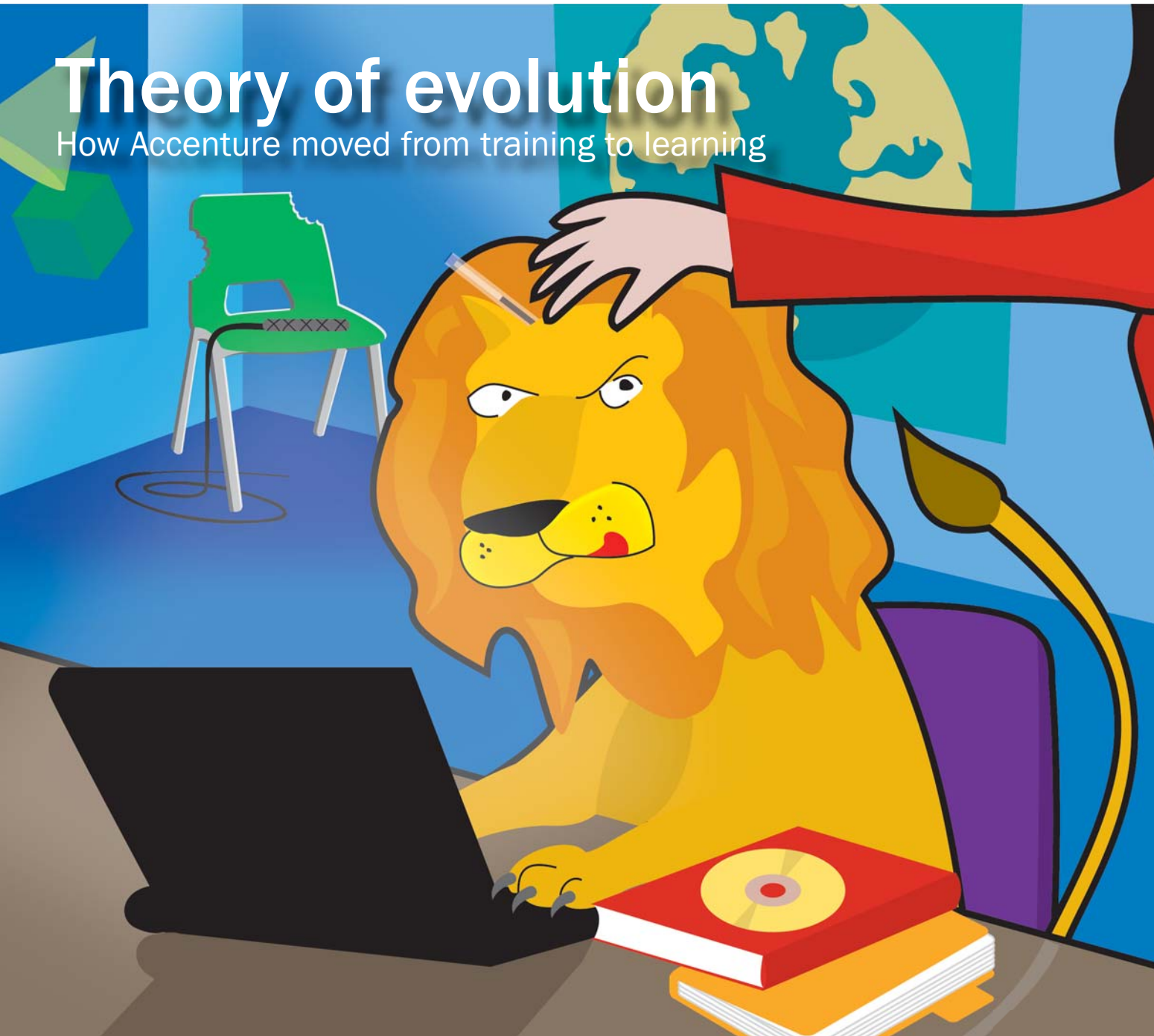


# Inside Knowledge

## Theory of evolution

How Accenture moved from training to learning



### FEATURE

Handling knowledge when manufacturing goes to China

### MASTERCLASS

Oliver Schwabe explains the value of e-learning from a KM perspective

### NEWS UPDATE

Robert Buckman looks east... Snowden prepares for publication... plus the latest events...

### THE KNOWLEDGE

Nick Milton reflects on KM as a management discipline



## Cover story

# Accenture's knowledge continuum

At Accenture, training, learning and knowledge work are all linked in structure and process so seamlessly that it is impossible to say where one becomes the next.

By Jerry Ash

Many champions of knowledge management (KM) have eagerly embraced the movement in corporate education away from classroom-based training towards learning 'on the fly'. It is, after all, a perfect fit with KM's ideal of knowledge sharing.

No one has been a bolder exponent of this than Hubert Saint-Onge, an early KM pioneer, who said: "The classic training and development (T&D) function is largely ineffectual in our current organisational contexts. A very small proportion of the substantial investment put into T&D activities actually hits the mark."

"The first step in making the change is to move from training to learning. This is not a small change. Training belongs in an entitlement-based organisation, one where the individual passively waits to be given what he or

she needs in order to do the job. If it is not forthcoming, then it's all the fault of the organisation. On the other hand, there are no instructors in the learning environment. The learner has to be self-initiated and assume responsibility for his or her learning," he says.

Saint-Onge practiced what he preached. He dropped the training programme at Canadian insurance company Clarica several years ago and replaced it with on-the-job learning.

Many executives and managers will have been easily sold on the idea of abolishing training since it represents both a cost and a loss on the all-important corporate profit and loss sheet – an expensive support department to teach the courses and a loss in productivity while people learn. At Accenture, however, knowledge and learning were not on collision course, but on convergent paths.

Accenture, one of the world's biggest management consulting, technology services and outsourcing companies, has 133,000 employees in 48 countries, earning revenues of \$15.5bn in 2005. Its leaders see the value of both formal and informal approaches to learning, bringing together training and knowledge management functions in one organisation focused on enhancing the capabilities of Accenture people.

This report examines the decision by Accenture to continue with T&D using updated tools and methods in formal settings, as well as workplace learning in collaboration with processes integral to Accenture's KM programme.

## In the beginning

Accenture has long been known for its training and knowledge management capabilities. As in most major organisations, these were completely independent functions





Cover illustration: Emma Pallfreyman

sharing infrastructure to communicate and distribute computer-based training (CBT). Until then there had been no connection between training and knowledge sharing, says Tom. “We had a lot of great training that few people knew existed. There were a lot of people using our knowledge system so it seemed natural to take the training to where the people were working.”

The result? Training modules are among the top downloads in the knowledge system.

### Forces of change

Several forces were at work that would affect planning to revitalise training and knowledge management. The worldwide slowdown in IT spending and related services in 2000-2002 forced corporate planners to take greater account of the need to cut costs partly by centralising operations. The new Accenture mindset required demonstrating value for all expenditure. For the training organisation, that meant budget cuts, travel restrictions and an alternative emphasis on e-learning.

A movement for change had also been brewing in the T&D field for years. Teaching professionals at Accenture had been exploring other options for delivering training, starting with computer-based training in the

The situation provided a natural bend towards the convergence of KM, learning and operations. This led to a new integrated platform for centralised operations.

### Revitalising training

Although Vanthournout did not know of Saint-Onge’s ‘abolitionist’ views, he was well aware of the movement within T&D from training to learning. Now the cost factor added urgency to the issue. Although he was not planning to abandon training altogether, he was looking for alternative methods.

“In 2000, when we were looking to move some of our training outside the classroom, we developed an e-learning system, which we called ‘myLearning,’” says Vanthournout. “That system was based on the belief that everyone at Accenture was self-motivated towards their own development and would invest the time to explore the training opportunities available to them via this new system.”

But the theory of such self-directed learning proved difficult to accomplish in practice.

“We found that most people were very busy and really wanted to be told what to do,” says Vanthournout. “They wanted to be told what they had to take or they wanted to say, ‘I need to accomplish X, give me the best options

within Accenture. But in 2000, Don Vanthournout, Accenture’s chief learning officer, was asked to transform the training organisation into a learning organisation. T&D was renamed capability development and given the mission to create a new vision for learning, to develop the strategy for achieving that vision and to execute the strategy.

Knowledge sharing was identified as a natural fit under learning and was moved into capability development. Since 2000, Accenture has been on a journey to reinvent both its training and knowledge-management strategies. In the process, a holistic approach that bridges the formal learning with informal learning has been developed.

Tom Barfield, currently global knowledge-management lead, joined Accenture in 1992 but did not become involved with KM until 1996 when he decided to leverage the knowledge-

---

“Training belongs in an entitlement-based organisation, one where the individual passively waits to be given what he or she needs in order to do the job. If it is not forthcoming, then it’s all the fault of the organisation.”

Hubert Saint-Onge

---

1990s and more recently with e-learning. Even within the classroom there had been quite an evolution from the traditional instructor-led methods to goal-based learning, team learning and simulation.

for getting me to be able to do it’. As a result, our online approach has transformed from a launching point for exploration to a place where Accenture employees can now find training paths for developing their careers.”



Those paths involve classroom-based training, although a strong initiative still works to incorporate learning within KM's knowledge-sharing

processes. A new system, called Knowledge Exchange, follows the vision of CEO Bill Green regarding corporate values, ethics and culture. Even before being named CEO in 2004, Green was well known at Accenture for developing talent and empowering those around him, especially in his previous role as chief operating officer.

The new Knowledge Exchange is a common space providing the main access point to research, expertise location, communities of practice (CoPs), engagement profiles,

those objectives the in best way possible within budget.”

The solution set will end up as a combination of traditional training (classroom, workshops, computer-based training and knowledge-sharing approaches such as experts, CoPs and repositories).

“Truthfully,” Barfield says, “we are still evolving. But regardless of methods, the training curriculum is all about building the Accenture professional. Different approaches are used based on the needs of each of the professional groups such as consulting, enterprise, services or solutions. Some groups will have more classroom in their curriculum than others.”

#### Paired strengths

“Our mission is to help our people gain more proficiency in the skills that contribute to our business,” Barfield says. “We believe that training is an efficient way to get a person to a

time in their curriculum than others. Classroom, while the most expensive option and reserved for those areas that need it most, is also perhaps the best way to embed the Accenture culture in our people.”

Barfield recently attended a classroom course for senior managers. The course was structured around the more innovative simulation approach. During the three days participants were divided into teams and asked to run an Accenture profit-and-loss unit, making all the decisions for a simulated three years.

“This was a powerful experience of living in the shoes of our senior executives, learning what drives their decisions, learning about the levers that are pulled that affect our corporate balance sheet. This was an ideal classroom experience – it wouldn’t have been as effective in an informal learning environment in something like a self-study or a community of practice,” says Barfield.

Although knowledge sharing is more open-ended than prescribed, it provides an opportunity to connect training with KM. “We are going to start leveraging our KM solution to better communicate our job-readiness training. Users of our learning system will type in ‘SAP Financials’ and not only get a list of SAP courses, but also any related SAP material from the knowledge system. We may then direct them to the SAP topic page in the knowledge system and provide them with an overview of the best training courses to take.” Otherwise, a person would only become aware of these courses by initiating a specific search.

Barfield also believes this integrated system will motivate people to work with each other.

“The classroom is the perfect place to both learn and network with others,” Barfield says. But there are also powerful reasons why learning and networking outside the classroom are important. A knowledge-driven organisation cannot always depend on

---

“We had a lot of great training that few people knew existed. There were a lot of people using our knowledge system so it seemed natural to take the training to where the people were working.”

Tom Barfield

---

methods and contributions, as well as myLearning training options. “As the integration of knowledge and training evolves,” says Barfield, “we are identifying more opportunities to integrate the systems.”

Vanthournout and Barfield plan to highlight topic pages from the knowledge system to provide a high-level overview of topics and links to communities of practice, experts, documents and training options. “Our learning approach at Accenture,” says Vanthournout, “is to focus on the performance outcomes desired and then to develop a solution set to meet

moderate level of proficiency, and that job assignments, collaboration and knowledge sharing are key to growing proficiency at higher levels.”

While the classroom is still favoured for embedding the Accenture culture in its people, cost is a factor and KM tools are considered excellent alternatives, providing a different kind of ongoing, on-the-spot learning.

“Training is a prescribed curriculum,” Barfield emphasises. “We take very different approaches to accomplish this based on the needs of each of our workforces. Some groups will tend to have more classroom

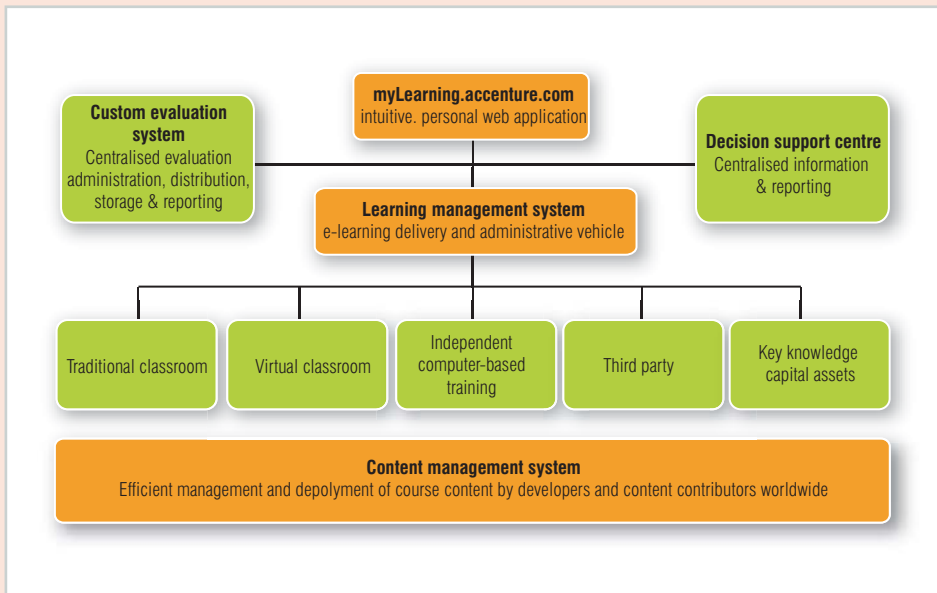


Figure 1: The learning infrastructure at Accenture

periodic learning to reach a company as large and widespread as Accenture. “We need to focus on how we can foster learning and networking experiences outside the classroom environment,” Barfield says. “The natural place for this to happen is in the community of practice and expert network spaces. We are putting a lot more focus on these areas right now.”

#### No waiting

Hubert Saint-Onge may have been right – T&D as we remember it is largely ineffective in today’s knowledge-driven environment. But the likelihood of companies abandoning the advantages of formal company-oriented training is unlikely and probably unwise. The Accenture experience bears witness to the value of innovating

and integrating training with knowledge sharing on the job.

In today’s fast-paced work environment, the ‘need to know’ cannot wait for the next classroom opportunity. The architects for learning in the new environment at Accenture are forging a powerful partnership between training and knowledge management that will take advantage of the best of both worlds to support an effective learning organisation and a system where learning and the application of learning go hand in hand.

If other architects of modern training and development programmes were to take Accenture’s holistic-capability approach they, too, might conclude that their knowledge and training organisations need to be integrated.

In a workshop at the Ark Group’s KM Asia conference in November, attendees will engage in a ‘simulation’ that will result in a proposal for an online forum following the event to enable KM Asia conferees to continue their learning online in a virtual knowledge-sharing community. The idea is that lessons learned at the conference can continue, grow and contribute to workplace practices and decision-making throughout Asia.

The proposal will be submitted to Ark with the argument that the combination of the learning event and a learning network will

provide value reaching far beyond the conference itself – adding value to the attendees and to Ark Group by extending the value of the conference and raising interest levels for KM Asia 2007.

Accenture’s training/KM strategy will be an excellent reference point. ■

---

*Tom Barfield will be guest moderator of the AOK STAR Series Dialogue September 18-29. Join AOK, [http://www.kwork.org/explain\\_join.html](http://www.kwork.org/explain_join.html), to participate in this interactive discussion.*

---

*Jerry Ash is KM coach, founder of the Association of Knowledgework, <http://www.kwork.org>, and special correspondent to IK. He can be reached at [jash@kwork.org](mailto:jash@kwork.org).*

---

# subscribe now!

Please call Adam Scrimshire on +44 (0)20 8785 5914  
or visit us online at [www.ikmagazine.com](http://www.ikmagazine.com)



A continually growing archive of hundreds of case studies, detailing the successes and failures of information-management strategies at organisations just like yours, is what makes ei the world’s premier resource for professionals involved in managing the enterprise-information network.