



Simple ideas about learning curves

Definition of "learning curve": 1. a curve plotting performance against practice or 2. the course of progress made in learning something. (Merriam-Webster)

Climbing the learning curve

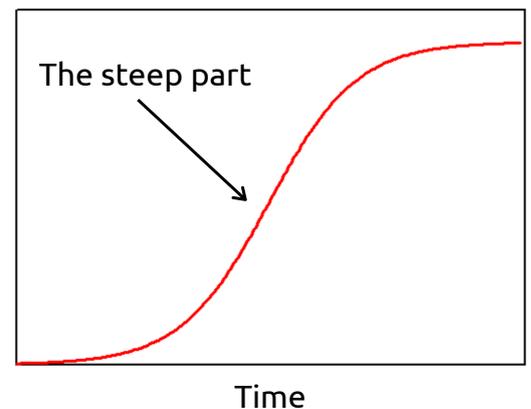
One of the fascinating things about AI technologies is the aspect of combined learning, where humans and technology learn from each other. This is described in "*Simple ideas about AI*" and also on our website under Rational Assistant. When people learn, we often talk about learning curves, usually in expressions like "it has a steep learning curve". Most people tend to understand this, as the learning being difficult and therefore slow, so a bad thing. Just like walking up a steep hill can feel difficult. Actually the steepness means, that you learn a lot in a short time. A good thing, really.



Getting the skills you need

To the right is a typical S-curve with a flat part in the beginning and at the end and a steep part in the middle. This is the most common, idealised, way to represent a learning curve, but it doesn't mean that all curves will actually look like this. If you are learning a new skill, that you need to do your job, then it matters how quickly you acquire the new skills. This is particularly true if you need to get to the top before you can start performing with your new skills. This threshold could be a certificate or similar. In many cases learning happens on the job, so it is a continuous process. The steepness of the curve is mainly an expression of how quickly you acquire new skills. This can be easy or hard depending on your starting point and the difficulty of the task. *In practice, what matters is, how hard is it to learn a new skill and how quickly you gain enough proficiency to be able to apply the skills.*

Learning or performance



The simple ideas

When new technology is introduced in the organisation it disrupts the normal workflow and the new functionality needs to be learned to be really useful. The sooner you can use the new technology, the sooner it starts generating value. Once you start using the new technology there is a positive reinforcement of the learning and the new skills can be applied routinely. Instead of one big learning curve we operate with a series of smaller learning curves to ensure continuous learning and application of skills. This supports a faster - and less risky - path to return on investment.

