

The last of the six 'I' s of real learning - Intrinsic

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To put this in context...

Let's start with a definition – The Cambridge dictionary tells us that 'intrinsic' is an extremely important, basic characteristic of a person or thing'. In this case the 'thing' that is extremely important is that life, and especially work-life is *intrinsically* developmental.

Ask this question of anyone at work: 'What specifically can you do a lot better or for the first time than say a year ago?'. Typically answers will be easily articulated – we know how performance improves, and can describe this in detail. Next question: 'What training courses did you go on to learn all that?'. Well, this surely need not be pursued further.

Naturally occurring experiences and incidents in the real, raw work learning environment is, and will always be, our principal source of development.

Every time we do anything is an opportunity to consciously and deliberately do this better than the time before.

This is how we learn most – and yet it is least valued

When, all too rarely, specific, individual development needs are identified, how often is the 'Go on a training course' option taken without any consideration for better, tailored, more directly relevant, and immediately beneficial options that cost nothing and that keep people in the workplace?

It's too easy to take the low value option, over deliberately designed learning from work, especially when this is not even in the minds of line management.

With so much noise around the entirely valid [70.20.10](#) mix of development, why do we see so little effort made to support and maximise return from the 70% of actual work based learning, over the 20% from social interactions, and spend so much on the at best 10% contribution from costly, away-from-work non needs based group activity?

Alas, when all is said and done, a more is said about 70.20.10 than done.

Using real work as the primary platform for development sounds simple, however it needs subtle and skilled management and requires care in navigating the *support* of learning, not its detail or direction.

Learning and development can be free!

This may help: What are your priority development needs?

 What real world, naturally occurring experiences can you learn from?

 What specific new and enhanced behaviours and performance will be seen and when?

 What support do you need?

 How will this positively impact your work, and beyond that, the organisation?

Informal, learner-centric development can be challenging, especially if neither the organisational will nor skills are held to make this less random and accidental, more managed and purposeful.

Of the five other 'Is of learning' in this series (incremental, immersive, iterative, intentional, and individual), the latter two are particularly valuable in combination with intrinsic. If an individual is sufficiently motivated and *intentional*, real work learning can be harvested alone, and with very significant impact. The challenge of working on and supporting the unique development needs of individuals, and not on groups of people with widely disparate needs is too great for organisations that reverse the numbers in the fabled framework referred to earlier.

Intrinsically-focused learners find their own way

Realistically, getting the most from intrinsic learning is likely to be a lonely journey – although it is possible to be alone with others!

The realisation that work and life is a laboratory, and that the active learner is a scientist, experimenting with new behaviours continuously and deliberately, then reflecting consciously to improve performance at the next opportunity – maybe within that hour, or even minute, can be enlightening and also overwhelming.

Contrast that with leaving work to maybe learn something during expensive events not designed with any individual in mind, then having to make the transition back to real work and maybe apply fragments of chance learning in a busy 'Have a good holiday?' workplace.

All learning is a skilled process, the intrinsic learner actively and consciously seeks and uses experiences to enhance personal performance. Such valuable people often shun 'training' as unlikely to have sufficient relevance to their specific role, development needs or workplace. Such unusual people stand under a waterfall of constantly flowing learning knowing they catch only the drips!

Learning that is focused on and driven by reality can be used creatively by an intrinsically aware individual, who will seek advice, support and even criticism from those most able to accelerate capability and applied competence.

These are the very few that are best read; that capture and record their learning – yes, really writing/typing notes that reinforce learning and that provide a tangible reference and note of key experiences. They also know that most so-called 'networking' is in truth 'not working', actively identifying individuals who can provide laser-focused insights that directly and cost-effectively impact results.

How often do we see an organisation seek out and find these gems?

How often are line managers measured and rewarded for their efforts to develop themselves and direct reports?

How often do we see unorthodox, sometimes challenging to manage people tire of organisations that constrain talent rather than encourage its self management?

So what is the learning from this?

For learning practitioners, I offer these thoughts on encouraging more intrinsic learning:

- Model the way, by showing tangibly and credibly that you genuinely use real work and life as your primary development environment.
- Identify encourage and support line managers who see value in making more use of real work to directly accelerate development and performance.
- Promote learning from work, and alert more colleagues to the value and the rewards of genuinely managing their own development.
- Get involved, support individuals taking on this challenge – it is interesting, varied and yes, intrinsically developmental!

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<https://www.learningfromwork.com/free-resources/blogs/>