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The new way to blend learning

A social element can be the factor to make, or break, a blended learning solution. TJ explains

Social learning | Sustainability | Leadership

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Editorial

Welcome to the penultimate issue of TJ 2014. It's been a fascinating year, and as we wind down to the end, things remain as busy as ever here.

This month sees the big event in our calendar – *TJ* Awards 2014. Our Gala Dinner will be taking place on Wednesday 26th November and once again our congratulations go out to all the shortlisted candidates. There will be 16 gold awards presented on the evening so best of luck to all those involved. This will be my fourth time at the event, and it's no exaggeration when I say it gets better each year. The dinner is a fantastic evening of celebration and fun and i'd personally like to take this opportunity to thank everybody who comes together to help make it a success. Speaking of those who contribute to the evening, p40 features Jane Elliot Poxon talking about the importance of being a judge and how it can aid your continuining professional development.

Let's get back to this edition. We focus on social and informal learning this month. As organistions continue to evolve, social and informal learning continues to rise in prominence. But what's the difference between the two? Mobile learning evangelist Amit Garg describes social learning as participating with others to make sense of new ideas. According to Garg, it's a natural process of learning, with and from others.

And what of informal learning? Jay Cross, author of Informal Learning, says that it is an unofficial, impromptu way of most of us learn to do our jobs. On p15, Paul Matthews gives his own defintion of informal learning and expands on how L&D practitioners can support it. Randy Emelo (p23) explains how the social element can be a major factor in helping to make or break a blended learning solution so be sure to check it out.

There's an interesting piece on p31, where David Bowman offers guidance on gamificiation and its role in social learning. We all know that social media is an increasingly popular medium, so could adding gamification elements help make it a more powerful way of delivering social learning within the business? Read his thoughts to find out more.

We're also working on improving our website all the time so if there are any questions or suggestions, do feel free to email me directly or leave a message on the *TJ* forum. Our forward features list for 2015 is now available on our website, but once again, let us know if you do feel we have missed anything out.

Going forward, there are numerous opportunities to get involved with *TJ*. Contact us for a media pack to find out more, and make sure you follow us on Twitter @Training Journal to stay up-to-date with the latest developments. Until next month - happy reading!

TJ

Seun Robert-Edomi

Unleash your ruthless side

In part two of a series of articles on productivity, **Graham Allcott** says it's time to get ruthless and refine the art of saying 'No'

We're bombarded. Information overload, demands from our bosses, beeps and notifications, potential things we'd like to explore. The possibilities in terms of where we could put our time and attention are not just endless, but the volume is increasing rapidly too. So how do we make the right decisions and cut through all the noise? It's time to get ruthless.

Ruthlessness is one of the hardest skills for a ninja to acquire; it allows us to make clear-headed decisions, objectively and calmly. It's not just about how we process information, though; it's also about our ability to protect our time and attention, focusing only on the things that add the greatest impact, even at the expense of other things that are 'worth doing'.

It goes against the Western, Protestant work ethic that we're so familiar with to decide not to do things, but that's exactly what we must do. A lot. Being much choosier about what we say 'Yes' to is an important skill – and learning to say 'No' to ourselves means not biting off more than we can chew. If you do get into situations where you've taken on too much (and I do this regularly, by the way!), you need to realise that renegotiating your commitments to yourself and others is better than burning yourself out trying to meet them all.

Picture this: you're in a meeting that you thought you were attending purely to contribute to, and the meeting discussion begins to come around to some decisions and commitments about actions people could take at the end of the meeting. There's a particular set of actions that you're renowned for being good at, and just as it's mentioned, several pairs of eyes turn and focus on you. It's easy in this situation to over-commit. It's harder to rein the conversation back from what you could deliver and on to what you're able to deliver. It's harder still, when you know how valuable your contribution could be, to say 'No' to →

You need to realise that renegotiating your commitments to yourself and others is better than burning yourself out trying to meet them all

all of it, without feeling like you're letting the side down or losing favour with someone who matters. Saying 'No' to others is tricky. It requires steely resolve, a ruthless streak and some great tactics so that you come out smelling of roses. Make it your mission to perfect the art of saying 'No' to yourself and to others. It goes a long way.

Your three types of attention

Let's look at one particular way in which being ruthless with your attention matters more than you think. In an average day, you will have different levels of attention. For ease, a crude analysis might highlight three different types of attention:

- **Proactive attention:** This is where you are fully focused, alert, in the zone and ready to make your most important decisions or tackle your most complex tasks. This level of attention is extremely important and through this article my hope is that you realise just how valuable it really is.
- **Active attention:** This is where you're plugged in, ticking along, but perhaps flagging slightly. You're easily distracted, occasionally brilliant, but often sloppy too. This level of attention is useful.
- **Inactive attention:** The lights are on but no one appears to be home. There's not too much brainpower left and you're likely to really struggle with complex or difficult tasks. Your attention here isn't worthless, but its value is limited.

Of course, these are crude and artificial demarcations, but useful ones to think about when trying to maximise your productivity through good attention management. I have spent the last few years watching my attention management trends and flows and talking to others about their own patterns, too.

We often like to be distracted because it's the perfect excuse for procrastination and thinking less, and Facebook or Twitter win over the report we're supposed to be finishing simply because it's easier to be in those places, having conversations, than it is to get into the difficult thinking we're supposed to be engaged in. Learning to deal with such interruptions is as much about our self-discipline as it is about our ability to say 'No' to the interruptions of others.

The internet is single-handedly the biggest productivity tool and the biggest procrastination tool, all wrapped into one. Can you see an immediate problem here? The point is to be clear with yourself: decide at which times of day you want access to a fantastic wealth of information – and decide the times in the day that you want to avoid the temptation to get caught in a 'YouTube loop' or waste valuable attention marvelling at Facebook statuses, celebrity gossip or BBC website articles. Learn that the internet is your best friend as well as your worst enemy, and at times it needs to be as far away from your impulsive grasp as possible.

'Selective ignorance' is a term Tim Ferriss uses in his book, *The 4-Hour Work Week*. He describes the idea of avoiding ever buying newspapers or consuming unnecessary media. He talks about how he 'shortcuts' this by asking his friends' trusted opinions on political issues so that he can make a good decision about who to vote for without the need for a lot of time wasted engaging in the issues, and how he deliberately avoids gadgets or internet sites that he knows can be distractions. There's also an element of personal preference to some of these: I personally love political news coverage and find the 'games' that politicians engage in pretty fascinating stuff. I would therefore hate to be taking my voting preferences from friends, as good a judge as most of my friends are, and miss all that entertainment on the way. Likewise, many of us love nothing more than relaxing with the Sunday papers and a cup of tea. This is all about compromise though – giving up small luxuries or small wins, knowing that from less comes more.

Saying 'No'

Meetings are a wonderful way to spend time indulging in other people's priorities rather than your own. Avoiding meetings that are not directly concerned with your major projects or areas of responsibility, or for which it would be possible to have an involvement in a much easier way, is critical for a ruthless productivity ninja. We all know that at times this takes some creativity and even sometimes some deception, but spending all morning in a meeting being a luxury 'extra brain' in someone else's project is a ridiculous and churlish waste of your valuable proactive attention. Where possible, just say 'No'.

Phone calls are among the worst interruptions. They cost you time and energy, both in dealing with them and in 'recovering' from them (those, 'Oh, where was I again?' conversations that you have to have with yourself once you're off the call). Try this: for the periods of time that you have decided you will use to tackle proactive attention work, turn off your mobile phone and if you have a phone on your desk, set it to automatic answer machine. Over time, let the decision to leave your phone turned on be a conscious one, so that it feels like you now choose to receive calls for a period of time rather than choosing not to.

There's another great reason for doing this. Voicemail is seriously underrated as a communication medium. It's one-way communication instead of two-way. As such, the caller leaving the message gets to the root of the issue in seconds rather than in minutes and by the time you call them back, you're both halfway through the conversation that needs to happen.

Saying 'No' to yourself

We are social creatures, and the 'ping' of a new email arriving is enough to give us sufficient curiosity to drop our most important piece of work and 'check' who is reaching out to us to say 'Hi'. As we do so, we lose our place, interrupting the most important work of the day, and for what? Usually a circular 'all staff' email telling us that Julie from accounts has brought back some sweets from her holiday to Greece, or a reminder of next week's all staff meeting that you already had in your calendar anyway. Yet most people turn on their email as soon as they arrive in the morning, and turning it off is the last thing they do each evening before heading home. This means that you're constantly prone to interruptions that are easily avoided. Ruthlessly turning off your emails, even for just a couple of hours a day or half an hour in each hour, will give you a clearer head, reduce the noise threatening to distract you, and will help you pay attention more easily to the things that really matter.

Say 'No' and realise that you shouldn't feel guilty saying 'No' if someone is interrupting you at an important point in a key task, when you're on a roll during a period of productive, proactive attention. Try to schedule their query or involvement when you know your attention will be on the wane, thereby protecting your most precious attention and momentum. Don't drop everything straight away for another person's badly timed query.

So that's a brief look at one of the nine characteristics of the productivity ninja, ruthlessness. And before I go, here are five things you can do straight away to foster just a little bit more ninja ruthlessness into your working routines, even if saying 'No' can be hard…

1 Get new ideas off your mind as quickly as possible – silence the 'internal boss' within you and keep your place with whatever you're working on. Capture all of these thoughts so that you can come back to them later (to →

organise, review and, if necessary, do the actions relating to them). Have a pen and paper handy. This only works if you trust that you'll come back to these captured thoughts later on, but can be a great way to stay focused.

2 'Process' email rather than 'check' email – doing email in batches, returning your inbox to zero several times a day, severely reduces background noise and your keenness to go fiddling in your inbox looking for potential distractions. Yes, I did say zero. It takes less than three hours for almost everyone, in my experience.

3 Be very choosy about dropping everything to read, investigate or do something. Stay grounded. In the age of information, opportunity often knocks pretty loudly, through the recommendations of friends, social media sharing and so on. It's no longer that important to scan the horizons. Letting the more important things come to you is much easier.

4 Wear a big pair of headphones; this clearly translates the message 'Stay back, there's nothing here to see'. As well as having the extra practical function that you can drown out the office hubbub with music (which some people love to work to, while others find difficult to concentrate with), it's also a real barrier to you hearing the bits of the conversation or questions aimed at you. If you are interrupted while wearing headphones, it's kind of obvious to the person interrupting you that they're breaking your flow.

5 Take note of Tim Ferriss' 'selective ignorance' advice and try unsubscribing from unnecessary media which feeds on your time. Think about the radio you listen to, the newspapers you read, the time you spend 'scanning' online. You never know, that extra hour a day could present you with the perfect opportunity to boost your productivity by completing all the actions on your daily to-do list, for example.

Good luck, see you next month. **TJ**

Be very choosy about dropping everything to read, investigate or do something. Stay grounded

Graham Allcott

is the founder of Think Productive and author of *How to be a Productivity Ninja* upon which this series of articles is based. To find out more or to contact the author visit http://thinkproductive.com/

Sustainability problem

Professors Pierre Casse and Gazmend Haxhia urge leaders to embrace sustainability as part of today's reset economy

'The first rule of sustainability is to align with natural forces, or at least not try to defy them.' **- Paul Hawken**

Many people simply don't understand the concept of sustainability. Unfortunately, the term has different meanings for different people depending on their cultural background and the nature of the societies in which they live. Moreover, sustainability as a concept has different resonance depending on whether you work in the public or private sector. The problem with sustainability is a complex one and the lack of any common understanding, and the implications it may have for the future of mankind, is an important consideration for the 21st century leader. It is one which must not be underestimated.

Despite the inevitable complexity in comprehension, it is fashionable to express interest in sustainability. However, one can be forgiven a proclivity towards cynicism when one observes advocates, in whose interest it is to shroud the issues in blankets of unnecessary confusion to befuddle and bewilder. When challenged, these so-called 'sustainability' gurus immediately resort to aggression and derision. Let's be honest, one man's confusion is another man's meal ticket.

But what is happening in the real world? In general, most leaders will defend the following assumptions and values; they will claim that sustainability involves maintaining a delicate balance between:

- Ensuring that the organisation and its key operations will endure;
- Carefully considering the implications of their decisions on the day-to-day lives of ordinary people;
- Protecting the environment so that future generations will be able to enjoy the world's riches of which today's leaders are temporary custodians.

While it's true that most leaders will be happy to sing from the sustainability song-sheet since they know that people are concerned, there are a few champions who sing louder than others. These proponents reiterate the chorus in harmony:

- We are destroying our environment and our actions, if we persist on our current course, will hurtle us headlong towards an inevitable doom. We are destroying the very fabric of our world through pollution;
- We are developing our social sensitivity and as we do so we realise that some of our behaviours are not in our best interest and may even be detrimental to those around us. Smoking in public is no longer socially acceptable;
- We have reached an advanced sense, and understanding, of history and as a result we are becoming more attuned to the implications of our behaviour in the present for future generations. We give consideration to the legacy we will leave to our children's children and we feel responsible.

The fears and concerns that underlie the concept of sustainability, despite the lack of common understandings as to detail, are serious and have given rise to movements in society which question the fundamental assumptions which drive our attitudes and behaviour. For instance, no corporation in today's world can afford to ignore the importance of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

A new perspective and the sense of urgency

"Economic activity should not only be efficient in its use of resources but should also

be socially just, and environmentally and ecologically sustainable." – **Warren Bennis**

This is the dawn of a new age. We have come to realise that the world is a much smaller place then we had thought. In the 21st global village, we are all interconnected, and evermore, interdependent. As the global population continues to expand, we must face the fact that the earth's natural resources are finite. It's as if we fell off a cliff and have been falling for some time but now, suddenly, we can see the base of the cliff looming large before us. The urgency to act is gathering pace as we see the base of the cliff on the horizon. As time progresses, do we have the courage to take the decisions that must be taken? Where is the leadership?

With respect to the environment, thankfully, initiatives have been both top-down and bottom-up. On the supranational level, the World →

Few authorities can afford to ignore the need for coherent environmental management policies. The fact is: ordinary people are worried about the future of the world in which they live

Business Council for Sustainable Development, the United Nations Environmental Program and the World Economic Forum in Davos are pressing the need to ensure that sustainability is a key consideration on the global agenda. On the national level, few authorities can afford to ignore the need for coherent environmental management policies. The fact is, ordinary people are worried about the future of the world in which they live.

We can't deny the facts before us. Many of the business models upon which we depend for the betterment of society were designed in an age when the Earth's natural resources were considered infinite. Whole industries grew up around the assumption that the natural resources we need to sustain our survival are inexhaustible. Nevertheless, the disappearance of forests, the depletion of the fish stock, the erosion of the Earth's ozone, and the contamination, in fragile ecosystems, of the water supply tell a different story. Perhaps the most telling evidence comes from the gradual change in weather patterns across the globe.

With respect to trends, the following should be taken into consideration:

- The growth in the global population, and issues arising from demographic shift, can't be ignored;
- The ongoing development of the 'triple bottom line strategy' comprising the three key pillars is still a work in progress:
  - Economic prosperity,
  - Social equity,
  - Environmental protection;
- Sound decision-making on a range of issues related to sustainable development is slow in implementation;
- The use of measurement tools such as environmental assessment, life-cycle audits and the like, have not as yet become established in the leadership mind-set to affect an impact.

Leaders need to adapt the message according to different audiences and deliver something that is easily understood and an accurate reflection of the facts. An emphasis should be placed on the potential results of inaction

Our world is evolving faster than our powers of understanding, and since we have no means of anticipating what the future will hold with any degree of certainty, it behoves us to craft strategies which will aim to create a more sustainable world for future generations.

We have seen recent moves in the right direction. One such example in Albania is the Cement Sustainability Initiative related to the TITAN ANTEA green field project which involves the construction of a new cement production facility and development of two new quarries for producing the main raw materials for the operation over a green area. The project, which was funded by European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and International Finance Corporation (IFC), is considered as a category A initiative by the funding institutions. An Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) was conducted with a focus on Environmental Impact Assessment Studies and Quarry Management Plans. A further example involves Albanian Banking Institutions such as BKT, PROCREDIT, and CREDINS, amongst others that offer credits to home owners for the sustainable use of power through attractive rates which are subsidised by different international partners.

These examples highlight the human tendency to think that it is elected officials and policy-makers alone that will force leaders to take into account environmental management issues. However, reality shows otherwise. The challenge for politicians in democratic societies is that sustainable development strategies require a long-term vision. Those who hold the political power must think beyond the election cycle if they are to have an impact. There is a need to continue to raise awareness and educate people as to the issues involved.

Some business leaders understand that to be successful in today's environment, the business model must appeal not only to the market but to the wider community and society as a whole. Some leaders in the field today already include the challenge of 'environmental stewardship' in their business agendas and in so doing, inspire their people towards a higher purpose in life.

For instance, on the 22 November 2013, some business leaders in Albania, championed a grass-roots initiative entitled 'To Clean Albania'. Employees from a variety of organisations, including from companies owned by Gazmend Haxhia, (co-author of this article), organised a plan of action in which they took time off work to clean the city streets. Although a local initiative, the underlying aim was to highlight the need for a wider sustainable agenda. It is hoped that this initiative will lead to other such actions which will promote a sense of mutual responsibility.

Sustainability: Is it sufficiently appealing?

"The great challenge of the twenty-first century is to raise people everywhere to a decent standard of living while preserving as much of the rest of life as possible." - **Edward O Wilson**

As we have highlighted above, sustainability is a 'new fashion' and one of the challenges is that people across the world still need to be convinced of its importance. Let's consider some of the barriers to be overcome:

- The very word itself is unappealing. We need to clarify and promote understanding in a much more strategic and systematic way.
- It is perceived as a fad. But even so, can we afford not to recognise its importance?
- Many cynics believe that it is being used by others as just another way to make money. There is nothing wrong with making money if it is done ethically and in accordance with the regulatory requirements. However, it is true that many entrepreneurs see 'blue ocean' opportunities in areas where public investment is increasing. Nevertheless private sector initiatives such as those mentioned above in Albania, will lead to a better sense of what the issues are and how to cope with them.
- Some people resent what they see as fear mongering. We are told that unless we act now and modify our attitudes and behaviour we will leave a terrible legacy for future generations. But shouldn't we have contingencies in place in case the pessimistic view is accurate?
- There are those sceptics who claim that there are too many inconsistencies in the evidence. Supporters of this view are right. There is confusion regarding the very nature and seriousness of the situation. There is a need for a unified central reference point or body of consistent evidence on sustainability.
- There is an imbalance between the interests of first world societies and the needs of the third world. Sustainability requires a joint solidarity involving all societies. It calls for a global strategy.

Measuring your sustainability mind-set

Please answer 'yes' or 'no' all the questions hereunder. Be as honest as possible while answering.

Do you believe that...	Yes/No
Sustainability is a very serious issue	
We must consider the impact of our actions on people and the environment and take responsibility	
There is urgency in some key areas	
Business must be an active player in the implementation of sustainability initiatives	
A new type of leadership is required to make it happen	
Many people are quite naive about the issue	
Long term survival will depend on our short term decisions	
To do nothing to sustain our survival over time is foolish	
Everybody must do something to promote the concept and take necessary actions	
To ignore the challenge of sustainability is irresponsible	

Debriefing

If you have answered 'yes' to more than seven of the items above, you are either in the sustainability field and/or you have a passion for the subject. There is a good chance that you monitor the trends closely, support sustainability initiatives and understand that we have no choice.

If you have answered 'yes' to between four and six of the items above, there is a good chance that you acknowledge the existence and importance of sustainability but you are also aware of other factors such as the costs involved, the resistance of some interest groups and the political procrastination.

If you have answered 'yes' to between one and three of the items above, you are not there yet. Perhaps you have some good reasons not to be. But think about it; aren't you missing something very important which could adversely affect future generations?

The purpose of sustainability

We can see three main reasons why we should be interested and involved in the sustainability movement:

- It is fundamentally related to an identity issue: What kind of species do we want to be?
- It is about the quality of life for ourselves but more important for future generations: Do we want to survive?
- It is essentially about the quality of life: In what kind of world or environment do we want to exist?

The leadership challenge

If leaders from the public and private sectors are serious about the cause, they will have to: →

Professor Pierre Casse

is professor of leadership at Moscow School of Management, Skolkovo and chairman of the Foundation Pierre Casse (Belgium)

Professor Gazmend Haxhia

is president of Albania Experience Company and co-founder and lecturer, Polis University, Tirana-Albania

Improve the communication process
Delivering the message about sustainability is one of the main leadership responsibilities. Leaders need to adapt the message according to different audiences and deliver something that is easily understood and an accurate reflection of the facts. An emphasis should be placed on the potential results of inaction. Being proactive and factual is the key to convincing people of the need to make a move.

Create incentives to progress
By thinking and implementing new initiatives which capture the hearts and minds of all people involved, leaders should create a special agenda which promotes these initiatives. They must show that they are committed people. Sustainability is an opportunity for them to show that they have the stamina, courage and intellectual capabilities to make the difference for tomorrow. This implies that leaders from all sectors, countries and disciplines must learn how to accept differences and co-create positive attitudes based on unity and accountability. They must be role models, helping societies to re-invent themselves.

The fundamental question

"The ones who are crazy enough to think they can change the world are the ones that do it." - **Steve Jobs**

Leaders around the world must understand that the sustainability movement is a characteristic of the emerging reset economy. The challenge is to secure a sustainable quality of life for future generations in every society. In order to do so, leaders must constantly and continually review and revise the way in which we live with one thing in mind: there will always be room for improvement.

Sustainability is a first step in the direction of developing our awareness of the consequences of our actions on each other and on the world in which we live. It is also about creating in ourselves the will to manage the spontaneous results of our social encounters and become, perhaps for the first time in our existence, masters of our own destiny. TJ

Holding the butterfly

Paul Matthews' early love of butterflies has given him new insight into managing informal learning

I used to say that it is not possible to manage informal learning without destroying the heart of it that makes it so powerful. I was wrong. There is a way.

But let's start at the beginning...

Many people misunderstand what informal learning is, and this is apparent from the blogs and articles that talk about 'introducing informal learning' or even worse, insisting that the 70:20:10 model is actually a recipe of how 'learning should be done' within a work context.

So first, let's get clear on what informal learning is. If you look around the web and academic publications, most of the definitions of informal learning actually define it by what it is not, rather than what it is. They define formal learning as the structured, scheduled and intentional learning that occurs during face-to-face training or an online course, and then say that informal learning is any learning that happens elsewhere, outside of a formal setting. That is, learning that is unstructured, unscheduled and often unintentional.

This is perfectly adequate provided whoever reads that definition knows what learning is. However, in my experience, many people are unable to adequately define learning.

Here is a challenge for you...

Ask your colleagues and fellow learning professionals, "What is learning?" and of course, ask yourself the same question. What is your answer?

The first answer most people come up with is based on the memorisation of information so that it can be recalled on demand. This sort of learning can be tested with an exam and this definition of learning is understandably common because of the way our education system works. On further reflection, most people go beyond this simplistic definition. They talk about the insight that occurs when reflecting on previously learnt information, and then some talk about learning by observing others, or learning during conversations.

Some people talk about learning being equivalent to behaviour change. In other words, until someone changes their behaviour, they say that learning has not truly occurred. This is certainly true in some circumstances, but what if I learn how to do an activity, but then choose not to do it? From an observer's perspective, my behaviour has not changed, so does this mean I have not learnt it, even though I could do the activity at any time I wanted to?

Whatever definition people come up with, I have yet to hear one that defines learning as something that is 'done to' a person. All of the definitions describe learning as something that a person actively does within and for themselves. Even though the dictionary says that you can use 'learning' as a noun, most people really think of it as a verb. Given this, the phrase 'delivering learning' seems a bit pretentious, and 'delivering informal learning' even more so.

The problem that people have defining learning stems from the fact that most of what they have →

> *Learning comes from experiences, it comes from observing others, it comes from conversations and stories*

learnt during their life has been learnt without them being consciously aware that they have been learning. Humans are a learning species. We would have been consigned to the evolutionary dustbin a long time ago without our ability to learn through our experiences, and modify our behaviour based on that learning. Over thousands of years we have become rather good at learning from experience. So good at it, in fact, that learning is a side-effect of life. On a day-to-day basis, we are largely unaware of when we are learning, and all the things that we learn.

Here is another challenge for you...

Take a 30-minute period and write down everything you learn as you learn it, no matter how trivial, during that 30 minutes. I guarantee it won't be a complete list. Beyond what you learn within that 30 minutes, you are likely to reflect on your activities and make connections to other things you have previously learnt, and this will add another layer, and another.

In order to manage informal learning, it is important first to understand how ubiquitous learning is, especially learning that is informal, and how incredibly good we are at doing it. The vast majority of learning that happens in an organisation, and that enables the organisation to function, is informal. Without informal learning, an organisation would fail. Informal learning is already happening on a grand scale, so anybody who says they will 'introduce informal learning' is talking nonsense.

What we can do is make much of that informal learning easier by adding or changing things within the working environment. Examples of this might be performance support, social media, reference resources, and so on. In addition to this general support for informal learning, we may also want to leverage the power of informal learning to achieve more specific learning outcomes that we think are necessary to assist capability and performance in the workplace. In other words, we want to manage informal learning.

Here is an analogy to give you another way to think of it. We go to our GP when we need some help. In effect, we are asking them to help us get better, to help us with our body so it can do what we want and need it to do for us, so we can live our life in comfort and health.

Now, we know, and the doctor knows, that we all have a very powerful innate healing ability. If we cut our finger, we do not need to give instructions to our finger to heal. It just gets on with it. If the cut is bad enough, the doctor can help by stitching it up and using drugs to help the body fight off any infections. But we all know that the doctors, for all their skills, rely on the body's own healing intelligence. If the body could not heal itself, the doctor's interventions would be completely ineffective.

Let's call that innate healing ability 'informal healing' and the doctor's interventions 'formal healing'.

How does that work as a metaphor for understanding the relationship between formal and informal learning?

Our innate learning ability is so good that it is as much a part of us as our innate healing ability. We had this innate learning ability long before

formal training courses, just like we had our innate healing ability before we had doctors.

Doctors can get amazing results with modern drugs and technology, and we can also get very good at achieving amazing learning results using the latest technical wizardry. But we must never forget that learning is still mostly informal, and without the natural and innate learning abilities of the people we are teaching, our efforts would amount to nothing.

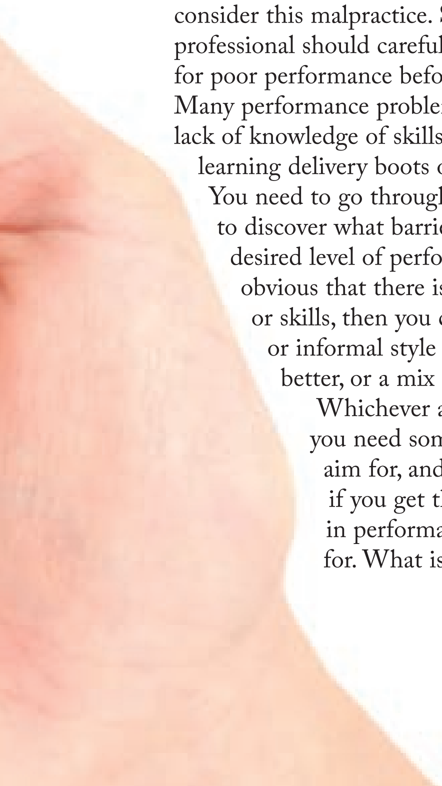
Doctors, at least those without a 'god' complex, are continually asking "How can we aid this patient's body to heal?" They know they are there to aid the body to heal rather than do the healing for the body. You don't hear doctors talking about 'delivering healing'. They know they get their best results by tapping into how healing already works and selectively guiding it, and accelerating it, and removing barriers that stop healing. You can think the same way about learning, so the next time you think about 'delivering learning', stop and think again what it is you are really trying to do.

Doctors know what a healthy body looks like, and how it operates, and this is their outcome as they assist the body to heal. Their outcome is not the healing. This is simply a means to an end. Likewise, the outcome for a learning professional should not be the learning, which is simply a means to an end. The outcome for the learning professional should be an employee who is performing well. So you need to get some clarity on what an employee needs in order to be capable of performing well, and if any of those needs could be satisfied as a result of them learning something new.

If a doctor prescribed drugs, or surgery, or a food and exercise regime without first diagnosing the reason the patient's body is not healthy, we would consider this malpractice. Similarly, every learning professional should carefully diagnose the reasons for poor performance before prescribing a remedy. Many performance problems are not related to a lack of knowledge of skills, so wading in with your learning delivery boots on is not the answer.

You need to go through a diagnosis stage first to discover what barriers are preventing the desired level of performance. If it becomes obvious that there is a lack of knowledge or skills, then you can decide if a formal or informal style learning intervention is better, or a mix of the two.

Whichever approach you decide on, you need some learning outcomes to aim for, and some way to determine if you get the resulting change in performance you are hoping for. What is the desired business outcome in terms of results, and what will people need to do in terms of behaviour to get those results? How can you measure the results and the behaviours in order to assess the effectiveness of your learning intervention?



On a day-to-day basis, we are largely unaware of when we are learning, and all the things that we learn

If you are going to include formal learning, you will probably start thinking about the things people will need to learn and the content you need to assemble and deliver to them as a training course, or perhaps elearning. However, in order to take advantage of informal learning, you need to think a little differently.

There is an obvious tension between the idea of learning happening in an informal way, and somehow managing it. There are many who say it can't be done and that the process of managing anything to do with informal learning tends to kill the informality, and thus the effectiveness. They say the real power of informal learning comes from its very informality, and any interference with that free-flowing informality renders it impotent. That used to be my stance until I realised there is a way to do it.

Imagine how you would hold a butterfly without harming it. I remember when I was a child growing up in New Zealand, my brother and I used to catch beautiful brightly coloured butterflies, and hold them in our cupped hands. Perhaps you did this too when you were a child, and learnt like we did that holding the butterfly too tightly without enough room for their wings did not go well for the butterfly. But if we held them loosely with enough room for their wings, surprisingly they would settle and stop frantically trying to escape. We could open our hands and they would sit there thinking butterfly thoughts, and in time fly off to continue their butterfly life.

I imagine holding butterflies when I think of managing informal learning. Managing it too tightly will indeed destroy the informality and its effectiveness. So the question becomes, how can you manage it loosely enough that it thrives and survives, while not holding it so loosely that you have no effect on it?

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Our innate learning ability is so good that it is as much a part of us as our innate healing ability. We had this innate learning ability long before formal training courses, just like we had our innate healing ability before we had doctors

When you hold a butterfly in your cupped hands, you are not actually holding the butterfly directly. You are maintaining and controlling the boundaries around the butterfly while giving it enough room to flap its wings and move. When seeking to manage informal learning, do not try to directly control the learning itself as you might do so in a classroom. Instead, control the boundary conditions and situation in such a way that the learning you are seeking is likely to occur, while at the same time not interfering with the informal learning itself at the time and place it is actually occurring.

Think of how an apprentice learns in a traditional apprenticeship. They first do menial tasks like cleaning up, and putting away tools. While they are doing this, they learn by observation of the master craftsman and the other tradesmen. And then one day the apprentice thought would never arrive, they get given their first real job to make a simple item. From then on the master craftsman tasks them with ever more complex and difficult jobs, each one designed to help them learn new aspects of the trade. The apprentice learns to use new tools and new materials from observing and asking others, and through his own trial and error.

A good master craftsman holds a safe space around the apprentice so they can learn at their own pace, in their own way, yet knowing they can reach out for help and advice when needed in order to accomplish the task. The master craftsman holds the boundaries. He also controls the situation by tasking the apprentice in ways that match their knowledge and skill. He knows that learning comes from experiences, it comes from observing others, it comes from conversations and stories. To trigger the learning outcomes you want, you need to design activities that will generate the kind of experiences and social interactions that are likely to result in the desired learning outcomes. The design of these activities is how you control the situation within which the learning will occur.

The activities could be a specific task to do or practise in order to gain experience, they could be instructions to have a number of conversations around a certain topic, or could be an instruction to reflect on something. As part of the activity description, you could make the learning outcome explicit to the learner, but it is often better not to do so because doing so is an attempt to control the learning that takes place. Doing so is holding the butterfly too tightly.

The really important aspect of the activities is that they are done without any attempt to control what people learn while they are doing them. They will learn what they will learn, and that will depend on the level of knowledge and skill they start from, how much they engage, and also on their own personal context. That is, each learner will learn something different that is relevant to them, even if they are given the same activity as other learners. Informal learning by its very nature is highly customised learning that is directly relevant to the learner in their own unique situation.

When the activities are completed you need to determine whether the learning outcomes were achieved, and whether the desired impact on performance was also achieved. The best way to discover what was learnt is to debrief the learner on the activities. Consider how the master craftsman would have a discussion with the apprentice carpenter after he has made his very first simple piece of furniture.

I think of this as a four-step process.

1. Define the learning outcomes
2. Design the activities
3. Delegate the activities
4. Determine what happened.

You can manage informal learning provided you don't attempt to control it. There is a difference between managing and controlling. Who ever heard of controlling a butterfly without clipping its wings and destroying its beauty? TJ

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Improved learning

Discarding the idea of being 'expert' can be cathartic in expanding our own learning. **Asher Rickayzen** explains

'In a time of drastic change, it is the learners who inherit the future. The learned find themselves equipped to live in a world that no longer exists.'
- Eric Hoffer, Reflections on the Human Condition

Is there anyone out there working in an organisation that is not undergoing drastic change I wonder? If so, I have not come across them recently. Eric Hoffer's ominous warning encapsulates the threat to all of us and to our organisations: if we fail to become agile, committed learners our future looks bleak. Unfortunately there is no instruction manual for our future, we cannot teach what we do not yet know and our need to strengthen our discovery muscles has never been stronger. Our preparation for the future might be better served by learning how to improve how we learn rather than the actual knowledge we acquire.

Undoubtedly in our interconnected world we have the opportunity to learn things in ways that are faster, more collaborative, more haphazard, more mobile, more virtual and more social. Much organisational learning, however, is still stuck in an old paradigm underpinned by outdated assumptions. I wonder what is stopping us from adopting an approach that is more informal and immediate inside our organisations? What do we need to challenge in the way we have learnt to learn?

My intention is not to make a generational distinction in the way we approach teaching and learning although it is tempting to do so; I do not believe that the crux of this matter is about age, rather it has a lot to do with our ingrained thinking about such things as power, trust, control and vulnerability. Although having said that this is not about age, the times when I have felt the starkest experience of two parallel worlds of learning co-existing has been when I have watched the way my teenage son goes about things and compared his methods to my own.

For him, the most obvious starting point for learning anything is social media. This was his route to learning to play the piano, juggling, skateboarding or working through physics problems, which had defeated him at school. I would imagine that if I transplanted him into the middle of a large organisation and asked him to figure out how to get things done he would feel relatively relaxed until the moment I told him that he would not have access to Twitter and YouTube. He would be baffled by the loss of tools, which he sees as completely integral to knowing what to do. Alternative suggestions about how he should go about learning such as: read the manual, attend a training course or book a meeting with an expert, would be met with the sort of derision and *'are-you-being-serious'* glare that is usually reserved for requests to tidy his →

If communities of interest are actively encouraged to connect more with each other, then knowledge, teaching, and learning will flow

> ***When our identity becomes defined by the certitude of our knowledge there is a danger that we become reluctant learners and trapped experts***

room or clean his shoes. He would see them as irrelevant, time consuming, cumbersome and impractical.

Technology is undoubtedly an important enabler, but this is not intended to be an article about the role of technology in learning. I am trying to get at something else, something in our mind-set that often limits our ways of teaching and learning and inhibits our imagination about the alternative approaches we could adopt. Unless we become more conscious about what these are, particularly within our organisations, unless we make them visible and overt, then we will find it much more difficult to move away from them and towards something new. If we want to change the way we learn then we need to behave differently from the way we previously viewed best practice; we need to unlearn many things we previously held to be true. The danger is that we reinvent the platforms for learning without paying enough attention to the thing that might ultimately make the most difference – our underlying beliefs.

Learning in a different way

Perhaps it is easiest to illustrate this through a real life organisational example of success. The organisation in question wanted to improve collaboration within its sales force, believing that by doing so it would identify more opportunities with its customers. Often, this type of need is met with something familiar such as a training course in working together or a programme relating to breakthrough thinking or advanced sales techniques. However, in this case the sales people who worked in its retail stores were simply encouraged to spend more of their time both talking to each other physically and virtually about the way they currently did their jobs.

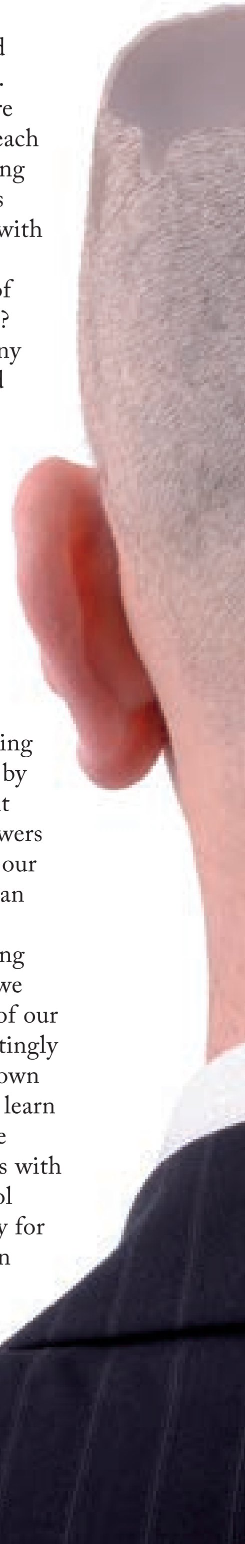
A common thread began to emerge spontaneously: Sundays in store were generally quiet days, so how did different sales people go about increasing sales? This sharing of 'Top tips for Sunday selling' began to have an impact. Everyone began to examine what they were doing more consciously and by taking their own experience more seriously, they began to share it with each other and to experiment with each others' ideas. Overall sales began to rise dramatically, driven by an increase in sales on Sundays, something that had eluded them for years.

This is not a story of a carefully designed learning intervention – it is a story of faith. The faith that if communities of interest are actively encouraged to connect more with each other, then knowledge, teaching, and learning will flow. It took courage to embark on this experiment and the courage was rewarded with spectacular results. How much safer would it have been to remain within the bounds of familiar approaches to change and learning? It is unlikely that it would have attracted any criticism, and equally unlikely that it would have yielded breakthrough results.

This story of learning was social, haphazard, serendipitous and uncontrolled. It is worth pausing for a moment to ask ourselves this question: what are the underlying mind-sets at play here and how have they been challenged in this example?

Trust and inter-connection

One of the most striking aspects was that there was no attempt to prescribe the learning that was needed. Prescription was replaced by trust, a trust that the sales force would want to produce positive results and had the answers within their community to do so. Much of our organisational thinking about learning has an assumption that we are able to identify the learning journey that is needed, but by taking control of someone else's learning journey we immediately limit them to the boundaries of our own experience and imagination; we unwittingly restrict them (with good intention) to our own preferences both in the way that we like to learn and the things we expect them to learn. We confuse our desire to be competent teachers with their needs as learners. Our need for control and predictability inhibits their opportunity for breakthrough and innovation. If we want an organisational breakthrough on learning then we need to ask ourselves the



extent to which we trust others to discover what they need to know.

Self-directed learners

This in turn raises questions about accountability. Do we expect ourselves to be self-directed learners who take full responsibility for our own learning or do we put the onus on our teachers? The evaluation forms so frequently used on training courses imply that it is our trainers who are to be judged. How much more effective might we be if we held the mirror up to ourselves and evaluated our own ability to learn, irrespective of the teaching being provided?

The distinction between teachers and learners can itself be unhelpful and in the earlier organisational example it was never made. In a recent conversation with the head of learning in a very large corporation, we talked about the danger of defining people as subject matter experts. The moment the label is applied there is an implication that their learning is complete. There is an implication that they must know the answers. We have reduced the chance of exploration and experimentation. We have inadvertently discouraged the possibility that we all have something to learn from each other.

When our identity becomes defined by the certitude of our knowledge, there is a danger that we become reluctant learners and trapped experts. As a subject matter expert, can I afford to admit the state of my ignorance? Will my ego be able to withstand the shaking of the ground I stand on? As learners, we are incompetent by definition but who amongst us is brave enough to openly embrace this and celebrate the freedom it offers? Those most committed to learning are at ease with their state of incompetence, continuing to push the boundaries of their knowledge, persistent in their desire to experiment and test, not settling for the petrifaction of becoming 'learned'.

Embracing our ignorance

Perhaps instead of subject matter experts we should be encouraging the idea of apprentice-in-chief. This state of permanent apprenticeship contrasts with the desire to look good and know what to do that is often demanded of us. A true test of our confidence is our ability to admit what we do not know rather than to cling to the comfort blanket of what we do know.

We become sophisticated at putting up our barriers, hiding →

> *Those most committed to learning are at ease with their state of incompetence, continuing to push the boundaries of their knowledge, persistent in their desire to experiment and test, not settling for the petrifaction of becoming 'learned'*

within our armour, protecting ourselves from the threat of revealing our own vulnerability. We slow our learning down by investing energy in constructing our defences when we could be investing it in our exposure.

When I was working with an executive team, these defences were revealed in a situation many might consider benign. As part of a business transformation initiative, the executive team committed to spending time back on the floor working as customer facing staff. It soon became apparent that some of them viewed the opportunity as overly threatening. Despite training and support, they still felt that their lack of knowledge would be embarrassing, something they could not afford to risk being made public given their level of seniority. This anxiety was not revealed during the discussion about organising the activity. Instead it seeped out through their behaviour and was only readily visible when we confronted it together later on as a group. Amongst some of them avoidance was rife; their diaries became blocked, they were only willing to participate within limited boundaries, sometimes they turned up physically but were never really present, spending the time instead working on their own emails or calls.

I do not believe this was a particularly unique group, rather that they were illustrating something that is universal. When we are anxious, when we are desperate not to reveal what we do not know, we close down our opportunity to learn.

In another example, my colleagues and I held a workshop to explore the topic of learning through a series of experiments with a group of senior, interested professionals. Even within this relatively safe environment, among people who actively wanted to learn about learning, our instinctive response to working on problems designed to expose our ignorance produced near panic in some. We noticed how strongly our memories of past learning experiences, often at school, determined our ability to engage with the problems before us now. The stories we tell ourselves are much more powerful forces for closing ourselves down or opting out than I would ever have imagined. Perhaps our biggest discovery during the day was the affirmation that beneath our confident professional exteriors, we all share common traits of vulnerability and a fear of being found out. Once enough safety has been created to reveal this with each other then a significant barrier to learning is dramatically removed. Our interconnectedness is amplified, our fragmentation is reduced, and the possibility of much swifter learning begins to emerge.

New conditions, old attachments

Perhaps during the course of reading this article you have heard a small voice in your head assuring you that different approaches are not needed for your organisation or simply would not work for you. If so, you might pay attention to it – not so that you can obey it but because it reveals your own attachment to the status quo. Perhaps it is a voice of the establishment shared by your colleagues as well.

If we want to change the way we learn, the starting point might be to listen hard to this voice, to hear every 'can't', 'won't' and 'it doesn't apply here' ... and then to decide which of these you want to challenge first. TJ

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The new way to blend learning

A social element can be the factor to make, or break, a blended learning solution. **Randy Emelo** explains

The idea of blended learning is nothing new. Since the advent of e-learning systems, most organisational trainers have expanded their scope and made training more flexible by using a mix of physical classrooms and virtual learning management systems to complete their training agendas. While I think the use of technology in learning is great and can be highly effective, I don't think this process of blended learning as we know it today goes far enough to maximise learning. In fact, a 2008 Corporate Executive Board study showed that within a week, people forgot 70 per cent of what they learnt from a formal training event, and within a month that number jumped to 87 per cent[1].

The current blended processes used to facilitate our training agendas simply are not providing an acceptable ROI that businesses require, nor are they having a real impact on our employees and their job performance. I believe we need to take traditional blended learning into the modern age by giving it a makeover and redefining its practice, namely by blending in social learning.

By examining the 70:20:10 model of learning and development, we know that formal learning only accounts for 10 per cent of the way people learn. It's that pesky 90 per cent, that informal learning part of the equation, that we need to get a grasp on. But we know that people like to learn from other people and from their own and others' experiences, which is why these learning modalities account for 90 per cent of the 70:20:10 model. I strongly advocate that we start taking advantage of how people actually learn and leverage social learning methods to help us wrap our arms around informal learning practices and get greater value from our formal learning efforts.

By adding social learning opportunities to current formal blended training, companies can expand their training utility to encompass the other 90 per cent of how people learn. They can use social learning to extend the training beyond the once-and-done event by connecting people with cohorts before, during and after the event so that learners can tap into people's experiences. Companies can make learning more experiential or at the very least more application and process-based by asking employees to share stories with one another after the training course that focus on how concepts presented in training materials have actually helped them as they apply them to their jobs, or how they have actually worked in practice. Trainers and learners alike can share insights, personal examples, ideas, suspicions, hunches, and more by engaging with one another in targeted ways around the training topics. I call this approach *comprehensive blended learning*.

Savvy companies have already attempted to put this new blended learning into action, although they may not call it exactly by that name. Unfortunately, they do not always execute it well. →

In order to make blended learning more effective and comprehensive, you must bring social learning to the forefront of the process

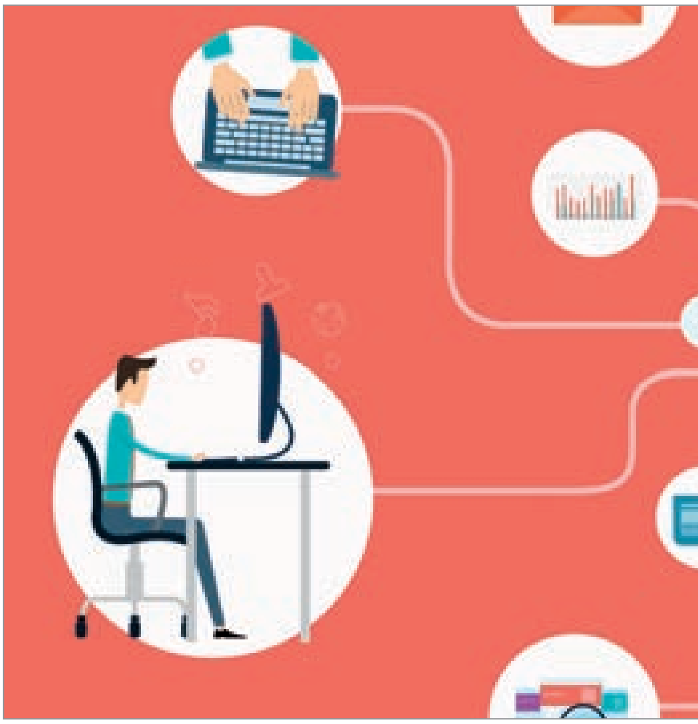
All too often, I see companies fall into one of these scenarios.

Scenario 1: Recommend and release

Self-directed learning is gaining prominence in the training world, as more and more companies want to offer learning that mirrors how adults like to learn. An unintended consequence of this movement in a blended learning environment is a situation I call, 'recommend and release'. This scenario occurs when companies offer too many choices for self-directed activities that support the training agenda, encouraging or directing trainees to supplement their studies, then releasing them without providing any sort of direction or advice for how to do so. Say, for example, a trainer gives trainees a list of recommended learning resources to help them continue their studies after the synchronous training has concluded. With no accountability to take an action, some employees will simply skip the opportunity to continue learning and get back to their more immediate work demands. For those who do want to take action to further their understanding of the training, they are confronted with figuring out the best option. Should they go to the LMS or to an intranet site? Do they ask a question on a social media network or do they look for a book to help them? Do they search online for an answer or connect with a colleague by referencing an online expert finder? This abundance of options with no clear directions can leave people confused about where to even begin if they want to take further action. In this scenario, people typically take no action at all, either because they have no accountability to do so or because they feel paralysed from the overload of options.

Scenario 2: The drag and drop

The drag and drop occurs when a company spends time, effort and money on facilitating a formal training course or event in one system or location and then changes the learning environment to try to enable social learning. Trainers and learning leaders may think they have this covered by figuratively dragging learners from the LMS or classroom and dropping them into an enterprise social network that allows them to collaborate. They might even feel confident that this tactic will work because the social aspect is built right into the LMS, or because the social network is one the whole company has access to. Sadly, this is not usually the case. By removing people from the place where they initially met and learnt, companies create a disconnect between the learning activities in each system or location



and form a barrier to people logging in and using the social system to extend the value of their training. People should not be treated like files on your computer; being placed in a 'drag and drop' scenario will negatively impact engagement and participation in productive social learning.

Scenario 3: Unfocused chattering

Unfocused chattering occurs when a trainer tries to use social learning without giving much thought as to what the desired learning behaviour or goals of the group should be and what training-related topics would be helpful for them to explore collaboratively. The trainer simply gathers everyone in a group online, tells them to ask each other questions and discuss what they learnt, and then leaves the results of what will happen to chance. The learners have the training or course in common, but they are not given instructions for how to use social learning technology to amplify their learning, nor are they prompted to share on a regular basis by the trainer because the trainer is not even paying attention any more. As a result, the learners either don't do anything and the group interactivity fizzles out, or one or two group leaders emerge and dominate the conversation and the direction of the group. While this type of unstructured interactivity isn't necessarily bad, there are very few instances where learners in this environment will engage in any sort of learning that is either related to, or in support of, their

References

1 *Sales Executive Council: Introduction to Talent Development* (PowerPoint presentation), Corporate Executive Board, 2008

2 "Building a Productive Learning Culture." *Learning Quarterly, Third Quarter*, CEB, 2014. http://ceb.uberflip.com/i/337397

training or that helps them perform better at work.

All the trainers I have ever met would never hold an in-person training session without giving major thought and consideration to all the details, like how the training will be conducted, who will facilitate it, what material will be delivered, and the like. So why would we except to treat social learning differently, give it little to no thought, and then expect to still get positive results? For productive social learning to occur in conjunction with our training curricula, we have to shift the way we approach the blended learning practice.

Bring social learning to the forefront

Social learning cannot be an afterthought to this new approach to blended learning. If it's treated like an appendage to your training, it will likely result in a wasted effort. Here's why: recent research by CEB's *Learning Quarterly: Building a Productive Learning Culture*[2] report showed that only 20 per cent of people are effective learners on their own. Without intensive work by the trainer to moderate the conversation and get people to share, the vast majority of people simply will not meaningfully participate or learn in this type of unstructured, learn-if-you-want social environment.

In order to make blended learning more effective and comprehensive, you must bring social learning to the forefront of the process. This means that blended learning should *start* in a social learning environment that has the capability to pull in training courses and other e-learning content. In this way, social learning should permeate the entire process and play a role throughout the entire training progression. It cannot be viewed as an isolated activity.

You should plan for it the same way you plan for the formal, event-driven parts of your training. Social learning activities should aim to drive home concepts learnt during the training event, or to introduce new ones that will be covered later in the formal activities, like courses and books. To stimulate social learning, you must think of activities that will get people to share and collaborate. Activities can happen before or after your virtual class or e-learning course. It is to your advantage to offer a range of options so that you give participants several opportunities to engage.

Here are a few ideas on how you can get started:

- Before the course begins, create a plan for how you will blend or mix more formal, event-driven learning with social learning activities.
- Schedule tasks, polls, questions, reading assignments and more that reinforce lessons learnt or help introduce pertinent or peripheral concepts.
- Use a social learning activity after a formal training event to prompt people to share their thoughts, suspicions, experiences, and so on related to that topic.

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Table 1. New hire training results

	ILT only	With comprehensive blended learning
Final exam scores (first attempt)	80.75 per cent	91.73 per cent
Final exam scores (second attempt)	85.90 per cent	95.73 per cent
I would recommend this course to others. (5-point scale)	4.56	4.84
This course will help me be more efficient, effective or productive in my work. (5-point scale)	4.51	4.84
Time saved	-------	4 hours per participant due to pre-work
Money saved	-------	$270,000 due to reduced travel costs

- Ask participants to read a resource related to your training to introduce a topic or concept and then respond to some pre-formed questions.
- Prompt people to answer questions like: In your experience, how do the concepts work in action? Are there any concepts that don't? What are your thoughts on how these concepts can be used in your role?
- Use deadlines for social learning activities as a way to increase the accountability and ensure that participants will respond and engage in a timely manner.
- Ask participants to take a concept learnt in the training and apply it on the job by a certain date. Then have them relay the results to the group. This will help generate conversation and allow people to share what went right and what went wrong as they put concepts into practice.

My company recently worked with a Fortune 500 technology company that provides a great example of how you can bring social learning to the forefront and make it an integral part of comprehensive blended learning. The company wanted to build a learning environment where newly hired technical support engineers could learn from one another, reference materials, and discuss concepts from the training course in the context of their jobs. They wanted their training to help employees solve customer problems quickly and efficiently. To accomplish this, they implemented a more comprehensive type of blending learning to support their new hire training curricula.

This forward-thinking company blended online instructor-led training with structured social learning activities, which allowed them to leverage a well-rounded learning strategy right from the start. They gave equal thought and preparation to each type of learning and were mindful of how both types would work together to achieve training goals. They used social learning technology as the foundation for the learning that occurred, which created a structured environment where trainers set learning goals, identified core competencies that would be impacted, and built a living library filled with resources and contextual conversations. They planned a well-formed agenda that wrapped meaningful and purposeful social learning activities around the formal learning experience before, during, and after their two-week training events.

Blending learning in this manner allowed this organisation to transform training into a more contextual and continuous learning process. It also provided structure for asynchronous online collaboration and conversations. Instructors had a new way to assign work, provide resources, monitor progress, check understanding, and solicit interaction and feedback. Conversely, students could ask questions, contribute to discussions, and document assignment progress. The company noted that passive attendance could not mask actual progression through the material when they used social learning, and their results prove that (see Table 1). They also saved roughly $270,000 by not having to pay for travel for people to attend a training course in person.

As demonstrated by this Fortune 500 technology company, going beyond current blended learning and training practices and creating a more comprehensive learning environment delivers impactful results and produces learning that is more likely to help employees' work performance. This company not only saw higher exam scores when they blended social learning into their training from the beginning, but they also saved time and money. All three results impact the business and provide positive ROI that can show the true effects of social learning.

I think our industry can progress beyond just using technology to deliver only portions of training. By re-examining the elements we use to blend our learning, we can achieve more holistic and impactful results. We can maximise the learning we have set out to attain by providing training that spans the 70:20:10 continuum. When learning is maximised and concepts can be applied, our employees are better equipped to bring our organisations success. TJ

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Securing the human

Lance Spitzner offers advice on changing people's behaviours to online security

Learning and development professionals have a critical role to play in helping their organisations improve information security procedures. As the organisations come under increasing regulatory and reputational pressure to secure sensitive data, an understanding of the requirements of related security training and best practice is vital for those within human resources, learning and development to be able to help secure their employees.

Based on the available evidence, it is extremely likely that every large organisation will experience an information security breach at some point in time. The threat is increasing with the rise of more interconnected networks and new trends such as cloud, teleworking and mobile devices distributing sensitive digital data to more locations. According to the influential Data Breach Investigation Report (DBIR)[1] which has examined more than 100,000 security breaches over the last decade, 81 per cent of the incidents can be described by just four root causes, namely miscellaneous errors (27 per cent), insider misuse (19 per cent), crimeware (19 per cent) and physical theft/loss (16 per cent).

The biggest factor 'miscellaneous errors' is, according to the report, simply any mistake that compromises security. The main threat comes from human error, such as accidentally posting private data to a public site, sending information →

Reference

1 *Data Breach Investigation Report,* Verizon, 2014 http://vz.to/1C03DpX

to the wrong recipients, or failing to dispose of documents or assets securely. However, lack of security awareness also has a part to play in insider misuse, physical theft and loss incidents. According to the report, not only are insiders misusing systems, but they are culpable by issuing partners with unnecessary security privileges that in turn lead to breaches. Theft and loss incidents including laptops, USB drives, printed papers and other information assets were not confined to taxis and trains. Worryingly, the report found 43 per cent of these losses occurred within the workplace.

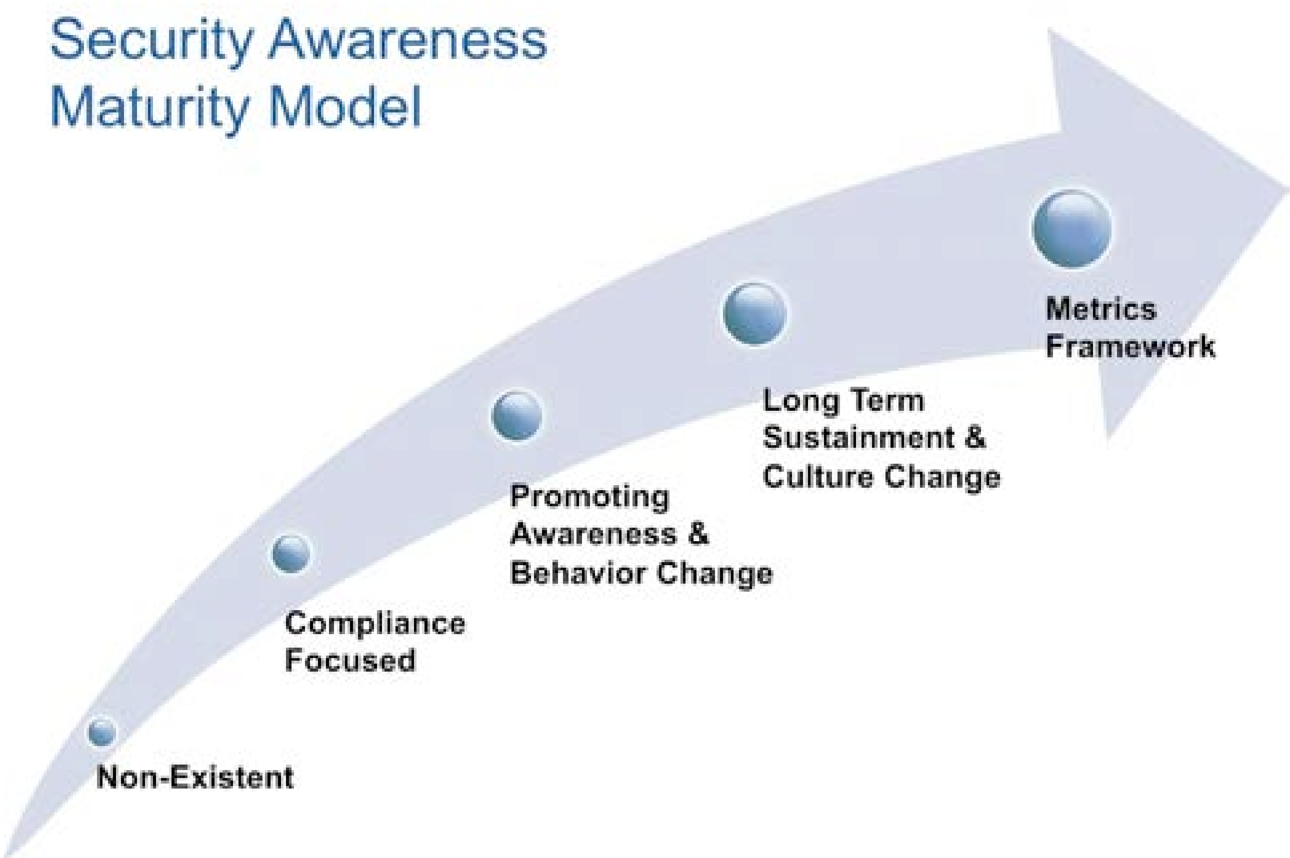
Organisations are beginning to realise that they have to secure the human element, technology can only go so far. As long as people store, process or transfer information, they too must be secured. One of the most effective ways to secure employees is to change their behaviours through active, long term security awareness training.

In the past, organisations have had security awareness programmes, but these were compliance driven designed by auditors to ensure their organisation could 'tick the box'. These programmes consisted of nothing more than a once year PowerPoint presentation or some very basic computer based training (CBT). While this approach ensured compliance, they were not effective at changing behaviours.

In the past several years, organisations have begun a fundamental shift on how they approach awareness and training. They are building mature security awareness programmes that identify and change high-risk human behaviours. After working with and helping hundreds of organisations around the world build security awareness programmes, we wanted to share with you what we have seen work and what does not work.

Long-term management support

The first step to any change is the support of senior management. Years ago it was extremely difficult to get executive support for any security initiative, let alone security awareness. However, things have changed as the rise in cyber security threats has become evident and almost any industry is a target. As a result, gaining executive support has become easier. How you gain support



often depends on your organisation's culture and priorities. The key though is to look specifically at your organisation's business needs. If you are going to share statistics, make sure they are specific to your industry. In addition, while it is often simple for organisations to gain initial executive support, you need to ensure that their support remains long term. Changing behaviour (and ultimately culture) is a long-term effort that can take years to achieve.

Steering committee

Before you can build your awareness programme, you need to build a steering committee or advisory board. What you are attempting to accomplish is huge in scope, you will need the help of others. The steering committee is a volunteer group of individuals from throughout your organisation who will provide feedback and guidance on how to build, maintain and measure your awareness programme. You will need people from different departments, roles or business groups. Some key groups we recommend you include are human resources, marketing, communications, audit, legal, help desk, and finance. These individuals and others will help ensure that you are covering the topics important to the entire organisation with effective and efficient communication.

One of the key departments you should involve from the beginning is your communications team, as they play a key role in your awareness and training efforts. You should also have a senior executive on the committee. While you do not expect them to be actively involved, just having their presence on the committee helps communicate to the organisation just how important the security awareness is. Once you have your steering committee built, you can begin to put an effective plan together.

Who

The first step in building your awareness programme is identifying whose behaviours you want to change. Most organisations start and stop with targeting all employees and contractors in their organisation with the same, standard training. However, after closer analysis you may identify different roles that require additional or more specialised security awareness training, such as IT staff or executive assistants. In addition, you may identify different departments, business units or perhaps even international offices that have unique requirements, such as translation. Finally, you may discover that you also need to have training for people outside your organisation, such as customers, vendors or other third parties. By clearly identifying the scope of your programme and who you want to reach, you can then create a more effective plan.

Threat comes from human error, such as accidentally posting private data to a public site, sending information to the wrong recipients, or failing to dispose of documents or assets securely

Keep in mind you do not have to create a totally unique programme for each target, nor do you have to train them all at once. What we have seen work best is to start by developing a core, baseline programme that applies to everyone in the organisation. Once that is rolled out, you can then build and deploy more specialised or additional training for different roles or departments.

What

The next step is identifying what behaviours you want to change. Remember you ultimately want to reduce human risk in your organisation. As such, you need to first identify what are the greatest human risks to your organisation. Is it phishing, accidental data loss, is it social media or mobile devices? Once you identify the greatest human risks you can then identify and prioritise the behaviours that reduce those risks. This is why it's beneficial to go through the process of identifying whose behaviours you want to change, by identifying the targets of your training, you can then more clearly identify and prioritise their risks. In addition, different roles or different targets will have different risks.

Prioritising risks is beneficial because there is a limit to how much people can remember and how many behaviours can be changed. Many security awareness programmes fail because they attempt to teach people too much. In addition, the fewer topics you have and the less behaviours you attempt to change, the more effectively you can remind and reinforce those key behaviours →

> *After closer analysis you may identify different roles that require additional or more specialised security awareness training, such as IT staff or executive assistants*

throughout the year, resulting in a higher chance of instilling those behaviours.

How

Finally you have to determine how you will communicate your security awareness programme. Regardless of what topics you cover, if you do not effectively communicate your awareness programme you will have wasted people's time. A large part of how you communicate your programme depends on your culture. You want to ensure you are communicating in a manner consistent with your environment while effectively engaging people. Some key things to consider.

- **Focus on personal benefit:** The tools, technologies and threats most organisations face today are the exact same ones that people face at home. From mobile devices and social media to email and passwords, regardless of location, much of it is the same. Tailor your programme to focus on how people personally benefit, not only are you more likely to engage your employees, but now they exhibit the same behaviours both at home and at work. In addition, security becomes part of their DNA, which is even more important as personal and work lives blend together.

- **Reinforcement:** Very few people will change behaviours after simply watching computer based training once a year. Change of behaviour comes from continuous reinforcement. We recommend reviewing training once or twice a month re-addressing a key point every time you do. Once a week is probably too much and people will begin to lose focus. However, once a quarter is not enough, you have to find the right pattern for your environments and culture.

- **Modular:** Make your training modular, have it broken down into individual topics. This way you have far more flexibility in how you deploy your programme. You can assign only the modules that apply to each target. In addition, you can break up the training throughout the year, using different modules to reinforce different topics at different times. Finally, people find a modular approach more engaging as they get the sense of accomplishment by quickly finishing each short training session.

- **Self-education:** Whichever methods of communication you use, the easier it is for people to absorb the content, the more likely you will reach them. This is why traditional face-to-face events can fail, as it can be so difficult to get everyone together at the same time. Self-education should consider materials such as newsletters, blog posts, podcasts, online training or perhaps an internal security portal that people can use on their own schedule. This flexibility makes it more likely you can change their behaviours.

Metrics

Once you have a programme rolled out you will need the ability to measure it. Measuring provides several things. Firstly it helps you identify where your greatest risks are and where you need to focus your efforts. Secondly, it can be used to demonstrate the value of the programme to senior management, gaining you the support you need to keep the programme long-term. Finally, the very process of collecting metrics can be used to reinforce your training. Phishing is a common example, as it is such a common risk. By running internal phishing assessments in your organisation, not only can you measure the risk, but also by informing people when they fall victim, you help train people and effectively change their behaviours.

Summary

To reduce human risk you need to change people's behaviours, and to change people's behaviour you need a well-planned, high-impact security awareness programme. Far too often organisations have a security awareness programme, but the programme is immature, designed only for compliance purposes to meet a certain standard. To truly change human behaviour, you need a mature security awareness programme that has the support of your management and answers the key questions of who, what and how. TJ

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It's all in the game

David Bowman offers guidance on gamification and its role in social learning

'D*o you know what my favorite part of the game is? The opportunity to play.*' - Mike Singletary, US National Football League Coach

Lee, one of the brightest graduates you recruited to the Hong Kong office last year, is on a conference call. But he's not talking business; he's talking tactics to colleagues in Mumbai and London. They are trying to outsmart Jane, a talented analyst on secondment to your marketing department in New York. Lee's team are excited; if they can successfully predict Jane's next move, they'll will move up two levels on the game. They make a move and Jane smiles. She's got it covered. Or so she thinks.

Before you berate them for playing games on company time, this 'game' has been devised and implemented by an L&D team who wanted to engage its talent in creative, collaborative learning that 'games' key business insights and lessons. And it's a game with developmental benefits: it provides them with instant feedback that reinforces positive behaviours and answers the question "how am I doing?" against clearly defined organisational goals.

So called 'gamification' provides rewards that indicate accomplishment and ultimately mastery. It demonstrates healthy competition as well as collaboration across functional areas – encouraging networking and knowledge sharing in the organisation.

Learning from each other, learning with each other

Can social learning allied to the core elements of games, especially those around team play, goal setting and competition, increase our ability to retain, engage and develop talent? Deloitte[1] believe so. In a study of the impact of informal and social learning on talent development, they conclude that organisations with strong informal learning capabilities, including the adoption of social learning tools, are no less than three times more likely to excel in developing global talent.

Having been involved in the design and delivery of stand-alone business simulations for nearly twenty years, I have seen first-hand the power of 'playing serious games', the degree of engagement, motivation and sheer enjoyment people get from the experience. And so I am intrigued by the possibility of building elements of game play more widely into an organisation's learning and development strategy. Given the ubiquity of social media technology and the appetite people show for engaging with each other, social learning feels like a natural home for exploring gamification approaches.

→

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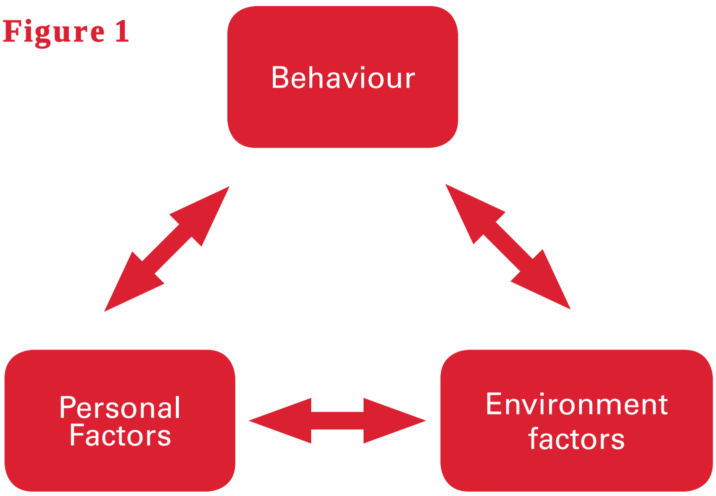
Figure 1



Consider the 'game' as a form of problem or puzzle to be solved in a social context. This can be done as a collective endeavour or in competition, either individually or in teams

3 A. Bandura, *Social Learning Theory,* 1977

4 M. Wu, "What is Gamification, Really?", Lithium, 2012 http://bit.ly/1vU46Ie

5 C. I Muntean, "Raising engagement in e-learning through gamification", 6th Annual International Conference on Virtual Learning, 2011 http://bit.ly/1vbVxf0

What is social learning?

Social learning theory[2,3] claims that we learn principally from the behaviours of those around us. It focuses on learning in the social context and considers how we learn through observation, imitation and modelling.

In essence, the model argues that all three factors interact with each other. Behaviour is driven by personal and environmental factors, which in turn interact and can themselves be influenced by behaviour. There are two important personal factors:

- **Self-efficacy** is our belief in our ability to succeed in specific situations. Our sense of self-efficacy plays a key role in how we approach goals, tasks, and challenges. When faced with failure or disappointment, a person with high self-efficacy is spurred on by the feeling that with the right application and effort they will overcome this setback.
- **Self-regulation** is the ability to regulate our responses in the face of competing stimuli, to defer gratification and to be able to access deep levels of concentration and focus.

State of mind is critical to effective learning and ultimately it is the interaction between the modelled behaviour, personal factors and environmental factors that will determine the effectiveness of the learning. With this in mind, consider the 'game' as a form of problem or puzzle to be solved in a social context. This can be done as a collective endeavour or in competition, either individually or in teams. Thus the game element can be a means to encourage both cognitive and social engagement. Put simply, the fun of solving the problem allied to the fun of playing with or against others.

All in the game

Michael Wu[4] defines gamification succinctly: "…the use of game attributes to drive game-like player behaviour in a non-game context". Common game attributes that are typically employed include levels, badges, points, progress bars, leader boards, and virtual goods. Each serves to motivate users by providing feedback, recognition, status, and the potential for competition among users[5]. And according to Hsin-Yuan Hang & Soman[6] game attributes can be divided into self-elements and social elements. Self-elements focus on the individual competing with themselves and self-achievement. Social elements focuses on interactive competition or co-operation.

There are many benefits associated with gamification but it appears to be commonly accepted that it can have a positive impact on motivation and engagement. Gamification also taps into the social desire for self-esteem and the desire to interact[7].

In terms of driving engagement through games, Zichermann[8] recommends following the three Fs: feedback, friends and fun: "the best gamification lets people know how they're doing – through rewards, points, scores, progress bars. 'Friends' means a social aspect, to promote competition and collaboration. 'Fun' means just that – make learning enjoyable."

Does gamification enhance social learning?

There are four key questions we must ask to assess whether gamification enables and enhances social learning effectiveness:

1. Do games increase attention levels?
2. Does the format and process of playing a game improve retention?
3. Are individuals more able to reproduce the knowledge they have gamed?
4. Do games increase intrinsic motivation?

- **Attention**

There is much evidence that engaging in friendly peer-to-peer competition creates a positive engagement with the content – a narrative or story encourages an interest in "what happens next?"

- **Retention**

Retention has been shown to be improved by rewarding people for their ability to retain and recall information. Recognition can also be provided through the use of gamification techniques such as leader boards, badges and progress bars.

- **Reproduction**

Kapp[9] concludes "When learners receive content on a daily or weekly basis and are quizzed on that content with some additional game elements, the effect is long-term knowledge retention and knowledge application".

- **Motivation**

The most effective gamification includes elements of narrative, story, challenge and continual feedback. The feedback could be as simple as where am I on the leader board? But it prompts the learner to ask: 'What does that mean for me? What do I need to do about it?' This encourages self-reflection and personal goal setting that gives the individual room and scope to negotiate their development from their perspective.

A review of the literature reveals a good deal of support for gamification. Huckabee & Bissette[10] see it as a mechanism for making learning fun and increasing learner motivation and accountability. It is easy to envisage gamification sitting alongside e-learning with the addition of game-like elements being used to boost participation and interaction in a virtual development session. Done well it can provide the learner with:

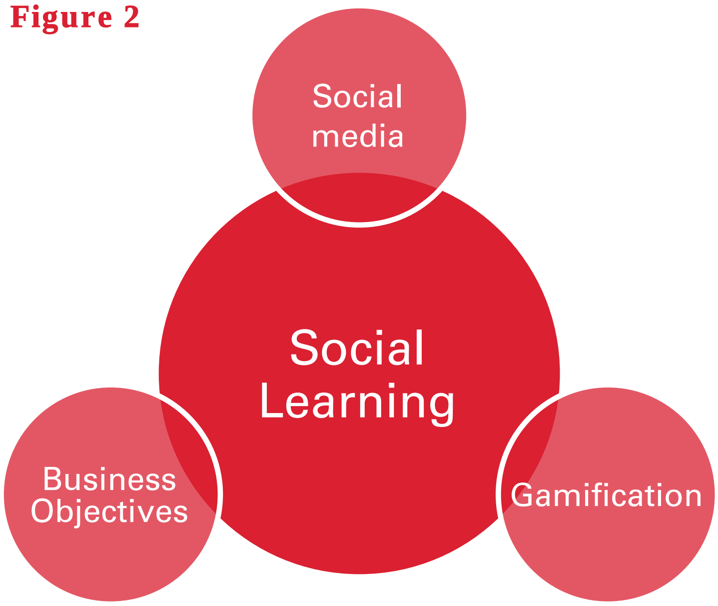
- Quick measurable feedback
- A view of their relative performance
- A reward for interacting successfully with other users
- Rewards for discretionary effort through bonus rewards
- A way to retain content in a playful and engaging manner
- The features of social media sites that encourage connectivity and promote sharing of information and ideas.

The role of social media

Social media provides an opportunity to aid and promote social learning, and adding gamification elements can make it a more powerful way of delivering social and informal learning to the organisation.

In a number of organisations, a valuable social media tool already exists in the form of SharePoint. It has the flexibility to add content as required. It is also possible to develop portals that can bring together learning management systems, social media and social learning. Though gamifying the learning is rare, it is increasingly common to observe elements of this being introduced into a blend of learning methods and means on offer.

Figure 2



A way forward

Leveraging social learning through gamification requires careful design and implementation: simply sprinkling elements of social learning and adding sparkles of gamification to existing interventions is dangerous and could be counterproductive.

We must be absolutely clear at the outset on the organisational objectives. The intervention is designed to support, including understanding the target audience and the context within which they are operating. We need to understand what are we looking to do differently – what behaviours do we need to change, adapt or modify? Only then can we create a solution that applies the elements of gamification that will enhance the learning experience and that are consistent with the target audience and in achieving the organisational objective, Figure 3 provides a suggested model.

The key question for practitioners is whether you want to introduce gamification into your social and independent learning strategy? Here are some important considerations:

- By definition, a game cannot be gamified but practitioners can make a decision to introduce game elements into their L&D process and programmes. Merely adding games to an L&D programme is not gamification.
- Gamification relates to behaviours not outcomes[11]. If you wanted to increase the speed of take-up of a business critical learning module, say around new regulatory requirements, you could gamify it by adding a leader board that →

6 W. Hsin-Yuan Huang and D. Soman, *A practitioner's guide to gamification of education*, 2013

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Figure 3

creates a league table of completion dates and times. The gamification piece could in theory drive the required behaviour that people access the learning module more quickly.

- It should not be seen as a replacement for solid content and/or face-to-face interventions but rather as an addition that supports achieving objectives.

Will games help to drive appropriate behaviours?

Punished by rewards?
It is here that care is needed. We should not rely solely on extrinsic motivators to drive desired behaviours. There is evidence that using extrinsic rewards dissipates intrinsic motivation. The desire to gain the 'reward' becomes the game, and the desire to complete the underlying learning is reduced.

Gaming the game
We needed to ensure that individuals are not simply gaming the game, engaging in strategies that are designed to beat the game and add nothing to the learning of the individual or the organisation.

Incentivising or creating compliance?
How will we use the data gathered from the gamified activity? The perception of how this data is used will affect how people behave – does it go 'on the record', is it used to in the reporting process, etc?

Play is a serious business
Some will question the value, validity and output from such interventions and any attempt to persuade them that play is a valid, and some would say vital, part of the learning process. In fact, play – as any parent will testify – is a crucial form of rehearsal, exploration and experimentation, the building blocks of learning.

In conclusion

Social learning is a powerful driver of individual and organisational learning. I have witnessed the power of highly motivated action learning teams working independently on business critical issues that deliver real and sustainable benefits.

The most successful create a social learning space to capture, organise and debate their ideas. The missing element is often the gamification of the process that would allow the organisation to understand the extent of the learning and development that is taking place outside of formal learning and development interventions.

Social learning and gamification can be an important ingredient when designing 'best in class' learning interventions. However, we should bear in mind that highly motivated action learning teams also have face-to-face time together to understand the dynamics of their team. 'Cold starts' are hard to make work, but if you ignite the team first you are creating the conditions for them to succeed.

Whatever tools and techniques we decide to deploy, our learning and development objectives must align to the business's objectives. So when deciding to employ gamification techniques and create social and collaborative 'development space', the 'game' must provide individuals with a clear line of sight to the organisational objectives they are working together to deliver. With that in place, let's play and have some fun together along the way! **TJ**

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10 Huckabee, I., and Bissette, T., "Learning made fun – Gadgets, Games and a safe place to explore", *Training Industry Magazine*, Spring 2014

11 Op cit. W. Hsin-Yuan Huang and D. Soman

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L&D's role in managing talent

A lack of career development is set to cause problems for firms. **Steven Ross** reveals the findings of recent research

Recent research from Penna has revealed that employees leaving organisations are citing 'lack of career opportunity' as the main reason why they're moving on, and that this is more important to them than pay and reward. Combine this with the finding that more than one in three (38 per cent) organisations are expecting to see an increase in staff turnover over the next 12 months, with a third (33 per cent) having already seen a rise in resignations over the past year, there is clearly an opportunity for learning and development professionals to help plug this talent exodus through creating more compelling opportunities for their employees.

But before throwing budget at the next L&D programme, professionals need to know where and how to invest in order to offset resignations and aid attraction, retention and development in the future. With this in mind, it is important for professionals to consider a number of important points.

Match career planning with business objectives

It's all well and good knowing that employees are keen for their careers to develop, and for them to maintain a steep learning curve, but development programmes must align with business objectives as well as the aspirations of employees. Otherwise,

there is the risk that skills developed will be redundant for the business in the near future, and that organisations won't get the best ROI from their L&D spend.

The second point is recognising which employees are genuinely interested in up-skilling and applying those skills within their current role or indeed a progressive role at their current organisation. Currently, 35 per cent of organisations are working on their succession planning for the next twelve months, but if employees don't have a desire to stay with the business or learn new skills then these plans may go to waste. It's important to prioritise investment and resource where the business will reap the rewards and that means identifying individuals who are committed, engaged, and likely to stick around.

There should be regular dialogue with employees to understand what they want from their career and where they want to go. This needn't be in the form of an annual appraisal – in fact, regular informal discussions work best as a means of really understanding what motivates individuals and how they see their career developing. Employees may want to move up, take a different route across, or to hone skills in their current role, but having this up-to-date insight will enable managers and L&D professionals to align individual aspirations with business goals – while identifying gaps for the future, which can be plugged through recruitment or training.

Formalising career development

Nearly half of organisations don't have a formalised approach to career development (49 per cent), making it difficult for employees to understand how they can develop within the organisation, or how to have conversations about their future. Not having a formalised approach can also create inconsistency in practices across the business.

While organisations won't be able to eradicate resignations through introducing formal career development practices, it will have a dramatic and positive impact on retention statistics as we already know that perceived lack of opportunity is the main reason for employees to leave. However, it's really important that formal career development fits into the organisational culture and feels organic and natural to the employees, as otherwise it can have an adverse effect. For example, if a business is used to embracing new technologies, then an internet-based career development portal could work well. This then allows employees to take charge of their own careers, being

Without knowledge of business direction, career advice and development plans could be inaccurate and result in disgruntled employees who feel like they're going in the wrong direction

guided through various workplace development scenarios on their smart mobile devices or office desktops. If the organisation is more traditional, and technology is not heavily relied on, then workshops and coaching may be more effective. The best of both worlds is a blended approach.

For businesses and L&D professionals that are looking to break the mould and try something new, it's crucial to have a robust communication strategy in place to support the rollout and continued engagement. Objectives should be set out clearly in advance so that all involved are clear about the benefits of doing things in a different way, and measurements should also be put in place to benchmark success – as well as securing buy-in from the budget holders and those that will be involved in the L&D programme. Otherwise, there is a risk that the project is undermined before it even starts.

Spend budget wisely

While nearly half (48 per cent) of organisations have seen increased investment in learning, spend is still unlikely to be back to pre-crisis levels for the foreseeable future. Therefore, it's crucial to get a strong return on investment, by starting with the end goal in mind and working backwards, while ensuring plans are informed by measurable goals, detailed understanding of employee motivations and ideas which are in keeping with company culture. L&D professionals should think about the results they would want to present to the board at the end of the year and specifically how they'll be achieved. Remaining focused on outcomes throughout the journey is the best way to ensure that programmes remain on track.

Our research found that classroom based courses, e-learning and one-to-one coaching were →

found to be equally the most popular learning interventions (at 21 per cent each), so considering the drivers behind the programme and desired outcomes is crucial and will help inform the approach. E-learning, for example, makes learning highly accessible and can be rolled out across divisions and geographies relatively easily – for example, like implementing a new customer relationship management system. Equally, it may be that the business would really benefit from strong leaders, who need to learn how to move on from being technical experts to becoming leaders, which may require more tailored methods such as one-to-one coaching or mentoring.

When considering where L&D spend is best made, professionals should also be mindful of the latest developments – such as the increased use of gamification in the workplace. While gaming is a well-established industry, it is in its relative infancy in the HR market. But the potential is huge, with gaming technology already being used to aid L&D through reinforcing learning in bite sized chunks and pushing snippets of learnings and challenges daily. This technology can also be used to encourage employees to take charge of their own career and learning, rather than being spoon-fed development plans which can be time-consuming on managers and counterintuitive for an employee's development.

Prepare managers to hold career conversations

While the ultimate goal is to encourage employees to take charge of their own career development, guidance is still needed from their managers, as well as L&D and HR professionals to ensure they are empowered and confident enough to move their career in the right direction. However, Penna's research found that a quarter (25 per cent) of managers are not trained to hold career development conversations with staff, meaning that advice given may not necessarily be delivered in a way that will help drive engagement and retention, or worse still – those career conversations may not happen at all.

Managers need to be aware of the business's future plans and the skills needed to achieve such goals. Then they can help advise employees of where there are opportunities to develop and what their future might look like in the company. Without knowledge of business direction, career advice and development plans could be inaccurate and result in disgruntled employees who feel like they're going in the wrong direction, or that their development plans are too changeable to make a big enough impact.

To move to a model where employees take responsibility for their own careers too, managers need to know how to support this and set the framework. Instead of saying "in six months' time, you'll be in this job", it's about helping employees to navigate their career and know what development opportunities are available in the organisation, so they can set their own goals. Managers also need to know what they can say 'yes' and 'no' to, and be confident enough to relate a strong business case either way to the individual or to L&D or HR teams within the business.

Preparing managers for such conversations reinforces employee confidence and respect for them too, as we know that people leave bad managers, not a company. Workshops that focus on role-playing typical employee scenarios can be a valuable training tool, as conversations can be practised and analysed before happening in a real workplace scenario.

Frequency of career conversations

Penna's research shows that when formal career conversations are taking place, they are typically doing so annually (52 per cent) – with only 11 per cent of those we surveyed saying that informal conversations happen on a regular basis. However, we know that the latest generation to join the workplace are expecting much more frequent feedback and conversations about their performance and career progression opportunities. In fact, research has found that 41 per cent of millennials prefer to be rewarded or recognised for their work at least monthly – and in some cases more regularly than that.

By having informal catch-ups more often, younger generations stay more engaged at work, in their career and company. This can present a time and resource challenge for managers, but if they have had the right training and support to make career conversations productive and timely, it can actually save time in the long run and ensure younger employees perform better. These informal conversations can be held anywhere too, such as over coffee or lunch.

There is still a place for more formal reviews, but it is worthwhile bearing in mind that informal top-up sessions will help to aid engagement and retention. This is something that can form part of an attraction strategy too, and L&D professionals should be working with HR and resourcing professionals to showcase how career development is part of a business's fabric. This can be a really attractive proposition for candidates if communicated effectively.

Currently 57 per cent of organisations say career

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1 Research by Gallup: http://bit.ly/1v7A4Td

2 Next Gen research by PwC: http://pwc.to/1vZJxv7

development is not a component part of their talent attraction strategy, but it could be used as a valuable tool. For example, when considering a candidate may have two job offers, with a similar salary, job title and location, having a career development element in the package could make one role more favourable than the other, with the employee feeling more invested in and excited about their future within that particular organisation.

Conclusion

What is apparent is that the economic recovery has put career development firmly back on the agenda for both employers and employees. L&D professionals play a central role in ensuring that development budgets are spent wisely – in a way that the organisation and individual can both feel a positive impact of such an investment. By doing research up front, about the direction and future goals of the business and talent needed to get it there, L&D professionals will be able to map more clearly what skills are required and whether this can be developed in-house through training or whether external support or recruitment is needed.

Making employee's part of this process, by understanding what their future career aspirations are, can help to align individuals to business needs. Employees in turn will have a greater understanding of where they potentially fit in the organisation's future, creating an opportunity to carve a role for themselves, whilst being given the tools they need to develop their careers and have greater direction. L&D professionals need to be clear from the outset about what they want to achieve when developing and implementing a career development programme, aligning goals and setting benchmarks for success. If they do this, then in turn businesses can access the talent they need to grow and individuals can benefit from being re-engaged with their careers and the organisation. TJ

It's really important that formal career development fits into the organisational culture and feels organic and natural to the employees

Steven Ross is head of career development at Penna Plc. Find out more about the research at http://bit.ly/ZC5mVS or visit www.penna.com

On being a judge

Jane Elliott Poxon reflects on why judging is more than personal CPD or professional pay back

There are a number of awards that celebrate excellence and innovation in training, learning and development at both local and national levels. More often than not, the majority of us only become involved if we submit an application for a programme which we have developed or delivered. Very few of us put ourselves forward to be considered as a judge. Is this because we are waiting to be asked, have insufficient time or we feel that we are not sufficiently well qualified or do not have sufficient gravitas for such an onerous role?

When I was first asked to be a judge for a learning and development award, I too had many misgivings. First of all I was not sure if I was up to it. Would I have enough knowledge or skill to judge the work of others and would the other judges be judging me? Would I have enough time? Would I have to write long and involved reports? And why should I do something for free? Maybe there is an element of self-doubt in all of these questions that arises from not having previously submitted any programme of my own. After all, how could I be a judge if I have never been a winner myself? If this were to be a prerequisite then no doubt the pool of judges would be very small indeed and entry to that hallowed role would be even more daunting than it already appears.

Earlier this year, with the benefit of hindsight and the confidence of previous judging experiences, I put myself forward as a judge for the *TJ* Awards 2014. Not surprisingly, some of the same questions were in my head but were tempered by previous positive experiences of judging. I can honestly say that these questions needed only a fleeting address. I was happy and excited by the prospect of having the opportunity to review programmes that have merited being singled out for a possible award and to discuss learning and development issues with those that have either developed or been affected in some way by the specific learning interventions. I was also keen to learn more about what lies behind successful learning and development programmes in 2014 and the issues that organisations face in the context of today's economic and increasingly global environment. The precious resource of time was duly found and I found myself absorbed in reading about different learning interventions that have challenged and changed individuals and organisations.

In similar contexts, you might hear colleagues say some of the following in relation to some other non-paid activities: "It will look good on the CV", "It is good for my CPD", "I am giving something back to my profession", "It might broaden my network and lead to other things", "I hear that the prize giving is a good event and the food is excellent". All of these may be valid and reasonable statements and I and colleagues have sometimes used them to justify being a judge when speaking to more sceptical colleagues. What is true, however, is that when you do agree to be a judge you always find yourself working with new colleagues who share your passion for training, learning and development in all of its various guises. I find that it revitalises my enthusiasm, challenges my perceptions and, in some cases, sparks off new ideas. There are times, when reading a submission, when I have been challenged to find anything new or innovative and sometimes feel that the writer could have been a greater advocate for their programme or that

It revitalises my enthusiasm, challenges my perceptions and in some cases sparks off new ideas

the programme is still work in progress. In such cases, judges will provide positive and encouraging feedback that can inform any further submission. When, however, you do read a submission that has been written with enthusiasm and passion then this does shine through and you cannot wait to hear more about the programme and how it has progressed beyond the submission.

So what does judging involve? In my experience, the process of judging follows a fairly standard process. First, judges are given a number of applications to review in paper or electronic format which they independently read through and grade before coming up with a short list. Of course, the number of submissions can differ greatly and can sometimes be no more than a dozen or can be over thirty, depending on the popularity and profile of the awards and the category that you are judging. The positive point to note here is that all submissions have been restricted to a specified →

word count. Grading or review will normally be against a set of criteria set by the awarding organisation and nearly always requires judges to mark individual submissions against each of the criteria using some form of numeric scale. This is followed by discussion with a panel or another judge when a short list is agreed of entries that are either visited or invited to make a presentation to a panel of a minimum of two judges – usually those who were party to the short listing.

The visits or presentations are opportunities for the judges to really learn more about the programmes and question a small representative team of usually no more than four people made up of deliverers, participants and sometimes line managers. It is also the opportunity for the organisation to fully showcase their submission.

This is the really interesting part of the process during which a judge can sense the enthusiasm of those involved and often get another dimension to that shown in the written submission. It is through speaking to line managers and learners that the intervention comes alive and the strength of the programme can be seen. The visits or meetings are not interrogations. They are never confrontational, quite the reverse, and although time-bound, so that no one entry has the advantage of being able to present greater detail than others, the entrants make full use of their time to showcase their achievements. During this phase, the learning and development specialist can be secondary to the discussion, unless of course the particular award is for learning and development specialist of the year!

Visits or meetings are then followed by the difficult part; deciding the winner and any special commendations. As a judge, you have to put your personal specialisms, preferences and prejudices on one side and consider each entry on its individual merit. Sometimes there will be an obvious winner but there can often be spirited discussions with colleagues when there are two or even three submissions each with their particular strengths. Of course each award will have its own set of criteria that the awarding organisation will have stated but when making the final choice the discussion more often than not focuses on the impact that the programme has had on individuals and the success of the organisation and how the organisation has been able to capture the return on investment.

And so the winner, or winners, are chosen and the various organisations and individuals are invited to attend an event. Here winners, potential winners and judges come together to await the formal declaration of the winners and the awarding of prizes. These are usually superb and well-planned events and are a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the excellent work of colleagues in the training, learning and development field. There is always an air of expectation on the evening as not all in the audience will be a prize winner on the night. They will only know that they are in the top six or so organisations that could have won a prize. This only adds to heighten the tension and eventual joy of winning a prize. Of course some attend but do not win but there is equally recognition that their submission was worthy of being considered as excellent and has often made it through a number of very competitive rounds. Hopefully this will serve to motivate further submissions in the future rather than stifle any enthusiasm in the bud.

Sometimes programmes have been successfully resubmitted in the following year. One year later, they have been able to demonstrate the return on investment and sustainability that that they had not been able to show in their first submission.

All of this sounds not in the least bit onerous and although some effort and time is required of any judge, making space to take part does bring its personal rewards. So what is involved? The traditional format of reviewing written submissions can be daunting and time consuming especially when you think about the amount of time and care that has gone into each submission. However, reading these submissions can be fitted into your workload and good use of brief notes on iPads, tablets or laptops, and in some cases on hard copy, are useful at this stage; they need only be sufficient to jog your memory when shortlisting or to support your questioning during a visit or presentation.

The interview or visit stage is probably the least flexible part of the process as diaries need to be synchronised and in some cases distances travelled. This is usually a day or two days of activity but can be more. Following the decision-making, there could be a requirement to provide a short written piece that can be used as the citation at the awards ceremony or to give feedback to the applicants that have requested it. In total, therefore, no more than say five days maximum of effort will have been taken out of your diary and much of that can be fitted in around other work activities. Of course you could include time to travel to and attend the awards ceremony to which judges are invited but having attended a number these events that are so joyous it is hard to see why a judge would not want to attend as, by then, you have an interest in seeing the winning team celebrate.

As the judging process comes to an end what can a judge expect to have learnt or gained from the process? You will probably have your name in a programme, you have a new entry on your CV, it can provide an excellent line in your CPD log, you might also be able to add other names to your LinkedIn or other networking profile and can boast of attending the gala event; so possibly job done. If it was all so transactional, why then do so many judges do it again? Possibly because they do genuinely learn something new. They go away inspired and in some way refreshed, and possibly because all in all, although it is not paid and does take up time as well as sometimes being stressful as deadlines approach, it is a really enjoyable process and celebrates what is the best in our chosen field of work.

It is through speaking to line managers and learners that the intervention comes alive and the strength of the programme can be seen

Personally, reflecting upon the process of judging for the *TJ* Awards this year I was once again encouraged by the enthusiasm for learning that exists within our professional community. Did I learn anything? Yes, I think that I did. At this point, I feel that in a time honoured way, I should give a reference to support my reflection and learning but I will refrain from this as my learning has, as ever, been informed by my previous experiences rather than any text. Already I have started to explore the different ways in which I can incorporate social media and other e-technologies to support learning into my own practice. In addition, I have been reminded that the most effective intervention is not always on a grand scale and does not need to be expensive. It can be a discrete intervention at very little cost, but linked to the organisation's strategic objectives and the impact can be huge both for the organisation and individual learners who can see the personal benefit of engaging in learning. In effect, I have been once again reminded of the reason why I was drawn to our professional community in the first place. **TJ**

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The bottom line

Sara Hope explores the importance of conversation in developing people and providing business success

Conversations are one of the critical pillars of business success. They are the essence of how we connect, learn, share, inspire and deliver results. They have the power to evoke excitement, passion, curiosity, and they can also lead to fear, anxiety and distrust.

In a constantly changing world, there has never been a stronger imperative for leaders to have greater flexibility to engage in conversations in different ways. The old models of command and control and issuing orders is no longer a viable approach to engaging colleagues. Growing numbers of millennials are hungry for autonomy.

They expect to have their opinions listened to and be given the opportunity to make their own decisions, their own mistakes and to learn during every step of the way. To compete and prosper in a growth environment, organisations need people who can ask and seek answers to new questions, solve new problems and anticipate barriers before they arise.

This requires a willingness by leaders to think differently about themselves. It challenges the traditional notion of expertise and hierarchy within the system. Promotion is no longer the merit of those who have relied solely on their technical expertise or developed the latest high tech product. Smart leaders in today's organisations need to be able to have conversations that inspire others to follow and think for themselves. It equates to having an ability to encourage creative thinking and valuing the views of another human being. It comes from the ability to ask great questions and the ability to truly listen. And it comes with a degree of vulnerability to speak honestly when things go wrong, and the resilience to learn from mistakes. Leadership is a conversation.

'Coaching' conversations

There are many powerful approaches to learning and raising performance which can help guide and inform our conversations. For example, coaching, mentoring, action learning to name but a few. With these approaches come frameworks, definitions, competencies, models, as well as a high degree of our own subjective experience.

Over the summer months I had some coaching in one of my hobbies, sailing. I was told the coach who would work with me was an expert. They would show me various techniques to ensure my performance was at the top of my game. My experience of the conversations was one where I was 'told, shown, demonstrated' what to do. While that was helpful in the moment, when it came to tying knots three weeks later, I had forgotten the critical steps. My other experience of coaching during the summer was a peer coaching conversation with a colleague. This was somewhat different, more like a 'thinking conversation'. I was encouraged to reflect on a meeting, explore new perspectives and challenged on what I would do going forward. In this situation I left with a deeper sense of ownership and responsibility. The outcome and what I chose to do was mine and mine alone.

Whatever 'label' we choose, we have to acknowledge and notice our subjective experience. The meanings I associate with 'coaching' may be very different to yours. While definitions can provide guidance and give a sense of comfort, they can sometimes prohibit creativity and a sense of being in the moment. If we become too fixated by which hat we are wearing, we are in danger of losing our ability to be truly present and focused. Too often we see leaders who say "I am going to coach you now" because that is what they have been taught on a course. To the receiver this may be perceived as "oh great, I'm one of the chosen ones", or it could mean "oh no, have I got a problem?"

I was talking to a CEO recently whose aim was to grow the leadership capability of his business which employed approximately 2,000 people. The language of 'coaching' didn't strike a chord, and yet when we spoke about bringing more honesty into conversations, he started nodding and said, "Yes, that's exactly what we need to be doing."

By giving permission to leaders to remove labels and focus on the quality of conversation, they are able to work in a more expansive rather than reductionist way. Adopting a coaching approach to conversations can leave the other person feeling more empowered, confident and motivated to take responsibility. It can help create new perspectives, and develop insight. Using coaching as a way of 'being' rather than 'doing' enables leaders and managers to have conversations in a different way, leading to different outcomes. Fundamentally, this requires a shift in mind-set and in practical terms this is the shift from telling people, to asking people.

> ***This skill is about strengthening our muscle to be in a dance and when the music changes, to have the ability to change our steps***

How to shift approach

There is tremendous potential for organisations to reflect on how they are equipping leaders and managers to be skilled conversationalists in all aspects of their working relationships. Helping leaders consciously move from using phrases such as, "You need to.., You should.., I think it would be best for you to…" to "How could you.., What might work.., When could…" sounds simple, and yet presents itself as a challenge to leaders at most levels.

This skill is about strengthening our muscle →

to be in a dance and when the music changes, to have the ability to change our steps. If leaders are truly able to be in the present and have the skill to flex according to what's needed in the moment, exquisite results can be achieved. A leading retailer recently delivered a mentoring programme with the main aim being to engage its people to take more responsibility in developing themselves and facilitating the development of others as well as the business drivers of staff engagement and retention. Although this programme was labelled 'Mentoring' there was clearly a strong desire for both mentees and mentors to transfer the classic coaching/mentoring skills of listening, questioning, summarising etc into their wider role as leaders, and to embrace a coaching approach to everyday conversations.

A great example of using mentoring/coaching skills in a wider context was highlighted by one mentor who became facilitator for a global cross functional team at the same time as starting mentoring. She described using her raised awareness through participating in the mentoring programme to help navigate her way through difficult conversations, be more attuned to what people were not saying as well as what they were, and being able to enable other people's thinking through incisive questions and allowing time to think. A second mentor described his coaching approach to everyday conversations as "free range mentoring", offering a further example of this broader application of skills.

So what does this mean for those of us who have roles in supporting leaders to adapt to the new territory? We have choices. One mechanism is to create new structures, processes, competency frameworks and complicated models. As a manager, these can often give us comfort and enable us to 'tick the box'. In environments and cultures where ROI is paramount to success, and where structures and processes reign, challenging the status quo and looking at solutions from a different perspective takes courage.

Too often we build our learning programmes in a segmented fashion. We create workshops that focus on the skills we need to engage with clients. We create a different one focusing on the skills to hold a robust performance management conversation. And we create a third one tailored to how to mentor your team. What we often fail to do is take a holistic view at the common thread that unites all these interventions – the conversation. They all incorporate a key ingredient that ultimately dictates the impact we have. *How* we have the conversation, whether it's as a mentor, as a consultant, as a sales person, as a teacher or as a parent, is what makes the difference. When great conversations happen, the effects can be more powerful than almost anything else. Building conversational muscle for application across *all* the roles a leader plays not only makes economic sense, it can impact cultural change across the system.

Building an environment for skilful conversations

So how can organisations foster an environment to enable leaders to be better conversationalists?

1. Build the core skills

The core skills that underpin coaching, are vital to leadership at any level.

Listening (and being listened to) is probably the most crucial element of development and engagement. Along with asking insightful and powerful questions, listening provides the essential ingredient required for the greatest business and organisational success. And yet, how often are we on the receiving end of being talked at? One of the most fundamental social skills available to us all is the ability to get into other people's minds and to see the world from their point of view. As Sheryl Sandberg maintains, "there is no absolute truth – there is my truth and there is your truth".

In the current climate, with the frantic pace of our work and lives, we have developed bad habits and we often need reminding about the value and importance of slowing down, not interrupting, listening to each other and being present.

2. Speaking from the heart

We need to be encouraging leaders to speak from the heart during conversations with their teams. This means being willing to share more of who I am, me as a whole person and not just 'at work', to encourage and empower others to do the same. Simon Collins, UK chairman at KPMG recently wrote in *The Guardian* about leaders needing to talk authentically about advancing women in the workplace. He shared stories of his own experiences and also explored the importance of marrying up what you do with who you are. "Ultimately, I don't want to be two people – one person at home with my family and another at work. When I leave KPMG, a test of my own legacy will be whether our 11,500 employees feel they no longer need a work persona," he said.

The essence of speaking from the heart and being mindful of the experience we are creating for those we are engaging with is critical to achieving successful change. By bringing more of ourselves to any conversation – the willingness to think out loud when we don't know the answer, share what we notice, tell our stories and voice our opinion – we are being courageous and in being so, inspiring courage in others. Modelling this as a leader in all our interactions means we can continue to ignite small fires which over time will turn into a brighter beacon of light.

It takes inner strength and a level of commitment to speak honestly and openly. If we want our leaders to take a stronger ethical stance, speak from the heart, and engender a spirit of inclusivity in the way they work, we also need to see this modelled in the coaching profession.

3. Dare to disagree

If organisations are to truly appreciate and value their people, they must recognise the tremendous potential that can be unleashed when human beings experience 'permission' to think for themselves. This means evolving from a position where there is only one right answer to centring on an approach that appreciates diversity and difference in thinking. Constructive conflict and healthy disagreement is positive.

It takes courage to have the honest and truthful conversations that very often don't happen across our businesses. Leaders need courage to be able to share their experiences in an open and honest way and listen to different experiences from which to learn. They need courage to dare to venture into previously uncharted waters and explore places where there may be a difficult, or even no answer yet. This means acknowledging our fears and equipping individuals to become skilful in difficult dialogues.

4. Embedding an internal coaching approach that supports constructive conversations

For there to be a cultural shift in the way colleagues communicate together, a coaching approach to conversations needs to be embedded across the organisation. Often it is easier to be drawn to delivering one-off short-term interventions rather than focusing on the long-term sustainability.

It is vital to have a solid place for coaching in organisations, and if we are going to gain the maximum value from what coaching has to offer, it has to be strong from the inside out. One of the striking themes from the 2013 Ridler Report on Executive Coaching was the trend in organisations to grow internal capability rather than use external coaches. Internal coaching was seen to be growing by 79 per cent of respondents and one of the principal reasons reported for the increase is that internal coaches understand their business better than external coaches.

What we often fail to do is take a holistic view at the common thread that unites all these interventions – the conversation

Adapting the way people have conversations, and having a broader systemic approach to coaching and mentoring can enhance the effectiveness of teams and reshape the work environment. Leaders have a critical role to play in creating cultures of constructive conversations.

5. More investment in groups

While one-to-one conversations bring deeper awareness, insights and learning to an individual, integrating coaching skills and bringing them to bear in group conversations can lead to greater challenge, and organisational learning across the wider system.

There is no doubt working with a group is a different experience compared with that of a one-to-one relationship, and we would be wise to support leaders in having robust group conversations as well as those with individuals. It requires an appreciation of one's self and our impact within the system. It takes an ability to be prepared to question and challenge what is happening in the moment.

Conclusion

Bringing about any change, engaging people and getting buy-in isn't as easy as it sounds. Going back to the basics of conversations, and having the right kinds of conversations at the right time really makes a difference. Equipping leaders with a broad coaching skill set means we are offering organisations the chance to harness the innate wisdom, intelligence and creativity of their workforce, rather than holding on to the outdated assumption that my way is the only way.

There is no doubt that every interaction by every leader during every conversation helps shape the culture of the organisation. If we hold onto this premise, are we not wise to equip our leaders to be more skilful conversationalists? **TJ**

Sara Hope is co-founder of the Conversation Space. To find out more visit www.theconversationspace.com

Go on, give something back!

Susie Finch talks about GivebackUK and encourages L&D people to get involved

Learning practitioners usually like a challenge, so here's one for you: Imagine your staff are spread over several different locations across the UK. The majority don't have a desk as such. Oh, and you've also inherited a mishmash of different hardware and software at the different locations (some of which are a bit remote). And finally, you have very little budget for L&D – or even none at all. How do you support your staff? The answer: you get creative!

If this scenario seems at all far-fetched then think again, as it's the reality faced by most UK charities. There are around 164,000 charitable organisations in the UK.[1] Martin Baker, CEO and founder of the Charity Learning Consortium (CLC), estimates only the minority (around 1,000) have any kind of budget for developing their staff.

According to Skills Third Sector, more than 700,000 people were employed in the sector in 2011, with a staggering 10m people volunteering at least once a month.[2] So that's a huge 'army' of staff and volunteers, the majority of whom have little or no access to formal learning and development.

This lack of budget to support the very people that help the most vulnerable in our society is a depressing scenario. During the recession, money became particularly tight for charities, as the third sector was hit by public spending cuts, combined with a fall in financial donations. Continuing hardship and unemployment for many in society, combined with the Government's policy of expanding the third sector's role in delivering public services (David Cameron's vision of the 'Big Society') means the demands on charities – and on their specialist knowledge and skills – has never been greater. So although charitable giving is recovering, charities' purses have been well and truly squeezed.

This situation is something that has been troubling Baker. He set up the CLC more than 10 years ago, at a time when few charities were using learning technologies, to provide an affordable and effective L&D solution for the sector. What a difference a decade makes, as technology-led learning has since been embraced wholeheartedly by cash-strapped charities. Now 130 members of the group share e-learning resources and enjoy networking to share their experiences, best practice and expertise across L&D. As a result, more than 500,000 third sector staff and volunteers benefit from being able to access the consortium's online learning.

A recent survey conducted by Towards Maturity,[3] the learning technologies benchmark organisation, found that charities are increasingly innovative in their use of technology for learning. For example, charities are more likely than corporates and public sector organisations to use learning technologies to improve the induction process, and to help tackle 'soft' skills – including leadership and management, team-working and communication. The research, which was supported by the CLC, covered the entire third sector.

Laura Overton, MD of Towards Maturity, says that charities have also become "fearless" in applying technology to formal learning, with many reaping substantial benefits without compromising efficiency. For example, some 41 per cent of charities report that e-learning has reduced learners' time away from the job, while 39 per cent say it has improved the quality of learning delivered.

The same piece of Towards Maturity research

Donald H Taylor

Lars Hyland

Laura Overton

showed that members of the CLC save even more money than non-members using learning technologies: CLC members reduce their learning costs by an average of 42 per cent, compared to 21 per cent by non-members.

Loving video learning

According to research carried out by Towards Maturity, 60 per cent of organisations use best practice video content for learning and development. The majority (52 per cent) use video footage of best practice from within their own organisation.

Statistics taken from The New Learning Agenda - Talent:Technology:Change, the 2013 learning technologies benchmark report from Towards Maturity.

But for the overwhelming majority of charities that have little or no L&D budget, even joining the consortium is beyond their financial reach. So Baker has been looking for a way to support them and their staff. He needed to find a way to deliver knowledge and expertise en masse, but at low cost – and video seemed like the perfect answer.

"Companies like BT and Google are known for using video to share best practice within their organisations – both organisations have shared their stories at the annual Charity Learning Conference – and this really got me thinking," says Baker.

Inspired by these great examples, he came up with the idea of GivebackUK – a not-for-profit initiative to provide free video learning for the hundreds of thousands of third sector staff in the UK, along with the millions of volunteers.

"Using online video is the ideal solution to reach such vast numbers of people to share learning cost-effectively." says Baker. "It's the perfect 'marriage' of technology and information: using technology to reach the greatest number of people, so they can access information anytime, anyplace, and anywhere."

It's a sentiment that's shared by Donald H Taylor – chairman of the Learning and Performance Institute, and now an ambassador for GivebackUK: "It's hard to believe that less than 10 years ago YouTube didn't exist. Today video is such a popular and powerful way to share knowledge. To my mind it's the perfect medium for GivebackUK to reach a massive audience of charity staff and volunteers, so I'm looking forward to getting more involved."

Using film-maker Dr Mark Davies, around 200 'talking heads' videos are being created in order to, initially, freely share L&D best practice. These will form *The Expert Series* – the first video learning library from GivebackUK, designed →

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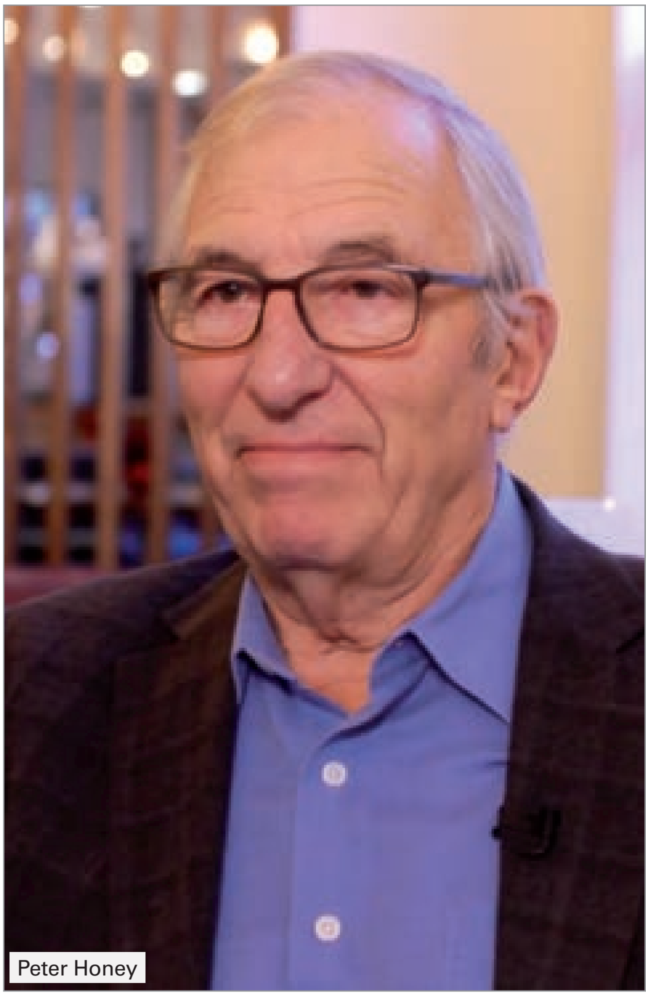
Peter Honey


Martin Cousins

"I'd love every learning and development professional to get involved, in order to pass their knowledge on to a potentially massive audience. If you love learning – and I've yet to meet an L&D practitioner who doesn't – then do please join in" - Martin Baker

to inspire charity learning practitioners. *The Expert Series* is due to be launched at Learning Technologies next year.

Well known 'movers and shakers' from L&D have got involved, such as Peter Honey, Jane Hart, Charles Jennings, Clive Shepherd, Liggy Webb, Lars Hyland, Laura Overton, Martin Cousins and social media and engagement advisor to the CIPD, Perry Timms. Like Taylor, Timms has been so impressed with the project that he's also become a GivebackUK ambassador.

"GivebackUK is the perfect way to capitalise on this thing we've come to know as 'the sharing economy'," says Timms. "Generosity and gratitude could help us all raise our game and deliver what we can to learners – irrespective of overriding financial and resource constraints. A chance to give something back, showing we're a profession where generosity really is valued."

L&D professionals working at the coalface of L&D have also been enthusiastic about getting involved in the GivebackUK video learning project. Amongst the learning and development professionals who've been filmed for *The Expert Series* are Denise Hudson-Lawson from UK Parliament; Abigail Bracken from O2; Kristofor Swanson from JPMorgan Chase, Darren Bartlett from RSA and Niall Gavin from First Group.

Creating a free video learning library for the third sector is an ambitious, long-term project which is not without its challenges. The greatest, as you'd probably expect, being time and money. So far the consortium has been funding this project, but Baker is looking into possible sources of financial support, at grants and government initiatives that may support learning within the charity sector.

In the first year, video content will be shared with members of the consortium, while a platform to enable content to be freely shared with the entire third sector is being developed. This also means that content can be evaluated by members of the consortium before going live to a far bigger audience.

The GivebackUK filming team, made up of Mark Davies, Rosie Haighton, community manager at the CLC, and Martin Baker, have become well known fixtures at conferences, interviewing experts and learning practitioners.

Plans are already in place to start filming in 2015 for the next two video learning libraries.

In the frame

Mark Davies, film-maker for GivebackUK, gives his top tips for creating successful videos for learning and development:

- Audio is key: Either get the camera close to the subject (without being too close up) or look for an affordable wired lapel mic.
- Stabilise the camera: If you're filming interviews, get the camera onto a tripod to eliminate shaky video.
- Never film portrait: If you're filming on a smartphone, always film landscape and not portrait.
- Brief and prepare: Agree with participants what the questions and themes will be well ahead of time (preferably days and not minutes!)
- Frame right: Use 'the rule of thirds' *(Google it to see how it's done).*
- Authenticity: Throw out the actors and the green screen. Only use real people – they're the real experts.

130 members of the group share e-learning resources and enjoy networking to share their experiences, best practice and expertise across L&D

The Everyday Series, as the name suggests, will focus on everyday skills, such as presentations, interview tips and time management. *The Charity Series* will cover bespoke charity topics, such as trustees and fundraising, to support the day-to-day running of charitable organisations.

Baker hopes that 500 videos will have been created by the close of 2015, and that GivebackUK can then enter its second, significant stage – offering free video learning resources to the UK charities, and their huge army of millions of staff and volunteers.

In the meantime, Baker is keen to get as many organisations as possible involved in 'giving something back', by passing on their knowledge, expertise and skills. "Everyone is good at something. GivebackUK is just a creative way of digitally recording an individual's expertise," he says. "I've seen the overwhelming power of collaboration from forming the Charity Learning Consortium, so I'd love every learning and development professional to get involved, in order to pass their knowledge on to a potentially massive audience. If you love learning, and I've yet to meet an L&D practitioner who doesn't, then do please join in." TJ

Susie Finch is a writer and editor who specialises in learning and development. Connect with Susie on Twitter @ SusieFinch or on LinkedIn

Every L&D practitioner has something to offer: Volunteer your time to be filmed, to share your knowledge, expertise and experience with thousands of charities.

- Pass it on: Share the GivebackUK details within your organisation, and encourage whole teams to get involved.
- Open to all: Any sector can join in. All topics relating to professional development are relevant.
- Give something back: Taking part fits perfectly with Corporate Social Responsibility policies.
- Help submit funding applications: GivebackUK is looking for someone with experience of applying for grants and funding – can you help?

Fundamentals of action learning

In the final part of this series, **Richard Hale** explores the key steps in action learning questions

In this final article, I take the perspective of the action learner who is working through the Action Learning Question (ALQ) process. The stages and associated steps are presented with trigger questions to help guide the action learner over a three- to four-month period as they create and then tackle their ALQ based around a business-related problem.

ALQs

My own contribution to the theory and practice of action learning has developed through work with clients who have adopted and adapted the ALQ process. This has been reported on in *TJ* since its early development in the late 1990s and over the years, case examples have been published of how ALQs have been applied in many sectors ranging from financial services to construction and central government in order to support leadership and professional development[1, 2, 3]

The basis of the methodology is that 'wicked' or messy problems found in organisations, those that cannot be tackled by straightforward project management, may be reformulated as questions which are then addressed by action learners with the support of their learning set. ALQs provide a practical approach to organisational research which is conducted and informed by practitioners within the business.

By following the process of scoping the ALQ, it is possible for the action learning journey to be recognised at postgraduate level, leading to professional management and leadership qualifications. In this way, continuing professional development (CPD) is evidenced by individuals who have actually made an impact on the business.

Example ALQ

Below is an example of an ALQ developed by a client in the care profession where centre managers are typically recruited from professional patient-facing roles. The challenge is that local care centre managers are required to promote their services to the local community and to register fee paying service users. This is in a climate of increasing competition with other service providers starting up in certain regions of the country. The head office identified that the share of the market is being lost in these regions and client registrations are falling despite government statistics showing an increasing need for care services.

The question was formulated as: '*How can we enable our care centre managers to become more commercially minded?*'

The four stages of the ALQ process and some of the questions are shown below with some illustrative references to this ALQ. All of the stages shown here required discussion amongst action learning set members in order to enable the essential social dynamic of learning 'with and from others'.

Scoping

SI –What is the problem?

Problems are issues that, if they are not tackled, are likely to lead to bigger problems in the future for the business. In the example above, the problem relates to the fact that some regional care centres are underperforming financially which fundamentally threatens the future of the business.

S2 – What is the overall question that comes from the problem?

Initially the question in the above example was formulated as: *'How can we ensure care centre managers become better at sales?'* Consultation with stakeholders led to the realisation that this was a challenge that related not simply to the sales →

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process but was about developing commercial awareness in a broader sense.

S3 – Who cares?
It is important to consult with stakeholders and clients who have an interest in the question and who will benefit from the action learner's work on it. In the care centre organisation, this meant consultation with centre managers, regional managers and commercial and marketing managers in head office.

S4 – What is in it for me?
You are more likely to be successful in tackling your ALQ if you can see there are potential personal benefits. Benefits could include personal or professional development or the acquisition of new skills.

S5 – What is the link to strategy?
The problem being addressed as an ALQ should relate to the organisational strategy.

Knowledge mapping
For more details on the knowledge mapping process see the second article in this series in *TJ*, September 2014[4]

K1 – Who can help me develop my knowledge map?
A knowledge map is a collaboratively generated visual representation of areas of knowledge which are relevant for further research. This process can help broaden one's vision of relevant fields to investigate. Knowledge maps can be developed within an action learning set and with other colleagues.

K2 – What is my own map of relevant knowledge?
You do need to map out how you see the connections between different themes or areas of knowledge as a starting point. For instance, the action learner working on the example ALQ above saw this as relating to the theme of sales training and instinctively wanted to investigate what sort of sales training could be offered to care centre managers.

K3 – What 'sky' research can I do?
When you start sharing ideas in terms of relevant

References

1 S. Caulkin, Reg Revans, Inspired management thinker of 'action learning'. *The Guardian*, 8th March, 2003

2 R. Hale, 'Adding Real Value with Work Based Learning Questions'. *Training Journal*, July, 2004

sources of knowledge within a learning set this may lead to unexpected insights. Set members in drafting an enhanced version of the knowledge map for the ALQ above suggested it would be worth investigating the self–image that carers have relating to their professional roles and careers. This led to a realisation that delivering more sales training alone would not address the problem.

'Sky' research may include comparison with the practices of other organisations. In the case of the ALQ above, visits were arranged to different types of organisation in the care sector that were operating in a commercial context.

K4 – What 'ground' research can I do?
'Ground' research means looking for data within the organisation which might inform decisions and actions. In the case of the ALQ above this involved interviewing managers from different care centres nationally and exploring their views regarding the challenge. This revealed there was significant resistance from some managers who felt that sales was not their role and that their main purpose was delivering effective care to service users.

K5 – What 'underground' factors are there?
Research into the 'underground' forces showed that there were competing political views relating to the organisational purpose and these were polarised around the desire for sales and the need to provide effective and safe care for service users.

Action

A1 – What conclusions do I draw from my research?
In the case of this ALQ, a key conclusion was that the strategy of offering training for managers in sales processes and skills was unlikely to lead to an improvement in the commercialism of the care centre managers.

A2 – What needs to be done?
Action is an essential requirement in action learning and in the case of this ALQ, a number of actions were proposed including sales training but also a review of recruitment, induction and professional development for care centre managers. It was also recognised that taking a commercial approach included, for example, improving the generation and use of management information.

A3 – What do key stakeholders think?
Key stakeholders interested in the ALQ should be consulted for input into the terms of reference for the ALQ and provided with feedback informally and formally as the question is addressed and conclusions are derived from the research.

A4 – What happened as a result of my action? & A5 – What further action is required?
The action learner should report back to the learning set, possibly over several cycles of action learning, the outcomes of the actions taken. There are three key questions set members should ask each other:

- 'What have you done?'
- 'What will you do?'
- 'What have you learnt?'

Learning

L1 – What have I learnt about the issue?
Learning about the *'issue'* in the example above relates to the challenge of reconciling the business need to provide effective care with the need to operate commercially.

L2 – What have I learnt about the organisation?
Action learning is about addressing organisational challenges and action learners should consider what they have learnt about the organisation, for instance about the culture and the sources of power.

L3 – What have I learnt about myself?
Action learning provides an opportunity for personal reflection about oneself which often leads to powerful insights.

L4 – What do I need to do to evidence this learning?
If the ALQ is accredited at higher education level then evidence of learning is incorporated into a written paper and presentation to assessors.

L5 – What further questions remain?
Where ALQs are being applied across an organisation as a strategic tool to support innovation and change then the ALQ is likely to surface other questions that need to be addressed. In the example above, it was recognised that further ALQs should be tackled which had been spawned by the initial question. This included questions such as:

- 'How should we develop our approach to recruitment and selection of care centre managers?'
- 'How can we assess the ability of potential care centre managers in terms of commercial awareness?' TJ

3 R. Hale, 'Bright Horizons for Action Learning'. *Training Journal*, July 2012, p25-28

4 R. Hale, "Fundamentals of action learning", *TJ*, September 2014, p15–17

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Building the internal links

Sarah Cook and **Steve Macaulay** take a look at the importance of the internal customer chain and how L&D can strengthen it

Where do you begin to become truly customer-focused? This article takes a long hard look at what needs to be done to build a strong chain within the organisation to meet the needs of the customers it serves. We will examine how to approach this from an internal perspective, using examples from companies and organisations we have worked with. We will focus on an often neglected element of delivering a great customer service: how to engage internal departments in order to create a customer-centric culture throughout the business.

Learning and development professionals have a valuable role to play in working with internal teams in the delivery of exceptional service. We will examine what this role entails and how L&D needs to influence in many ways within the organisation to achieve the goals of delivering high quality service.

Internal alignment to the customer

Delivering a great customer experience is high on many organisations' agendas and businesses' annual reports almost always have a section about how important the customer is to the organisation. To this end, we often work with organisations to help their leaders and teams become more customer-focused. For many, the first focus is in enhancing the customer experience through the development of front line staff. But it needs to go beyond this. It is now generally accepted that organisations with high levels of employee engagement throughout the organisation deliver better levels of customer experience than those businesses with lower levels of employee engagement.

This is the tip of the iceberg and engaged employees are only a part of the solution: multiple areas need to be examined which together make up a chain. Any one link which is weak or broken can mean that service to the customer is badly damaged. This is all too common. As a customer, how often have you heard phrases such as: 'I'll have to check with Head Office', 'Marketing never told me that', 'It's being processed and is in the system but I can't tell you when you'll have it delivered'? A recent Ofgem report into failing customer service in energy companies[1] found customers who complained listed the following catalogue of problems:

- Details difficult to find
- Got different/conflicting information
- Took a long time to get through
- Given wrong number
- Passed around too much
- Could not get through at all/no answer
- Could not get the right person.

This sorry tale of poor customer experience points to multiple areas of failure and demonstrates that often poor external customer service has its roots in poor service between departments and teams. For example, a manager waits in vain for the IT department to fix her computer; a big order is held up because the purchasing department is slow in issuing important purchase orders; the finance department needs more justification to rectify modifications to a product; a companywide travel ban is imposed, limiting essential contact with customers; levels of financial responsibility mean customers wait for the next level of authority to clear expenditure.

These all point to the fact that customer-orientation cannot happen in isolation. It needs everyone in the company to be committed through their actions to delivering for the customer – be it internal or external. This means that the executive team needs to clearly communicate the organisation's intent to deliver the best customer experience – and be seen to mean it.

Best practice organisations have a clear roadmap for how they will drive and deliver the customer experience. They recognise that it is a long-term journey that needs to be sustained over time. The executive must communicate the importance of *everyone* delivering an exceptional customer experience. They set expectations that each department or team has an important part to play in delivering this ambition. Learning and development has a key role to play in helping identify how the behaviours, skills and knowledge of individuals across the business can be developed to help support the strategy.

The internal customer

One of the essential mind-set shifts is to create a culture where those employees not at the customer front line believe: 'If I'm not serving the end customer, I'm serving someone who is'. This focus on the internal customer means that every team and every department, irrespective of where they are in the organisation, has a customer – the people to whom they supply a service. This is often a substantial shift for many people who are not used to viewing the people with whom they interact as customers and in many cases see them as 'nuisances'.

Leadership and vision

An internal department will not sustain long term customer-centricity unless its leader believes and shows by his or her actions that delivering a great customer experience is imperative for the team. L&D people can work with departmental leaders to help them create a vision of the customer experience the team can deliver. However, the creation of the vision or ambition should not be done in isolation. L&D can support the leader in involving team members in team meetings, discussions and focus groups around who are the team's customers and the ambition of the team in terms of customer experience. This process can help build engagement and commitment to the vision.

What is it like to be a customer of yours? Some company examples

To change attitudes, people need to know what it feels like to experience the satisfactions and frustrations of receiving the services they provide. It is essential to use customer insights as part of this process. What do the people, to whom the department provides a service, believe the department or team does well? What can they improve? What services do the team provide that no longer meet the customer requirements?

Finance team, business to business
We worked with a finance team in a business-to-business organisation. As a result of the customer feedback, the team discovered that one major report, which they produced on a monthly basis, and had done so for many years, was not valued by their customers. Customers only looked at one section of the report and discarded the rest. Many people in the finance department were involved in collating the information for the report but no one over the years had stopped to ask if this was useful to their internal customers. The team discovered through feedback and discussions with their internal customers that there was different information required which was of more value to them, leading to higher levels of internal customer satisfaction and efficiency.

Internal teams in a retail organisation
Internal teams across a retail organisation with whom we worked decided to seek feedback from the retail network – regional directors, area managers and branch managers about the service provided by head office and their distribution centre. The retail network rated each internal function and gave it a score on a scale of one to ten for how well each team was providing a service that the network valued. The resulting league table and qualitative feedback spurred on each team to develop an action plan for improvement. The feedback process was repeated on a six-monthly basis and has been a major driver in improving internal service quality.

Engineering employees across the business
An engineering business holds customer experience workshops for all its employees on an annual basis. As part of the intervention, everyone is asked to identify internal blockages and barriers to delivering a great customer experience. The leadership team reviews the resulting outputs →

and engages team members in leading and being members of project teams to address the key issues. As the customer experience workshops are held on an annual basis, all employees also receive an update on the improvements the project teams have made each year. They then have the opportunity of discussing ideas for further improvements to enhance the customer experience.

Service standards and metrics

Another step in creating an internal customer experience culture is to be clear what standards internal customers expect of the team. Using internal customer feedback, L&D can help the teams identify service standards. These team standards or team customer charter outline the basic levels of service that the customer will receive. They can apply to anything that is relevant to customers: turnaround time on emails, how a report should be presented, how to answer the phone etc.

The benefit of setting the standards, and doing this in a collaborative way with all the team, is to ensure that the basics of the service the team provides are delivered consistently. We have found that creating team service improvement plans and monitoring and reviewing these on a regular basis drives internal service quality.

How L&D can take the lead in getting close to the external customer

One of the barriers to creating an internal customer focus is the lack of closeness to the end customer. Team members in head offices or satellites may not ever interact with customers or experience the organisation's products or services. Here are a number of ideas for how L&D, HR and OD professionals can encourage internal teams to get closer to the external customer, thereby better understanding the role that they can play in delivering an excellent service.

Back to the floor

We would encourage internal teams to find opportunities for members of their teams to spend time in branches, contact centres, out on the road etc. This takes time and planning but we have seen team's understanding of both external and internal customer needs grow as a result. The activity works best when people are tasked with an activity and then share the knowledge they have gained with their colleagues.

A day in the life of

TV programmes have shown the benefit of going back to the shop floor. If it is not possible for everyone in a team to do this, then bringing

One of the barriers to creating an internal customer focus is the lack of closeness to the end customer

external customers in to the building in person or by other medium such as film, allows internal teams to better understand what customers want and need from the service. We have successfully run team events where actors have replicated real life customer experiences, as well as where front-facing employees have demonstrated what it is like to be on the sharp end.

Job swaps and secondments

An insightful development opportunity is to offer job swaps between roles, for example front-line and back office staff and secondments to front-line teams.

Mentoring

A further opportunity is for internal team members to become mentors of front-line colleagues who wish to make the transition to head office.

Front line service development for the rest of the organisation

We've also seen shifts in attitude towards the customer occur when internal departmental team members take part in development interventions designed for front-line teams.

How L&D need to work closely with HR and line managers

L&D need to work closely on other important initiatives:

Open communication

The essence of these activities we have described above is to keep open communication lines going between the team and the internal customer. So for example, when marketing creates a new customer campaign, they not only communicate it first to other teams before telling the customer, but they will already have involved and engaged representatives of front-line and internal-

Reference

1 *Complaints to energy companies: exploring how energy companies handle customer complaints,* Ofgem, August 2014

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facing teams in the development process.

One business in the financial services arena took a real-time approach for developing an app for its external customers. The development team not only involved external customers via focus groups in its development, but invited internal team members to add their ideas and then test and review the product as it was developed.

Involve and improve

Team members have great ideas and given the freedom and responsibility, they can invariably find better ways of delivering a great service. Internal departments often harness the power of the team in initiatives to drive efficiency and processes can be made easier and simpler for both the internal and external customer.

Feedback and recognition

Service organisations with well-deserved reputations consistently provide customer feedback to their team members. In addition, they recognise individuals who go above and beyond to deliver exceptional service. Businesses with a strong customer focus recognise team members from across the business – no matter whether they are front-line facing or sit in a support function. We favour those recognition schemes where peer as well as line manager and customer nominations can be made.

Praise and motivational feedback underpins positive customer-orientated behaviours, building confidence and pride.

Leaders as role models

Day to day, the leader of a team and the next level up in the hierarchy in particular need to demonstrate that customer focus is important. One question to ask leaders is how do you show that customer service matters? We have seen a significant turnaround in attitude and approach to the customer amongst internal service providers. For example, when the chief financial officer of one organisation started each of his business review meetings with the first agenda item: 'The customer' which came even before he asked about financial results.

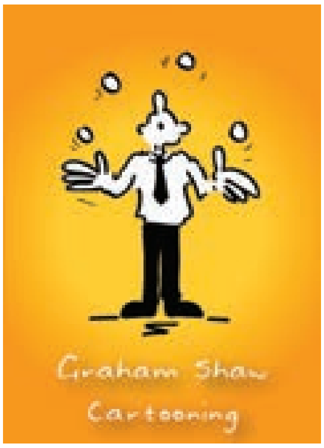
Five-step action plan

If the subject of strengthening the links within the organisation to deliver to the customer is complex, this should not obscure the need to take a determined look at what needs to be done and then get on and do it. We suggest a five-step action plan:

1. Undertake a thorough analysis of the state of internal customer service and co-operation between departments. It is important to identify and acknowledge exactly where the main problems lie and where the strengths exist.
2. Identify important areas for improvement. These are the top three issues that must be tackled to turn the organisation into the most customer-friendly one that it is possible to be.
3. Give employees valuable insights into other departments and how the whole company works together. Supplement this by regular updates on where the organisation is heading and how it is doing, being specific about the contribution that each department makes in delivering to the customer, whether back office or front of house.
4. Allow employees the opportunity to find out more about their customers, for example to follow up on customer complaints and to hear first-hand what the issues are. Consider giving greater empowerment to sort problems out sooner and give employees a voice in contributing to feeding suggestions back into the organisation.
5. Ensure regular reviews are instituted to make sure that standards do not slip and that improvements do not become one-offs but become a regular part of working. Regularly build customer issues into communication, reward and recognition and performance management, using customer service goals and standards.

Summary

An organisation will create outstanding service only when all of its employees, no matter what their role, are engaged and want to deliver a great service to both the internal as well as the external customer. This is easier said than done and involves multiple interventions and clear priority of purpose; growing a culture with customer in its DNA takes time and is a long and ongoing journey. L&D professionals have a key role in helping internal departments see and improve the way they can make it easy for others to provide exceptional service. **TJ**



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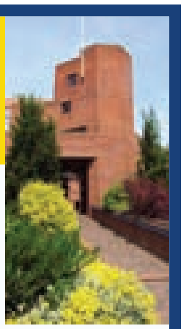

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Treading the boards

Alisdair Chisholm meets 'the best trainer in the world' and learns a neat trick

I arrive at 5.00am, that was the deal, and the Harbour Café is open and the best trainer in the world is there already, sitting at the back, levitating a small espresso cup.

He is wearing black jeans and an expensive black T-shirt, and he flashes me a big, white smile, floats the cup back down to the table and comes over to meet me. I hold out my hand and he takes it briefly, then steps closer and gives me a big hug.

"I always hug people who are paying me money," he laughs, and leads me back to his table. There is another espresso cup that I hadn't noticed before, in front of me, full with a double shot. I know this café pretty well. It is a favourite, mainly because it is open so early, and I think it is lovely, but I know that their idea of good coffee is Nescafé Gold Blend and they very definitely do not do anything even approaching espresso.

"I know you like coffee," he says, waving his hand as if to suggest it is nothing, "so I brought my own machine in for them. I think they like it, so I am not sure I will get it back!"

"You've been here a while, then?" I ask, handing him an envelope with a large amount of cash in it, the agreed fee.

"About an hour or so," he answers, taking the envelope.

I nod, knowing he has already put the time into this session, and relax. I drink my coffee, taking my time, thinking about when I met him and why I was here.

It was a gig on a luxury cruise liner, a first for me, and practically his second home. I did my talk, a kind of 'motivation for millionaires' session, and stayed around for dinner and the show. The ship was docked, so I could have got off and gone home, but I wanted to see the magician.

When the show began, he just appeared from nowhere on stage, using a clever lighting trick, which I have used myself a few times, and was holding a small Starbucks coffee cup. For moons, I have started just about every gig with a cup of coffee in my hand, and it was a little bit strange to see someone else doing it.

He stood, centre stage, right in the spotlight, held his hands wide apart and then just sort of pushed the coffee cup out of his right hand, and floated it across to his left hand. Then he floated the cup up to his mouth, took a sip of coffee, floated it back down to a small table in front of him, covered it for the briefest of moments with his hands, and it was gone.

And that was it; I had to know how to do it.

After the show I left the ship, checked into a local hotel, hit the net, found his name and contacts, realised he lived pretty near to me, and sent him an email, asking for a one-to-one training session; he mailed back the next day, saying 'no'. Nicely, I tried again, and back and forth a bit, negotiating, and that was how we ended up at the Harbour Café, early as you like.

And there, in the café, I drank my precious espresso, and set the cup down on the table.

"Ready?" he asked, and I nodded.

He picked up my cup, floated it from hand to hand, then showed me how it was done, which made me laugh, the way methods often do, and a few minutes later I could do it; just because something looks like it might be difficult, even impossible, doesn't mean that it isn't really easy once you know how. He applauded me quietly and stayed a bit, offering the odd word of encouragement and advice, just enough.

He was out of there by 6.00am, job done, and I stayed about another hour, floating the cup back and forth, happy as can be.

We had spent less than an hour together, he had said probably about 100 words, maximum, and earned every penny of his reassuringly expensive fee.

So, the 'coffee cup' has gone straight into my opening for just about every conference and course, I have cut down on the words, a bit, and, more importantly, I have remembered something really quite important for anyone in the training game.

Learning something, anything really but particularly something that we actually want to know how to do, is a wonderful feeling, up there with the very best.

Learn, teach, good fortune. TJ

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