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## Teemu Leinonen: E-learning is dead. Long live learning!

Datum 21/12/2004 Auteur [Teemu Leinonen](#)



(afb. Teemu Leinonen)

### Memorizing or cultivating knowledge

With the term e-learning most scholars, educational practitioners and technology developers mean learning that is facilitated and enhanced with information and communication technology. The little "e" - the electronic - is easy to define. However for many of us the other part of the word, the "learning" seems to be extremely difficult to conceptualize.

First of all it is important to recognize that there are different levels of learning: starting from the classical conditioning and mechanical route memorizing to processes of meaning making and acquisition of skills to create knowledge. The results of different types of learning have different value.

One could say then that the value of learning depends on its usefulness. Nonetheless the kind of skills and knowledge that are useful to individuals, employers, society and humankind in general are often conflicting and difficult to combine. It seems to be that in the rallying point of the different needs are abstract things, such as theoretical and methodological knowledge, collaboration skills, values and ethics.

The conception of learning as memorization of facts and procedures is living strong in the western world. The two main supporters of the simplified conception of learning are the industry producing mass products for consumer society and the military organizations training millions of individuals annually. In both cases - in the industrial world and in military - the aim is to train people to behave as reliable pieces of the system.

However, the idea of classical university is to carry out research and offer highest level of learning opportunities. The learning follows the research. The cultivation of knowledge is the primary task and the learning is based on it. In its practice the university is growing scientists, scholars and professionals with skills to adopt, cultivate, create and share knowledge.

### Knowledge is cultural - so is learning

From studies of expert's way of thinking we know that the knowledge that is useful in real world situations is hard to modify or cast in a way that can be saved to the hard disk of a computer. Experts' knowledge is often called tacit knowledge. Experts know what to do when facing novelty in their field of expertise. Still it can be extremely difficult for them to explain why they did what they did. This type of expert knowledge is hard to make explicit, as it is strongly situated to the practices where it is used.

The best way to assimilate experts' knowledge is to participate in the practices of an expert community. Participation means that the

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activity is dialogical: you read, watch, hear, comment, try out yourself and then present your interpretation of the issues under study in the community. There is a community that is reflecting and working on improving its cumulative and communal knowledge.

Knowledge is situated in the time and place where it is generated, modified, and exploited. In this way knowledge is cultural. We learn in time and place where we are collaborating with other people. Just like knowledge is cultural, so is learning.

### **Building the culture of (e-)learning**

When implementing learning - with "e" or without it - the focus should be on building communities, offering people spaces and facilitating their advances in the community's area of interests. At the same time, the community should involve new generations, have them take part in its activities. Unfortunately in e-learning we too often pay most of our attention to such issues as technology, e-learning platforms, ready-made content, standards, management of learning and automated assessment.

In future we will see more companies and universities that will consciously terminate their e-learning projects. This does not mean that these organizations would not be interested in using ICT in their learning-related operations. The products and services offered under the term "e-learning" simply do not serve their needs.

In several of these companies the aim is to support informal learning that takes place in actual work operations. This is done by offering and guiding staff towards a more efficient use of the sources of information already available in the organization, and to generating (online) communities where colleagues are helping each other. The purpose is to make the operations more explicit and accessible for all, and in this way put them under evaluation and improvement by the community itself. The practice of sharing work processes and the information related to them requires an organizational culture that values openness, tolerates critics and respects individuals.

Universities that now want to stay away from the e-learning are emphasizing traditional academic practices. The universities offer seminars, workshops and group assignments taking place in both campus and online. In these universities the learning materials, lecture notes and course readings can even be given for free to anyone interested in having a look at what and how the topics are studied in that particular university. More important than the static content is the dynamic university community, the people working and studying in there. By offering content online and enhancing active campus learning with online activities the university is building a culture of learning on its own terms - just like it is supposed to do.

For many scholars, educators and human resource developers working in companies, e-learning, as we know it today, has proven to be a number of empty promises. The interesting thing is that at same time, they are probably more excited than ever about learning. E-Learning is dead. Long live learning!

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### **Bijlage(n)**



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