the BUSINESS CASE for VIRTUAL LEARNING

PAUL BEJGROWICZ, former Director of the virtual J&J University at **Johnson & Johnson**, talks with **RICHARD KLINGSHIRN,** Managing Director of **ACS Learning Services**, about ACS' advances in virtual learning

PAUL BEJGROWICZ **When putting a program together, how can you help companies build a solid business case, such as for 3-D technology and collaboration tools? How can you help companies build the business case they need to invest in learning and training?**

RICHARD KLINGSHIRN There are several key elements that we view in any business case. Clearly the cost versus the benefit is one of the largest components that many companies will look at. From a cost benefit side and looking at some of the newer collaboration tools and the virtual world tools, these are tremendous tools that can be used in a virtual setting. This avoids incurring costs such as travel cost, incurring significant amounts of down time. These collaboration tools can help people leverage informal learning as well as formal learning. There are a number of different benefits that we believe can be achieved. And all of that helps to in essence provide good solid rationale for any business case. Like any learning ultimately you need to look at what you're trying to achieve, you need to look at the requirements that a business has, and the strategy the business is trying to achieve. These tools are not the answer in every learning situation but if you've got a situation where you believe a collaboration or virtual lab of sorts is something that can benefit your people – is something that can help you achieve your learning objective – then by all means building a business case that is focused on the cost differential between a virtual environment and a live classroom setting is one of the most significant components to that business case.

PB **In the face of budget cuts, can you provide supplemental support on existing projects? How do you help your clients keep up momentum from past learning and training efforts?**

RK As a provider in the learning space we have a lot of different options and opportunities to help our clients. Everything from the very straight forward staff augmentation, where perhaps a company simply needs some instructional designers or maybe it's because some new technologies are out there that their existing team does not have familiarity with. Maybe it's because their budget cuts have in fact impacted them to the point of cutting their own staffs. We have instructional designers on our staff who can step into an organization and work with their teams from anywhere to a matter of weeks to many months, or even longer. In addition to that we maintain a pool of freelance and contract resources both domestically as well as in other countries. Some of those countries are in fact what we would term low cost countries, such India, the Philippines, Malaysia – places like that where the universities have done a very good job of training their folks in the disciplines like instructional design and adult education. We have access to a pool of resources there as well. When you look at other disciplines you may need, whether it is business analysts, media or project management. We have those types of resources on our team and are available as contractors as well. It is something we can do to certainly help our clients as we look to supplement their own teams.

PB **How would you look at supporting technology tools and getting**

a company up and running with collaboration tools like SharePoint, blogs, and wikis? How would you support the clients with getting those initiatives started and getting that comfort level to where it would need to be?

RK Within our team of contractors, we have people who are familiar with the technologies that you have mentioned in many of the other generally available technologies in the market that more and more companies are taking advantage of. So that's key to have people who are familiar with the technology. But being familiar with the technology isn't enough to actually achieve the learning objectives. Our team is also familiar with how to develop learning both in a formal and informal setting for use in these tools. It may be something as simple as we're going to use a blogger or wikis in a supplement to a particular program or to a particular curricular that is targeted at a particular audience and we encourage people to blog around topic-specific issues. Having said that our team is familiar with the rules of the road that you need put in place so that it doesn't just become a free for all and people look at it and say that this really isn't helpful to me. Once they make that decision they are done and don't go back again. As you mentioned in the pharma space and other regulated industries, you have a lot of compliance, legal and regulatory requirements that need to be respected and addressed in any sort of communication and in any sort of medium like this. Making sure we're asking questions of the business owners, making sure we understand from the subject matter experts what it is that can and can't be shared is also key here. The real magic to using these tools is to leverage people who are familiar with, not only the technologies, but how you develop the learning that will ultimately be communicated via these technologies.

PB I'm a big proponent of you can't just build it and they will come. **Can you describe some of what you did to help with the strategy for how you would build some of the informal learning capabilities, whether it's the blog, wikis or having a place where people can post their PowerPoint slide or the white paper they just did? Did you design a strategy and governance around that?**

RK In terms of the strategy you have to give people a reason to come to these sites. Once they leave the formal setting some of these tools may be supplemental to a particular formal piece of learning. You need to give people a good reason to come visit the site. And that good reason could be something as straight forward as, 'Hey, in three weeks, I (the instructor,) or I (the sponsor) of this program, am going to post a report that I'm currently working on and post some of the results of that report. Please make a note and come see it and I would be interested in your feedback and your reaction to that report.' There could be marketing efforts, quick little e-mail snippets that include the link that remind people to go out and take a look at this or participate in that; so and so has posted something of interest. It's a delicate balance, so you have to be careful. None of us want to be inundated with e-mails and reminders. I'm sure we've all seen the LinkedIn reminders and that so and so are connected and they want you to be connected to that person. Too much of that can get annoying, but there is a balance there where you can provide that marketing as a reminder to people to participate in something.

Relative to governance I think that it is important to know these sites tend to be rather loose. They need to monitored and they need to be watched to make sure the group is focused on whatever it is you're trying to achieve. Oftentimes as a sponsor or leader of a group you can redirect the conversation by posting some additional comments or thought provoking questions to drive the group back to focus on what you need to.

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PB I agree having that structure and support and also tying back into the formal programs is what will keep it alive and keep people coming back. **What kind of measurements do you put in place to show an ROI?**

RK ROI is always a little bit elusive. It always depends on people's definitions and ultimately what you're trying to achieve. We start every learning initiative with a simple question. How will you measure success? What are the desired outcomes? How do we measure this? Some of those are very tangible and concrete, such as increased revenue being a result of a particular sales training initiative, or decreased accidents being a result of a particular training safety initiative. On the other hand, if you say we have to do a new higher orientation and we want our group of people to be ready to hit the ground running after a one-or two-week introduction program. Define 'hit the ground running' and that starts to get a little bit more elusive. What we look to is having the owners of that program define the outcomes for us. What do they want focus to do? What are some specific examples of the behaviors from the exemplary performer? With that in mind we can not only design and develop learning we can also come back – sometimes immediately, sometimes in a couple of months – following a particular program. Ask the people who went through this program if they feel they were exhibiting the particular behaviors that you were looking for. That's typically how we measure whether you are utilizing a formal classroom setting or utilizing some informal learning settings, taking advantage of technologies that we've talked about. I really think that it is no different measuring the outcome. Measuring the ROI is all about achieving what you set out to achieve.

PB **What will the future hold for learning and training programs in the pharma industry?**

RK I think what we're going to continue to see is an increased element that relies heavily on informal learning. We're going to see a decrease in the traditional apprenticeship-type method that has been in the mainstay for training for a number of years. But the classroom isn't going to go away. Instructor-led formal learning isn't going to go away. I think that as technology continues to race along in its current trajectory, leveraging the iPhone for learning is going to be key. Leveraging other mobile devices is going to be key and it is not Web-based training on your Blackberry. It is really a function of, 'Hey, I'm a pharma sales person and I'm talking to some doctors in a few minutes and I'm going to pull up an application that is going to give me a refresher that I need so that I am 100 percent up to speed on this particular product that I'm about to talk to these guys about.' That is really where I see the leveraging of technology and some of the opportunities that we've talked about coming into play. We're going to see more and more of this. **FP**

PAUL BEJGROWICZ is a Principle Learning Consultant for RWD Technologies providing strategic consulting services to clients on learning strategies, learning platforms, and development of multiple modalities focused on the client's business goals and objectives. This includes the evaluation and implementation of Learning Management Systems, the latest Web 2.0 learning and collaboration technologies such as 3-D Immersive Learning & Simulation and Mobile Learning. Previously, Paul was Director of Johnson & Johnson's eUniversity and served as the Global Process Owner for Learning, responsible for leading the learning and evaluation strategy, as well as the organization and execution for all learning and compliance training programs.

RICHARD G. KLINGSHIRN, Executive Managing Director, Learning, joined ACS in June, 2006 with the acquisition of Intellinex LLC, and is responsible for leading the learning business at ACS. This includes the Learning Business Process Outsource offering and other learning services delivered in conjunction with a broader Human Resource Outsource solution or on a standalone basis. With the acquisition of Intellinex, ACS expanded its learning capabilities to include a robust learning business process outsource offering which includes learning strategy and consulting services, content and curriculum services, learning administration services and hosted learning technology platform and related managed services.