning.

Moreover learning is not always using programmed experience and historical experience it is actively using current on line experience as it happens consciously to develop cerebral capacity and thus material progress. This is the Platinum Promise.

Learning for today and tomorrow

New challenges and new problems do demand and will demand new responses and new imaginative and resourceful solutions. The easy fruit has been plucked already. The only way we are going to be able to cope is to rely on the infinite capacity of the human brain coupled with an innovative approach to learning opportunities in our environment.

Self managed learning post experience

To make things happen rather than remain as wishful thinking we need to

Understand the process of learning

Establish the habit of *consciously* learning new things everyday

Make use of the rich vein of everyday experiences. This could mean for example when you come across a new word or an idea take the very next opportunity to use the word in conversation, apply the idea to a current issue, using something you see in a newspaper advertisement as a springboard to a product derivative

Review an idea at the 'turned into practice' stage, however marginal the new change or practice is and use again and again until it is routines

Develop a repertoire of new behaviour so that as a simple model, your verbal vocabulary is enlarged every day, as one more complex, your ideas and thus experience also grow.



Devices and desirables

Ways of reinforcing individual work based learning so that it can be self- managed will include HR and operational systems like performance management devices as well as operational management techniques. Everything from appraisal and assessment centres to value analysis, quality reviews and rating clinics can be included. All have self- managed opportunistic learning potential.

A recording process makes formal what emerges so that it can become a data bank for use at individual and group and organizational levels. This will take the form of learning logs, personal development plans, learning contracts, needs and wants learning exchanges.

Facilitation can be through Intranet bulletin boards, reviews, action learning sets, learning support groups, informal projects and assignments with a learning process dimension. All these approaches have been and are being tried out. One UK company has a "learning table" in its staff dining room. We routinely go round the table at our staff meetings asking individuals to name a high point and a low point of the week and say what they learned from both. The complete 'sharings' are written up and circulated so that common themes can be understood, reviewed for significance in relation to our objectives and strategy, absorbed and built on by both the company as a whole and individual staff.

Institutional work-based learning-the Platinum Promise

We have seen thousands of ideas and opportunities for learning are potentially available in the collective experience of the million or so Singaporeans who daily experience the world of work. No day is exactly like the one before or the one tomorrow. The infinite numbers of variables mean that we are always changing our behaviour to cope with different conditions even in the same tasks. Often the new behaviour is inappropriate or doesn't achieve the desired response. Only by actively reviewing at a conscious level will the learning potentially available become effectively part of our repertoire of new behaviours. The experience base varies but it can be progressively enriched if we take it on ourselves to proactively engage in new behaviours. Go to a meeting we would not normally attend, carry out a task that we don't have to do but we could negotiate the chance to do it, visit someone we would not normally do, talk to a colleague along the corridor outside our area of work.

We like the ideas but.....

..... it's too time consuming

..... I'm too busy earning the money to keep the business afloat

..... it sounds alright in theory.

Already I have indicated the essentials at the level of the individual. The individual needs to be supported by an attitude of encouragement by the employer. This means encouragement to take risks within defined limits, giving short term feedback on the results, developing corporately the ability to manage personal learning, recognizing the emotional dimension of threat and promise inherently part of new learning. It means reinforcement by the value system of processes that bear



on results, not just how many did you sell but what significance you have drawn from the results you achieved.

We would not be rash to say that without new learning, change is not likely and without pro-acting rather than reacting to change our business will wither and die. This is well attested. The process of exploring our environment and experience to fuel the learning sequence happens by chance in a disordered fragmentary fashion. If we are to achieve the golden potential of work based learning we have to manage it progressively. The payoff is more than gold-it is the Platinum Promise.