

Part Two: The Watering hole

The watering hole...

Just as campfires resonate deeply across space and time, watering holes have an equal status in the pantheon of learning places. Virtually every hominid on the planet has, at one time in its historical existence, needed to gather at a central source for water. During these trips to the watering hole, people shared information with their neighbors — those within their own village, as well as those from neighboring villages and travelers on their way to or from a distant village. The watering hole became a place where we learned from our peers — where we shared the news of the day. This informal setting for learning provided a different kind of learning community from that of the shaman or troubadour who regaled us from the podium of the campfire. The learning at the watering hole was less formal. It was peer teaching, a sharing of the rumors, news, gossip, dreams and discoveries that drive us forward. Each participant at the watering hole is both learner and teacher at the same time.

Page 2Just as water is necessary for survival, the informational aspect of the watering hole is essential for cultural survival. I'll have more to say about this later. For now, suffice it to say that the watering hole is alive and well in corporations where people gather around the water cooler (or, more recently, the copying machine) to continue a tradition of archetypal proportions. Executives and support personnel alike reenact on a daily basis scenes that have been played out on the plains of Africa for tens of thousands of years. Any disconnection from this informal learning community risks a disconnection from one of the things that makes us human.