

Transposing Communities of Practice Discourse onto Corporate e-Learning Practices: Organizational and Cultural Implications

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***Abstract:** The recent trend towards transposition and application of communities of practice approaches to the corporate e-learning discourse is part of an growing emphasis in the business world towards informal, on-the-job learning. Previous e-learning discourses and practices privileged a (largely assumed) self-study paradigm, where the learner is alone with herself and various tools, be they a book, a TV set, or a CD-ROM on a computer. While such a choice was partly shaped by the types of available technologies contemporary behavioristic pedagogies and tayloristic/individualist workplace ideologies played a large role. The emergence of a more collaborative and community-based approach (facilitated by newer communication technologies) addresses some of the widespread objections towards e-learning by increasing and re-valuing interaction and group activities participation with both teachers and fellow students, and by blurring the distinction between learning and doing. While there is a lot of good in this approach, we also need to ask ourselves a set of difficult questions—can "work-embedded learning" become a convenient excuse for organizations to leave students alone thus eluding their responsibilities towards their employees? How do we implement a program whose aim is to make the program's administrators largely redundant, as their role of formal instructor becomes secondary to the role of the learner itself? What is the legal status of such a model of learning? What are the key issues in terms of institutional politics and power?*

Keywords: Communities of Practice, Collaborative Learning, Work-Embedded Learning, Corporate Learning, Learning Discourse.