

# INSIDE LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES & SKILLS

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## Learning to Live

With their eyes on the technological and industrial needs of the future, Rudy de Waele and Humberto Schwab underline the challenges we face in the next five years

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Gerry Griffin asks: What can L&D professionals do to maintain a pivotal role in this learning revolution?

# THE **UBERIZATION** OF WORKPLACE LEARNING

**T**he cloud is radically rewiring our lives. Uber, Spotify and Airbnb, for example, have cut out the 'middle person' when it comes to booking transport, listening to music and finding holiday accommodation. As the cloud removes the inefficiencies inherent in analogue – such as having to wait in a taxi queue – traditional agents can be 'disintermediated'. You only have to recall the recent Parisian protests against Uber to recognise the potentially disruptive force of the cloud.

As this process of digital disintermediation continues to gain momentum in domestic and social settings, we need to ask ourselves how such technologies are impacting the world of work.

From augmented reality to big data, there's no doubt that learning solution providers

have embraced new technologies as a means of delivering learning. We're increasingly surrounded by digital modes of engaging with the end user. But we also need to reassess the role of the L&D professional in an age where 'Google search' has enabled a democratisation of information; a free and frictionless access to a wide variety of learning objects. What can L&D professionals do to maintain a pivotal role in this revolution?

## **A PERSONALISED, RETAIL APPROACH TO LEARNING**

In the days before an individual's ability to self-diagnose learning gaps and self-medicate on solutions became so easy, the L&D professional had the role of 'broker' – mediating between the learner and blocks of skills/knowledge. In the digital age, with the proliferation of free

knowledge, how can L&D continue to create value?

Learners don't need *more* content; rather they need to know which content is of *value*. If we consider both Barry Schwartz's Paradox of Choice, and Iyengar and Lepper's jam experiment, context is key – less is more, and too much choice is demotivating.

By becoming *Sherpas* of knowledge, L&D professionals need to demonstrate to colleagues the *relevance* of the content they're consuming – how it is core to their job, not distinct from it. The passive consumption of information can only move to active knowledge retention if learners have a *reason* to use it, and know *how* to apply it. In this respect, L&D has much to gain from retailing principles – products need to be thoughtfully packaged and actively sold to consumers.

This shift to 'retailing' the learning is concomitant with a shift in the changing psychological contract of the workplace. Essentially, we're now looking for our colleagues to take an active role in co-creating their learning solutions. This is to be welcomed, because for too long corporate learning systems have presupposed that the user/learner is passive in the system. We know this isn't the case. Learners need to have the ability to self-diagnose and take an active role in determining their own career and learning pathways. Call it 'self-service' learning if you will, but it's something that has always needed to happen.

Of course, in many industries – e.g., healthcare, defence and financial services – there is a huge amount of compliance learning that has to be done. The more engaging this is, the better it will be to switch the wrapper around it from being a tick-box exercise for reporting, to an engagement exercise that creates a 'culture' of compliance. We certainly know from the headlines in the financial services world, that the 'culture of compliance' is much needed!

If the psychological contract has changed, then the way we are distributing and sending out our learning, needs to change also. And indeed, this is beginning to happen with mounting interest in gamification and social-collaborative modes. In practice, it would be interesting to see how far down the line organisations are with implementing these strategies – we need to move from talking the talk, to walking the talk.

**THE UBER RIDE IS AVAILABLE AND ACCESSIBLE**

The skill set now though, which is coming into sharp relief, is that learning departments need to be better at promoting access to the content. Those involved in change management already know that behavioural change – engaging with the motivations of the user base, profiling the user base, giving clear calls to action to the user base – are part and parcel of that. For those less involved in change management and internal communication, the world of marketing may be unfamiliar territory. However, there are certain things that need to happen. At the very least, we need to avoid disenfranchising the users through the following content:

- Long
- Dull
- Block style
- Clunky
- Low utility modes



- Slow access between mobile devices and learning management systems
- Learning objects with poorly identified occasions of application (i.e., "Where can I actually use this?")

In other Skill Pill blogs and talks, we've spoken about a retailing model approach when it comes to learning and, again, it's worth reprising five tactics that the retailers use to hook in their customers:

- 1. Window display – enticing to try:** an enticing user interface is key. Netflix, for example, has won many hearts and minds with its ability to draw people into engaging with content – this is thanks to the adaptive algorithm that informs its intuitive recommendation and bookmarking of material. All of these manoeuvres are a form of retailing or 'selling' the content to the user.
- 2. Promotion:** promotions are like lightning conductors that bring users to a moment of decision – 'why now?' is the compelling event. When dropping learning objects into curated systems, we need to be really clear on what the compelling event is for the end user, otherwise they're much less likely to look at it.

**3. Range:** as already indicated, we need to make sure that we have curated relevant pathways of content which provide ample – but not overwhelming – subject coverage. The user needs to feel like they've got a degree of control and manoeuvrability, but if the content spread is too broad it will lose a sense of purpose.

**4. Layout:** the way that users can find and deploy material instantly is absolutely key – you need to allow for the purveyance of smart, relevant, instant-access content.

**5. Added-value:** how do you both nudge and reward participation?

- Personal avatars
- Intuitively recommended content
- Individual learning diaries
- Quizzes to test knowledge retention and degradation
- Badges for community engagement and contribution

Today's learners, like shoppers, are increasingly motivated by impulses and triggers. For this reason we need to 'season' their work-life with learning in order to get them unconsciously 'hooked'. If material

cannot be accessed and consumed within five minutes, you may have lost your 'customer'.

This is where L&D professionals can benefit from interaction with technology. Digital modes of learning are unrivalled in terms of scalability, agility, and adaptability.

#### KNOWLEDGE AS A SERVICE

Accenture has a useful infographic that outlines the process of making something 'as a service'. It has some interesting implications if we consider setting out knowledge/skills 'as a service'. Here we mean the learning objects, rather than the L&D function which has always conceived itself as a service or business partner (see graphic 'As-a-service', on previous page):

To select a few of these points, here is what we believe we can borrow from the world of Uber to become a learning disruptor. The learning we offer needs to be:

#### 1. Intelligent

The use of data analytics will allow us to better sell-in learning rather than merely track usage. Imagine a content delivery strategy that adapts to the circadian rhythms of your colleagues!

#### 2. Agile

Speed of access and consumption are key here – think Amazon's 'one click' purchase. We know that when a user has a need for learning materials (e.g., supporting content to help deal with an internal conflict) we have a five-minute 'window' from trigger to fulfilment.

#### 3. Scalable and plug-in[able], but remaining personalised

Your system needs to be able to aggregate learning objects from a variety of courses into an easy dashboard – think 'Slack' for learning. But areas for interaction need to be personalised enough to make individual input meaningful.

#### 4. Rapid response

How fast can you create a digital companion to an event/session/project? 72 hours anybody?

#### 5. Cost efficient

Ask yourself the following when assessing any learning intervention: "How will this help us make or save money?"

#### BE UBER-DISRUPTIVE!

Some 'what if' questions to consider.

#### What if...

- Apple re-designed your learning portal?
- Dunnhumby (Tesco Clubcard) managed the data you gathered?
- Richard Branson met with your instructional designers?
- Mumsnet re-organised your learning communities?
- *Dragon's Den* evaluated your investment in learning?
- Save the Children looked at your ability to respond/adapt to events?

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