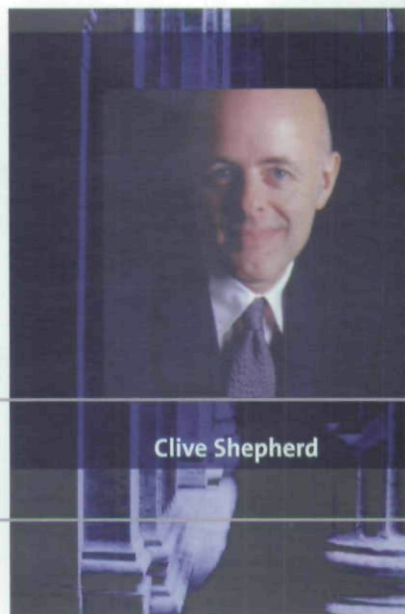


The ascent of Learning 2.0

Interest in 2.0 technologies is rising, but the initial user base is small



Clive Shepherd

Without doubt, the most compelling story in learning and development over the past couple of

years has been the increased emphasis on informal learning and the way this can be facilitated using Web 2.0 technologies. In case this has passed you by, Web 2.0 is the second generation of the World Wide Web created by Sir Tim Berners-Lee at Cern back in 1991.

Web 2.0 realises many of Berners-Lee's original ambitions for the web as a collaborative communication medium, not just a top-down format for online publishing. Web 2.0 encompasses blogs, wikis, social networks and all forms of collaborative media sharing, such as Flickr for photos, YouTube for video and SlideShare for slides. Web 2.0 has relevance for informal learning because it encourages the sharing of expertise from a bottom-up perspective, without the need for managerial intervention.

The eLearning Guild has recently released a report on Learning 2.0, 'Learning in a Web 2.0 World'. The list of authors represents a blogging who's who, with contributions from Jane Hart, Tony Karrer, Michele Martin, Mark Oehlert, Sanjay Parker, Brent Schlenker and Will Thalheimer. As usual with Guild reports, the research received a good response, in this case 1,160 members from 979 different organisations, of which 73% are US based.

For the purposes of the report, the authors define


Learning 2.0 as 'the idea of learning through digital connections and peer collaboration enhanced by technologies driven by Web 2.0', which seems reasonable. I've picked out a few highlights:

- Learning 2.0 can play an important role in supporting formal learning in terms of active support and follow through. This is an important point because there is no reason for formal and informal approaches to be seen to be in opposition. Second generation blended learning integrates informal techniques, both technological and traditional, alongside formal face-to-face and online ingredients, to create blends that help to ensure the successful transfer of new learning to the work environment.
- Learning 2.0 is growing much faster than other approaches. This is true, but let us not kid ourselves, the starting point was pretty low. It is still difficult to find convincing case studies showing the use of Web 2.0 approaches for learning in the workplace – other than at the more obvious high-tech organisations. Many learning and development people have been enticed by the prospect, but not so many know where to start.
- It is the belief of the authors that younger workers will demand Learning 2.0 and that organisations that adopt it will do better when it comes to attracting and retaining talent. This is the usual argument about the need for organisations to adapt to their new generation Y entrants. While I agree with the sentiment, I do not believe many organisations will have trouble attracting and retaining staff in a recession.
- Some 70% of respondents plan to apply more Learning 2.0 in the coming year. Survey respondents are always ridiculously optimistic about what they

will do next year, but this still has to be regarded as a positive endorsement of the idea.

- The biggest users are in Europe, the Middle East and Africa, and in Asia Pacific. We have to bear in mind that the number of respondents to the survey from these regions was much lower than in the US, but it still amuses me to see the US lagging behind in the use of technologies that it invented.
- Small organisations use Learning 2.0 the most. This is because they are not fighting embedded top-down cultures and IT departments that think you are from Mars when you talk about a wiki.
- Learners under 30 years of age take more advantage of Learning 2.0. This, too, is not surprising given that younger people have had more exposure to Web 2.0 technologies. But Learning 2.0 is not just for the young. The idea may be unfamiliar, but the benefits are universal and the software is easy to master.

The report also quotes two pieces of third-party research. According to the University of Massachusetts, some 77% of Inc 500 organisations have adopted some form of social media tool. Management consultancy McKinsey & Co claims that three-quarters of executives plan to maintain or increase technologies that encourage user collaboration.

An interesting side issue arising from the report concerns the training modalities used by respondents. While Learning 2.0, synchronous and asynchronous e-learning, and even the classroom, showed increased use, mobile learning was down 10% and serious games down 6%. It looks like 2009 is going to be a tough time to be working at the bleeding edge. 

Clive Shepherd is an independent e-learning consultant and chair of eLearning Network

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