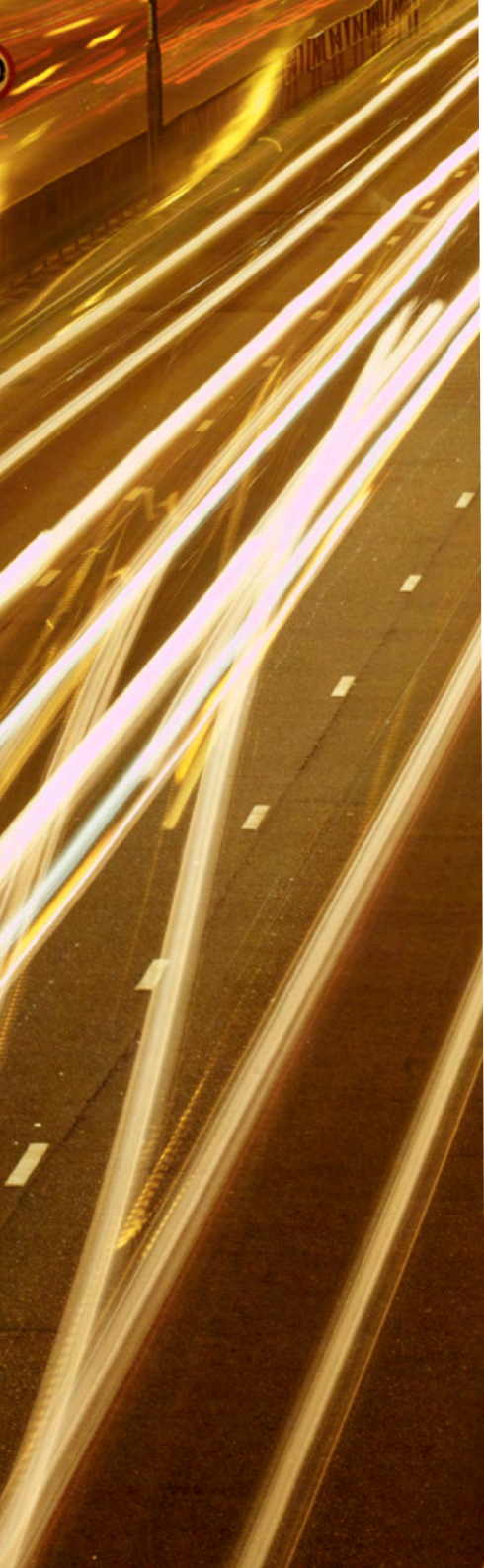


# Contextual Learning

## The Next Generation of Technology Education

Linda King, Head of Marketing, G2G3





**Contextual Learning:**  
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Change and complexity are the few constants that can be relied upon in the world of IT. The number of changes directed at IT in the form of technology implementations and upgrades, new standards, frameworks and guidelines, is considerable and ever-increasing. Industry analysts Forrester suggest that in the last 5 years within IT alone, information has grown at more than 30% year-on-year - meaning that organizations are under constant pressure to understand and implement relevant changes on an ongoing basis.

Because of this pace of change, organizations find themselves spending considerable amounts of time and money in identifying, licensing and implementing new and upgraded service management tools and technologies. Effort expended in this area is considerable, and many believe that implementing the 'right' technology will help them drive forward their processes and working practices. This is not helped by many vendors who promote their own technology as a panacea for all things best practice. However, with few exceptions, the majority of tools and technologies in the service management area are more alike than different in terms of feature and function. And technology and tools should never be considered as creators of process or best practice - instead they should be used to fundamentally support and underpin an organizations goals, working practices and individual processes and procedures, to the benefit of all in the organization.

In many implementations there may also be unrealistic expectations that project success rests purely on the shoulders

of 'successful' technology selection and implementation. Instead, the technology should be considered purely as a contributor to that success. The true success and acceptance of new technology or process implementation lies with people. Ultimately it is the people who will bring technology to life by combining use of the toolset with the processes and procedures specific to their organization.

**The drawbacks of technology focused training**

When examining activities relating to a technology implementation and roll-out, education is often considered low priority in many organizations and not given much consideration in terms of benefit derived. In the case of a technology roll-out, 9 out of 10 organizations will quite simply take the 'recommended training program' from the technology vendor which tends to be delivered via formal education or classroom instruction. Whilst this may seem the logical (and easiest) choice in terms of accelerating technology acceptance, is it really the right thing to do? Does this sufficiently address the cultural aspects of the implementation? Does this help people at the sharp end of the roll-out understand the 'bigger picture'?

Vendor-produced technology training tends to be very 'off-the-shelf' and generic in nature - the training has not been created with the individual, their role or their organization in mind. Instead it has been developed by the vendor, entirely around the technology and its nuances. This means that these training courses tend to be very long, as time tends to be wasted learning every facet of the technology, every bell and every whistle - which can often be overwhelming, irrelevant to the job and difficult to remember. Participants find themselves sitting through 3 days of mouse-clicking drudgery, with only a small percent of the training actually relevant to them or their role.



Not only this, but technology based, 'traditional' training courses on the whole tend to be feature-driven, uninteresting and monotonous in nature. 'Click here', 'click there', 'oh, that's not a bug, that's a feature'. Participants learn in a parrot fashion to do routine, technology driven tasks, such as 'create a new record' then 'update a record' and multiple other tasks within the limitations of the tool. More often than not, no consideration is given to terminologies and accepted language used within the organization, so the training may be focused on 'Tickets' whilst the organizations best practices prefer the use of 'Incident'.

Ultimately, technology based education has little interest in how tools can help improve performance on an individual or group level. Not only that, but it fails to create a holistic understanding of the reasoning for the implementation and the business benefits it expects to deliver.

### The evolution of learning

The way people learn has changed significantly over the last decade. The speed and continuity of business change combined with today's rapid work pace have made training courses of a formal nature inappropriate and simply too slow for many people. People need learning that is immediate, relevant, and in the context of their work.

The key challenge for learning should not be trying to best exploit and explain the technology - but instead how best to bring the learning as close as possible to the point of use by the worker. The answer to this is Contextual Learning.

### Contextual Learning


A new generation of learning is here in the form of Contextual Learning. The convergence of learning and work has launched a whole new era for supporting the needs of workers to learn in relation to their work. Unlike the more traditional, 'technology-focused' tools education, Contextual Learning is about making learning relevant in order to improve performance. As a business-focused educational approach, it relates what needs to be learnt to the specific needs of the learner.

Rather than teaching people every facet of the technology, contextual learning is a precision approach which focuses specifically on what people need in order to do their jobs more effectively.

### Contextual Learning has a number of recognizable characteristics:

**It is unique.** Every organization is an individual entity, and its learning infrastructure should support that. Contextual education should teach learners how a cultural change program or technology implementation underpins their organizations individual working practices, best practices and the key behaviors needed to deliver defined business objectives. Contextual Learning will also take into consideration the processes, terminologies and culture of the organization, ensuring a 'best fit' educational approach.

**It is engaging.** Contextualized education tends to be engaging in manner, which motivates learners to make connections between the knowledge being gained and its relevance to their roles in the business. An example of an engaging Contextual Learning approach is simulation. Simulation is a highly effective, process



based approach to learning which practically engages learners in relevant, scenario-based experiences that have “benefits and consequences”

**It is time focused.** Organizations often struggle to free key personnel to attend long, classroom-based, traditional technology-focused education courses provided by vendors. By taking a more precision approach and converging learning with the needs of the workplace, learning becomes shorter and more focused, and companies maximize knowledge gain, increase performance and save time and money.

**It is scenario based.** Contextual Learning creates meaning from experience. With this in mind, outcomes are optimized when learning is presented in realistic scenarios to which the learner can directly relate to. For maximum impact, learning programs and scenarios must be as close as possible to the point of use of the learner.

It is a **highly effective enabler of change**, making change irresistible to learning participants. Contextual learning creates a holistic understanding of the learning objectives, appreciation of the reasoning for the change, and awareness of the role they play in making that change a success.

**It is flexible and bite-sized** - Contextual Learning can take learning out of the classroom and to wherever the learner is. Learning can be ‘pulled’ when required, in bite-sized chunks. This style of embedded learning, when combined with ‘push’ learning, can empower staff to take control of their development.

Contextual Learning allows employees to meet their job challenges faster and more effectively - however requires a paradigm shift in terms of willingness from organizations to think differently about learning in a business context.