Death of the Corporate University
Birth of Learning Services

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> The traditional Corporate University model is dying...
> to be replaced by an entirely new model for corporate training.

In our High Impact Learning Organization® research and workshops we talk with training managers and directors about their challenges in organization, management and governance. Nearly every organization tells us the same thing: their current organization model for corporate training is undergoing a dramatic change. This article summarizes these changes and what they mean for you.

The Traditional Corporate University Model

In the traditional corporate university model, developed over the last 30 years, companies create a "place to go" to learn. These organizations have many offerings to choose from, they are centralized and located at corporate headquarters, and are staffed for peak demand.

In this model the corporate training organization develops a wide set of offerings and then markets them to managers, directors, executives, and line employees. Each individual business unit decides whether or not to send their people to "be trained."

The Corporate University is funded and staffed for "peak demand." There are a wide set of programs, facilities, and staff to help meet any possible demand from the organization.

Why this Model is becoming Obsolete: A Changed Workforce

The business environment in the last 5-10 years has changed dramatically. Today the economy is growing yet most organizations face a talent "squeeze." A significant number of older workers are retiring - and with them go some of the most critical skills in the organization. Workers no longer sit in an office next to their managers where they can be coached and trained: they now work everywhere and anywhere (i.e. the "flattening of the earth"). HR managers no longer speak of learning and development, they now worry about "talent management."

Changing Business Environment

~2000	2005-2006	HR Issues
1. Layoffs	1. Economic Growth	1. Skills shortages – retirement and hiring
2. Down Economy	2. Business Expansion	2. "Flattening of the Earth"
3. Corporate Consolidation	3. Global competition and business change	3. Demand for Talent Management
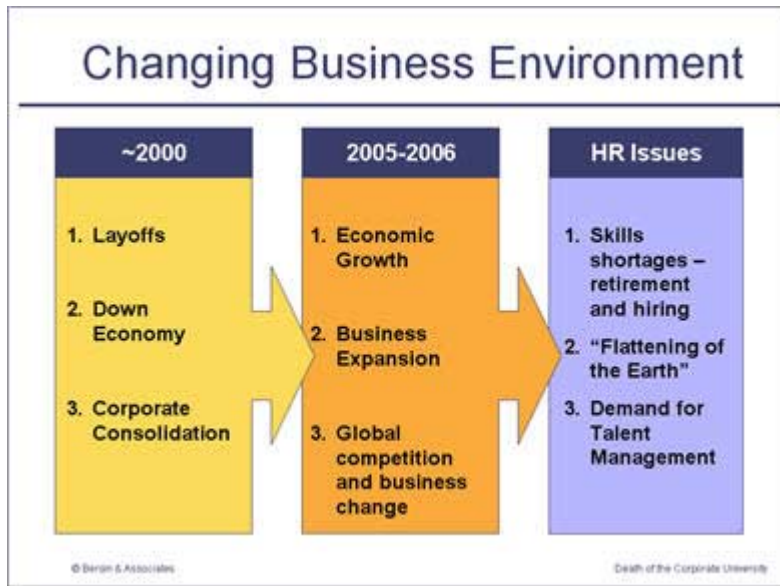
These changes have led to three important demands for learning: Learning must available "*on-demand*," it must be "*job-relevant*," and it must be "*constantly changing*." These new drivers are making the corporate university model impossible to maintain.

Consider the issues which training managers now face. Training must be aligned, relevant, and efficient. It is no longer possible to offer a course for year after year with a small number of attendees. Training must be totally aligned to today's most current business needs.

Top Focus Areas for **Training**

The University model breaks down. Employees can no longer wait for the University to offer the right courses. Employees want to be able to get information online when they

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need it. New hire, management training, and other soft-skills programs are now "blended" with online activities, events, and reference materials.

The New Model: Learning Services

There is an entirely new approach: the Learning Services organization. Learning Services is process-centric, not program centric. It offers programs, content, performance consulting, and outreach programs to help business managers improve operational performance. The organization uses technology to increase reach and range -- not just to save money. Learning Services "comes to you."


The Learning Services approach differs greatly from the traditional corporate training organization. It manages courses and content which can be delivered anywhere. It uses performance consultants to reach out and understand business issues -- and delivers programs, content, resources, references, and more. Its focus is not as a "place to go" but rather an organization that "comes to you."
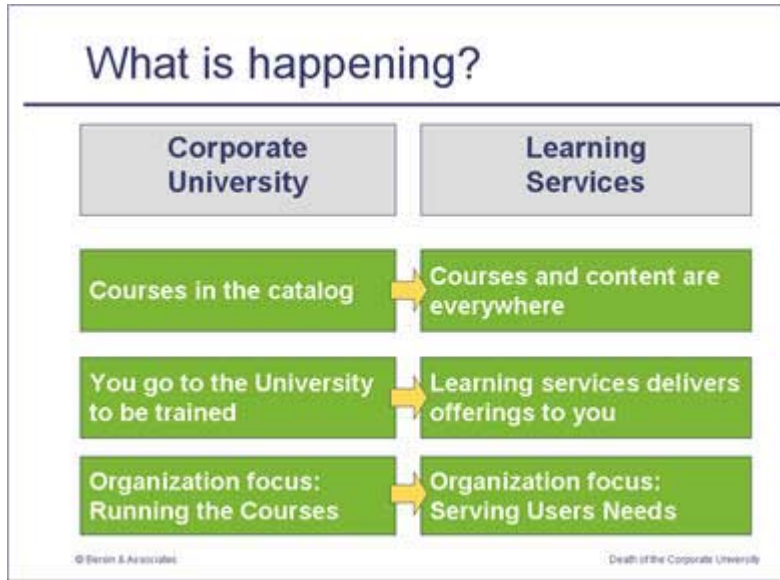
An Analogy: Data Processing to Information Technology

We know this transition is taking place. Forward-thinking organizations like Lockheed Martin, IBM, and others have made this transition already.

Consider what happened to the Data Processing departments in the 1980s. They used to be an organization which held "data and processing" in the basement with the mainframe. You used to walk into the DP department and ask for help with your data and applications. Today, by contrast, the IT department is everywhere. They run networks and systems which are self-service in nature. They no longer sit in the basement -- they are everywhere and available 24x7 when you need them.

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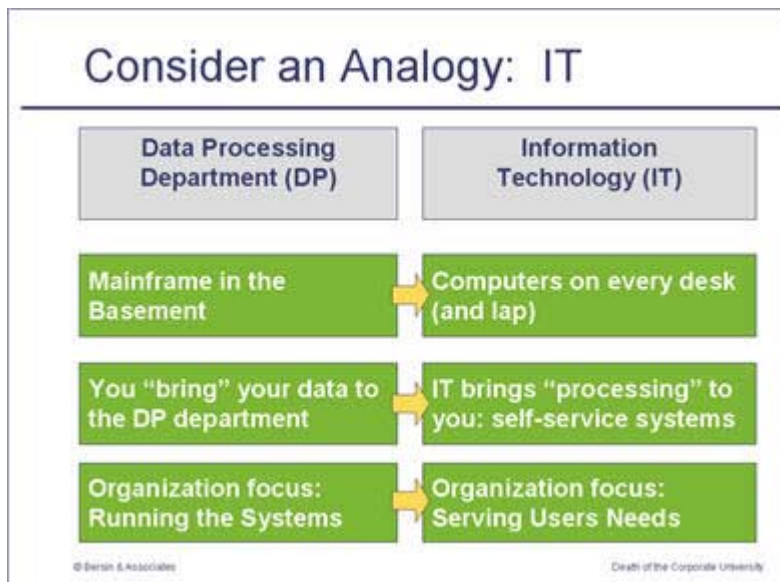
IT, like training, is a support function. Alone it does not generate revenue, gain market share, or create competitive advantage. Used correctly, however, it does all three. As the business and technology changed so did IT. Training is going through precisely the same transition.

What does this all mean to you?

It has many implications. It changes the way you are organized, how you use technology, how your resources are allocated, and how you measure what you do. It demands that you implement a "shared-services" model rather than a "program-centric" model. It forces you to build and manage a performance consulting organization. It mandates measurement of operational efficiency and service levels -- not just learning outcomes.