Social Learning of Company's Personnel by Means of Cloud Decisions

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

New tendencies of personnel training in conditions of partial company's budget on the base of formal and infoprmal components use have been described in the article. The main social training instruments have been characterized. The review of experience of foreign companies which successfully apply the instruments of social personnel learning has been given. It has been proposed new model of social learning based on the application of cloud decisions and learning platform.

1. FORMULATION OF THE PROBLEM GENERALLY

One of the general tendencies in the sphere of staff management in 2016 is HR-budget curtailment. As the recent analysis of CEB SHL company shows (Etienne and Beverly Wenger-Trayner, 2015) despite the recognition of staff training importance just this function is planned to be abriged by one third of companies in the current year. At the same time unavailability of personnel competence improvement in conditions of crisis can lead to the loss of business work.

The use of social learning including different forms of informal learning is one of the variants of personnel competence support in conditions of training budget reduction.

2. ANALYSIS OF RECENT RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

Research of personnel training and development is presented in works of J. Bersin (2016), J. C. Meister, K. Willyerd (2010), O'Leonard K. (2012), Etienne and Beverly Wenger-Trayner (2015), J. Hart (2013), M. Reed (2009). Problems connected with personnel training and development have been discussed by the occasional seminar of HR Digital in Moscow, and investigated by different scientists of the world (*Mezhdunarodnoye issledovaniye*, 2016).

Research and publications of foreign and Russian authors have shown that business executives begin to recognize the necessity of steady training by the use of innovative decisions and with a glance of personnel operating schedule. Companies begin to abandon conventional training for benefit of informal autonomous learning. The model of social training will be described in the article. Moreover, it will be proposed new model on the base of cloud learning platform.

3. AIMS OF THE ARTICLE

Development of social training model based on cloud learning platform which makes possible to abandon traditional formal training for benefit of steady learning and personnel knowledge renewal in conditions of reduced budget. New model of learning should provide a strong personnel motivation to solve pressing production problems as well as systematic renewal of workers' knowledge.

3.1 Basic material

Model of social training has been proposed by Jane Hart, the Founder of the Centre for Learning & Performance Technologies in England (Hart, 2013). This model should be based on creation of continuous learning environment and involve both formal and informal components (Fig. 1).

In the context of corporative training any personnel learning realized beyond training procedures is usually called informal. It may be self-learning, coaching, tutorship, participation in occupational associations, communication with experts and use of specific instruments for production support and etc.

Figure 1. Model of social learning
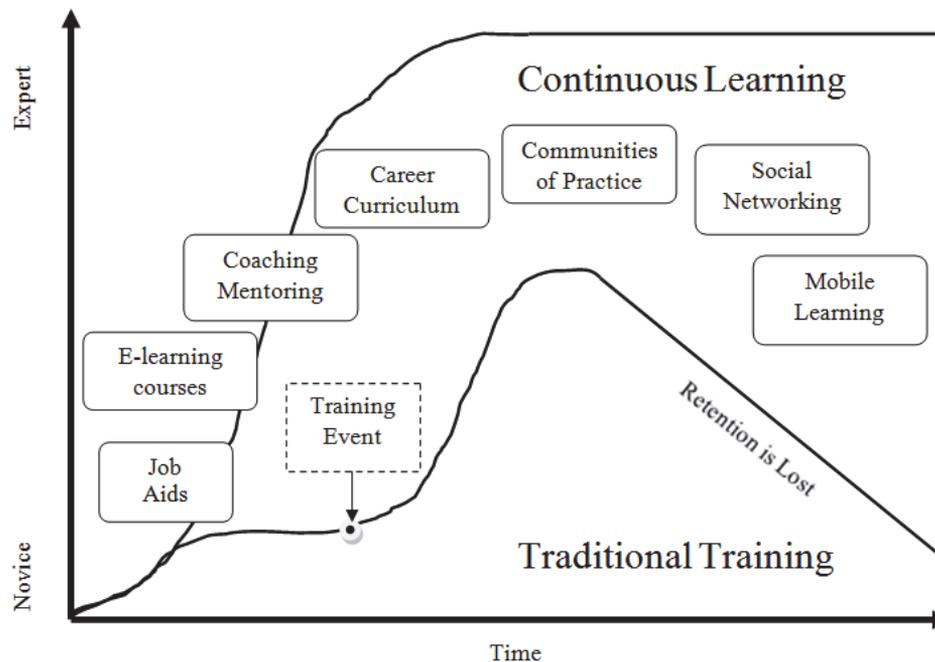
Source: adapted from O'Leonard, 2012.

For better understanding the substance of informal training we'll try to denote its main characteristics (Etienne and Beverly Wenger-Trayner, 2015):

— There is no formula of informal training; there are only examples of it. Thus and so, informal training (learning) is impossible to be organized according to universal, previously known scheme.

— Informal learning provides strong motivation. Participants of such learning demonstrate a lot more interest and involvement than those who are trained in the frames of formal programs. It can be explained by the fact that informal learning is always more or less spontaneous process, so the learners want to solve some actual for themselves problems and tasks.

— Spontaneity is an intrinsic feature of informal learning. It may occur wherever and whenever you like. Simply the person suddenly feels the desire to know more, to learn more and to understand something. Thus, he begins to look for some available instruments. And vise versa, if he knows about his own ability to teach something he finds a person who could be shared knowledge and skills with.

— There is no formal schedule in the process of informal learning. There couldn't be training program or required methods. People just exchange their knowledge and experience in the way they want and able to.

— Any person who wants and has, in comparison with his trainee, a great experience, knowledge ans skills can take on a role of teacher. At that, very often there is warm emotional relationship between "teacher" and "trainee"; and these relations themselves promote the start of informal learning process.

— The room for informal learning could be any environment – home, job place, any community, and the whole world in general.

— The results of informal learning are very difficult to estimate. Very often this becomes the reason for the fact that companies do not refer to informal training. However, many researchers

come to a conclusion that 80% of efficient learning is just informal one and only 20% is based on formal programs.

— Informal learning is the foundation of Lifelong Learning. It begins in early childhood of a person and follows him up to extreme old age. At first we are taught by our parents, then we learn at school; our friends and books, our counterparts and managers become our teachers; and at last there comes a time when we begin to be learned by our children and grandchildren as well as by the youth in general. Just such learning helps us to be interested in life, to keep cheerful emotional state and sharp intellect and not to stop our development.

The necessity of informal learning methods' adoption is connected with objective factors as well. Global context in which learning occurres is changed systematically, and manyfactors influence this process. Globalization is one of the most important factors. International character of trade and business leads to the need of new knowledge and skills as well as to the origination of new professions. In such conditions human resources should be flexible, be able to refuse from old but not actual knowledge and to obtain new one. So informal learning is becoming more popular in corporative environment today. Social network and multiple possibilities for distance learning give new new methods of self-training of the things which are necessary and most interesting for personnel. In these conditions learning becomes social and continuing. Advanced corporative learning and human resources development should correspond to the characteristics of workplace of the future and include the following aspects (Jeanne C. Meister and Karie Willyerd, 2010):

− Culture of the company should support personnel interaction in the process of projects' realization as well as the interaction of teams of different subdivisions;

− Human resource management should consider the needs of different age persons;

− The openness of the company, especially in social network, should have the first-priority importance in creation of its brend and reputation;

− Social relations should allow the employee feeling himself the member of dynamic and prestigious community.

Informal and social learning are the forms of corporative training which support the characteristics of the new workplace. Social learning is the process during which people watch the others' people behavior and consequences of such behavior, and then they change their own behavior respectively (Etienne and Beverly Wenger-Trayner, 2015). The modern social learning occurres online supported by the mechanisms of popular social networks, such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn. Sources of information during the work in these networks are posts, commentaries and video. The components of the so called "Seven-S" are often used in technology of social learning (O'Leonard, 2012). This concept involves four main components: conversation, connection, collaboration and content. Recognizing significance of these elements specialists of Bersin& Associates add three new ones: consumption, control and contribution. Social technologies of learning should provide users with all specified resources.

Thus, social learning is based on the use of the instruments of informal exchange of knowledge among personnel and on making platform for its arrangement. Platform of social learning should give any employee to raise a question at the moment of its origination and to get an answer from those company's professionals who have already faced with this problem. Among these professional there are may be collegues from his department or those persons whom he does not acquainted with. Social technologies should be organized in such a way that the problem arised be evident for the most employees. At that social learning represents complete autonomy and independence of participants from any structured training program. Providing personnel with comfortable environment for arrangement knowledge, documents and reports on the fulfilled projects in open access with the ability of content addition as well as for arrangement of arising questions and information exchange is the task of occupational training department.

Social learning is often used by organizations as the part of formal programs, and this introduces such elements as discussions, experience and skills exchange, reflection in the personnel development. Currently there is a shift from LMS (learning management system) as "the system of learning process management" to LMS as "the platform of involvement in the process of learning". New systems of learning management integrate the process of learning with the processes of talent management and effectiveness management; include corresponding content and assessment. Often they support 75-80 % of the general social applications and functions of the users' interaction proposed by social platforms.

Mostly prevailing instruments of social learning are the following ones (O'Leonard, 2012):

− Community of Practice, CoP;

− Social software (blogs, vetches, tabs and forums);

− Expert directories.

Communities of practitioners appear due to internal demand of people to acquire knowledge and to learn from each other. They unite people working in one and the same data domain, having common vocational interests, personel relations and similar experience.As a rule, such communities are voluntary and they are formed due to the initiative of their participants. Personel relations of members and especially the level of confidence among them have great importance for the efficient activity of this community. Practical activity in the frames of community may be connected with the fulfillment of the company's tasks or projects, with the developmet of new methods and ideas. The result of the community's activity is the development and documentation of the best practices, the best ways of tasks' fulfillment, solution of definite problems, recording of webinars, video materials, etc. Such activity implies making common dictionary (the so called book of knowledge), instruments and processes. Communities should be opened (apparent) for any employee in the company.

It is difficult to estimate the contribution of such communities in the business activity results as it is not reflected in company's reports.Nevertheless, specific mechanisms of practitioners' communities influence on the results of the company's activity could be marked out: training of new personnel, time of response on clients' needs, the level of recurrent products, patents and innovation.

Training of new personnel. New employees need 90 days in the average in order to acquire good reputation in the new workplace. The quicker they adapt in production environment the earlier they benefit for the company. Practitioners' communities may assist new employee to get into the swing of things by providing necessary information and possibility to know right professionals. Besides, development and community's portal arrangementof electron introductory course including material traditional for new employees training, for example, corporate standards, forms of documents, frequently asked questions, etc. is probable. Uncommon structure of the course presented in the form of game and use of marks, awards, tasks-missions and other playing attributes can rise motivation of new employee and involve him in working process. Today the elements of gaming are actively used in many electron courses.

Time of response on clients'needs. In some cases during his work with client an employee can face with the problem which is difficult to be solved. If we address to the communities of practiti oners we can find people who has faced with something alike in their activity and they know how to solve such problems. Besides, it is possible to use presentation material and suggestions accumulated in community's base. There appears the chance to connect with the authors of the papers and to get additional information.

Innovation. Communities represent special environment for new ideas which may arise in the process of work on projects, in the process of exchange of views and discussion on practical tasks. Social software support (SSS) realizes the abitities of internet services' users (blogs, vetches, fo-

rums, tags, tabs). The main task of SSS is to form the team of personnel and to optimize their common work. Thus, 15 % of American companies support blogs of their personnel, their vetches and forums in the context of learning (O'Leonard, 2012). Retailing and consulting companies made the largest investment in support of these instruments.

Social software support and communities of practitioners allow personnel teams working jointly in virtual setting on-line what promotes to gain new knowledge through monitoring, participation in discussions and projects, in the process of practical tasks fulfilment. And this activity becomes daily for employees. Expert directories are the stretching of standard catalogue (database) of the staff. As a rule, standard catalogue include information for contacts only. Expert book of reference additionally include new criteria of search such as professional knowledge, information about completed projects, membership in communities and associations, personal enthusiasm. The aim of such book of reference creation is to provide the employees with the possibility to find other experts in definite data domain, to unite them and to involve in common corporative interests.

The indicators proposed by M. Reed (2009) may assist to estimate the state of community. They are:

− The number of published commentaries on communities. This indicator characterizes the degree of personnel involvement in communities.

− The total number of new daily reports.

− The number of retrieval requests made in community. If personnel find the necessary information it is necessary to think about data domain extension.

− Time of participant's presence in community. If he leaves it in several seconds the community has problems: poor quality of content or complexity of site's use.

− Comminity should be "living organism", so it is necessary to organize some definite actions. These are master-classes, webinars, projects, forums, etc. These measures help to hold team, and the members' wish to take part in community's work won't be displaced by day-to-day problems.Besides, it is necessary to organize and control accumulation and continuous update of community's resources (articles, books, presentations, recording o webinars and conferences), to advance learning and feedback.

At present experts who control personnel learning in large companies make sure ever more that social learning integrated in corporative culture may be really efficient. Thus, 25 % of all American companies invested in creation of internal social network and support of social learning. Among large corporations this number is 49% (O'Leonard, 2012). At the same time Russian companies use instruments of informal learning very seldom. In January 2015 "WebSoft" Russian company interviewed clients with a question: "What instruments are used by managers in your learning portal?" (Babushkin, 2015). The results of polling are given in Table 1. There were interviewed 58 respondents. All of them are clients of "Websoft" company. Polling presupposed multiple selection, so the total result goes beyond 100%.

The results of polling showed that the use of informal learning instruments by managers has got minimum value (questions 8 and 9). At that, 41 % of respondents do nothing from mentioned in question list (question 11). Similar research was carried out by the authors at four companies of Perm Krai. The results of the poll are practically the same: the use of the instruments of informal learning and exchange of knowledge has got minimum rating. In the experts opinion one of the reasons of such situation is in the fact that companies' top managers do not recognize the importance of informal learning though the greatest number of them are the representatives of Y generation which is characterized by deep involvement in digital technologies.

Table 1. Results of a poll of "WebSoft" company clients

№	The content of the question	The number responding positively, persons	The percentage responding positively
1	Create their own analytical reports	11	19%
2	Looking at the statistics learning by using the Manager's toolbar	25	43%
3	Administered training and testing using panel of head	23	40%
4	Looking at the previously set objectives and evaluation in assessment procedures	5	9%
5	Looking at the results (evaluation, training, testing) in the records of the employees	13	22%
6	Apply for training to the subordinates	11	19%
7	Adjust individual development plans/training plans of their subordinates	3	5%
8	Answer in forums/blogs/social. networks employees ' questions	2	3%
9	Shall act as experts for the various fields on the portal	6	10%
10	Participate in the process of adapting/mentoring, create goals, and celebrate their fulfillment	7	12%
11	Do neither of the above	24	41%

Source: adapted from Babushkin, 2015.

The urgency of informal learning instruments use is first of all provided by the situation in which formal learning is not efficient in modern conditions. Many things which personnel are taught at seminars or training courses become out of date and are not remembered. Informal or social learning is integrated in the very work of the company and presupposes informal exchange of knowledge among personnel and creation of platform for its arrangement.

Adaptability of learning programs is the key demand in the modern conditions of business competition. The most desirable characteristic feature of learning is the possibility to adapt learning to the company's needs quickly and efficiently, especially in the time when organizations aim to reduce both external learningcost and the periods of time which personnel may spend attending different courses.

As it was mentioned above that the model of social learning should correspond to the characteristics of the modern digital workplace and provide personnel preparedness to fulfillment of urgent production tasks. Moreover it should promote regular renewal of personnel knowledge. We propose to use learning platform in order to realize new model. Cloudcomputing which modern learning platforms are based on proved its efficiency in corporative segment by sufficient decrease of company's infrastructure load and considerable saving.

Currently many platforms designed for organization of e-learning have been developed. Among them there are both Russian platforms and foreign ones with Russian-language support system, with public code (free of charge) and commercial. Any platform can be adapted to the needs of definite company. Learning of personnel with the use of online platform is based on automation and systematization of the cycle: "learning material-testing knowledge-review" (Fig. 2).

The example of cloud decision for making distance courses, for conducting webinars and managing tests is the Teachbase platform (http://www.teachbase.ru). "Internet School" is the Russian company developed this program.In the process of learning any materials may be used, including presentations, audio and video files as well rolls spread in YouTube. Also it is possible to add tests with different questions and cases. Functional of webinars allow translating desktop to the listeners, opening access to documents, communicating in chat. Statistics of learning, information about last events as well as examination of records is accessable through personal cabinets of users.

Figure 2. Cycle "learning material-testing knowledge-review"
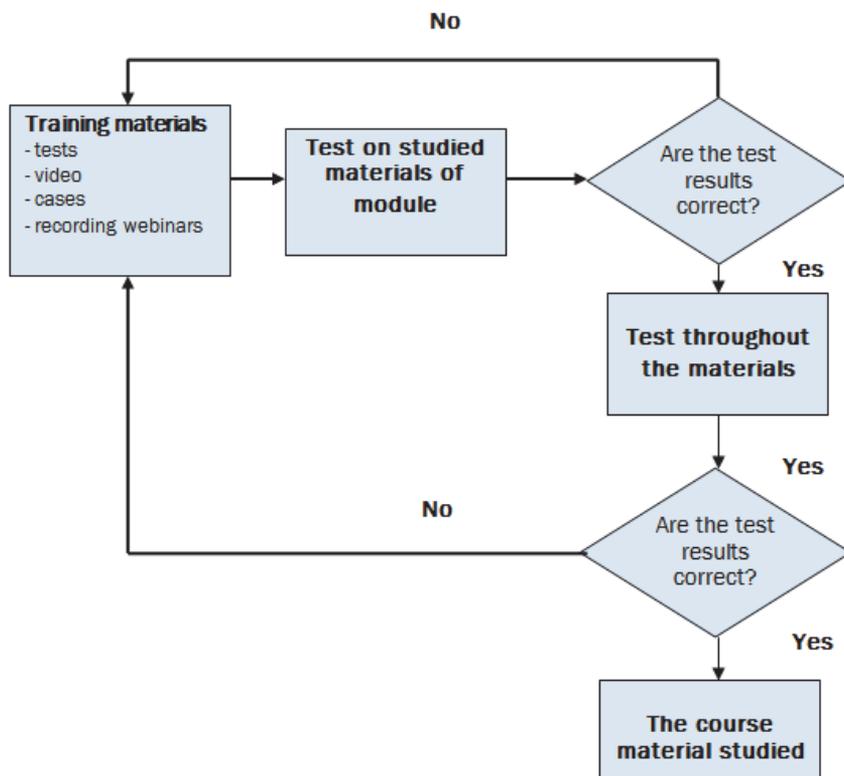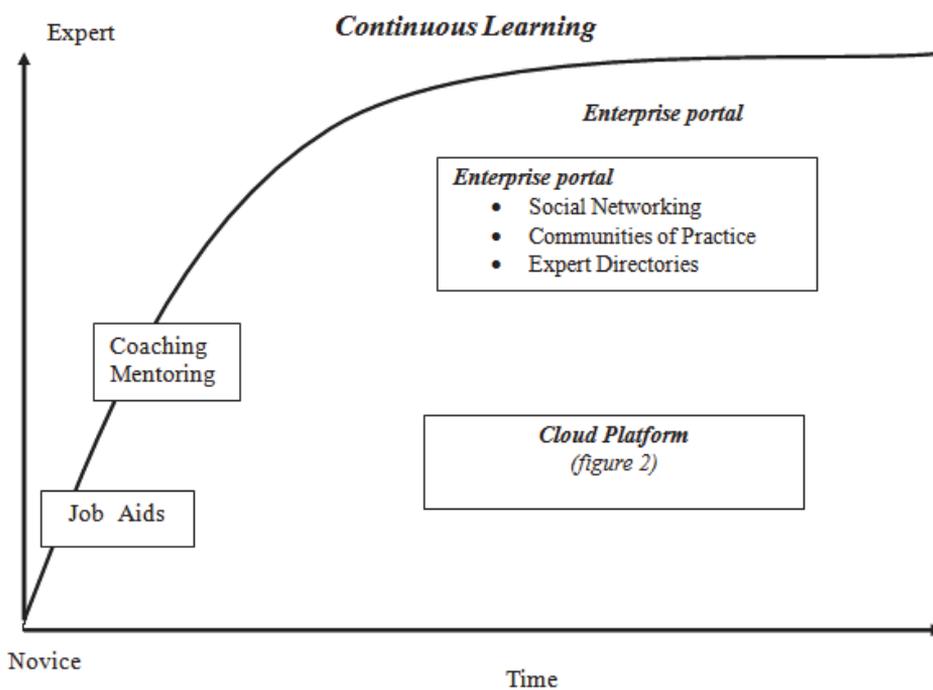

Source: proposed by the authors.

Therefore, Teachbase platform makes possible to organize full-fledged process of personnel learning in the company. Documents, methodology and other materials of the company are loaded into the library of the programduring preparotary stage. Thereby it is created the base of knowledge which will gradually be completed by new material and will be used in learning courses. As a rule, designers of platforms suggest their assistance in the process of translating methods and documents accumulated in the company into web-format. Utilization of web-technologies makes possible to provide interactive form of material, to ship help, video or references to the additional information. Computer-aided database of knowledge according to the courses translated into web-format is may be gradually formed in the company. At that such database can be used both for learning and for consulting. Utilization of this platform will make possible to reject traditional, formal learning which is less efficient and unprofitable.

Training portal created on the base of online platform will allow:

- Adapting recurrence of learning periods for different categories of personnel. For instance, every morning sales manager may have ten minutes course on one of product proposals, new employee – introductory course, etc.;

- Making planned and casual assessment of personnel in one devision or in whole company at the expense of the organized in the test form training material;

- Planning of the program of adaptation to positions with further control of its implementation successfulness;

- Professional training of personnel at the expense of self-learning;

- Exercising automated control of learning process at the expense of designed test system;

- Reducing training cost.

One more international project of lifelong HR and T&D specialists' development may serve as training site for gaining new knowledge and skills by HR specialists. Professionals of many Russian companies have already taken part in this project. New programs on the most actual skills constantly appear on the site of the project. Distance learning programs are the main format of this project. Every course is devote to narrow specific subject and consists of several webinars and large practical project task aimed at solution of the stated problem from the real business. Due to the synthesis of the above considered approaches to the organization of informal learning processes construction of the model of social learning in conditions of cloud platform and corporate portal use has been available (Fig. 3).

Figure 3. Model of learning with the use of cloud services

Source: proposed by the authors.

At present corporate portals are designed according to the principle of social network and involve extended functional for professional interaction of participants creating communities of practitioners, catalogues of experts, blogs, forums, etc. One of the first Russian cloud service for creation corporate portal is the "Bitrix24" program (www.bitrix24.ru). It has been designed and supported by "1C-Bitrix" Russian company (www.1c-bitrix.ru).

CONCLUSION AND DIRECTION OF FURTHER RESEARCH

Social learning is the new direction which demands awareness and understanding by top management and HRM of companies in the fist place. In these conditions the role of HRM should change: they should become trustees working in training community, the participants of which organize and control their learningby themselves. One of the new directions of personnel learning is microlearning based on creation of short video-audio material and interactive training rolls. Microlearning gives personnel the possibility of self-learning in comfortable for them regime without prejudice to work. At that all training material should be accessible through mobile service. If the catalogue of training records and lessons is designed in the right way then the employee easily masters the program of classical training during 1-2 weeks without prejudice to hours of business and personal time.

For instance, HomeCredit bank revealed the performance indicators of distance learning over the period of the year 2015 (Fufayeva,2016). Among them there are savings on learningcosts at the expense of the lack of business assignments, leasing, costs on product literature. It was estimated ROI indicator which demonstrated saving of e-learning comparing with traditional learning in percentage. Such indicator amounted to 17.5 million rubles.

In 2015 21 courses were developed, and 90% of them corresponded to the strategic directions of the Bank. Designer of the learning content are coaches of the bank's corporate university working in different directorates, cities and even countries. Now designers' team consists of 25 persons. Saving at the expense of new format of learning in comparison with attracting e-learning specialists accounted to 3.6 million rubles per year. So it was introduced the system of coaches' professional training which was called "Delicious e-learning". Due to this system coaches improved the level of mastering such competencies as "methodologist", "designer", "programmer". The indicator of distance learning (e-learning) has grown twice.

At the end of the course personnel fills in a form of feedback on the base of which rating of distance learning courses id formed. The average rate of courses designed in 2015 is 4.7 from 5 points.

Thus, new approach to personnel learning allows reducing risks connected with the necessity to cut HR budget in conditions of retrenchment and increasing companies' effectiveness.

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