Learning and development of the future is being ubered

By Helen Nicholson

According to the IDC 2018 Digital Transformation Predictions report, spending on digital transformation will reach an impressive $1.7tn globally. The fact that this figure represents a 42% increase from 2017 demonstrates the importance of staying on top of disruption for organisations around the world.

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When it comes to Learning and Development (L&D), digitisation and tech-enabled learning are transforming the role L&D plays in the organisation. It's not only technology making waves, evolving human resources present some interesting disruptions of their own.

A generation ago, people pursued a single career during their lifetime. Now reinventing oneself multiple times is the rigueur du jour. This shift makes access to development more valuable to employees. This conflicts with the reality that many firms still perceive training as little more than a cost centre. Some are opting to scale down or drop employee training programs – a worrying trend particularly prevalent in small to mid-size organisations.

For many organisations, the L&D function needs some refurbishment so it can serve the business better in the face of game-changing business models, IT, and user behaviour. L&D practitioners are likewise addressing their contribution as they evolve from course creators and content curators into genuine problem solvers.

Some of the biggest problems include:

• **A lack of capacity and mental bandwidth to accommodate conventional learning.** One of the biggest challenges is the lack of time available to learn new skills. Diaries are full to capacity. Today's frenetic lifestyle and hyper-connectivity translates into a barrage of information. In a world of many distractions, headspace comes at a premium. This makes extended sessions of content heavy classroom learning difficult to schedule and potentially ineffectual.

• **Legacy models that struggle to keep pace.** Change is happening faster than ever. So fast that the actual rate of change is accelerating. While organisations are ramping up their agility and responsiveness, education and L&D have fallen noticeably behind. Qualifications that were once relevant for a decade or more are obsolete in less than half that time, which means skills need to be updated more frequently. However, courseware and teaching methodologies continue to follow legacy models that simply can't keep up.

In South Africa, this lag is compounded by a failing education system. Talent joining the workforce is already on the back foot and for the first time, millennials are at risk of not being future fit.

• **Not teaching the right things, at the right time.** Two candidates join a team at the same time. They each have unique expertise and expectations. They also each have their own skills gaps to address. et these two individuals will often be required to attend the same course with the same content because that is what the programme dictates. Standardisation has its place, but too much rigidity is slowly eroding value, while frustrated employees seek to learn outside the company's platforms.

• **Failure to deliver real value.** As long as L&D teams continue to design, develop, and deliver based on what has worked in the past, they perpetuate the illusion of value. Like marketing, L&D has traditionally been difficult to evaluate and almost impossible to link to a specific business outcome. Consequentially, much L&D depends on a 'pay and pray' approach in the hopes that the content eventually finds its mark. Success comes in the form of ticked boxes and anecdotal evidence, with no real means of measuring effectiveness. With resources at a premium, this shotgun approach can no longer be tolerated.

So, where to from here?

The good news is that change is rarely the issue, rather the gaps it creates. Transformation doesn't have to be complicated or move away from the core human aspects of L&D that already work, for example, social learning, real-time feedback, and coaching. With the right vision and leadership, these obstacles become excellent opportunities to realign L&D with the organisation. By becoming more like a hand-in-glove as opposed to a tool-in-hand, L&D is finding workarounds that translate into better returns for the business, more motivated employees, and systems that are inherently more future-proof.

• **Enable information to be consumed differently.** Adjustments can be as simple as making courseware available on mobile devices, so it can be consumed anywhere the user cares to use it - at their desk, after hours or on route to a client. Meanwhile, micro-learning is ideal for delivering learning when and where it's needed most, in smaller, yet purposeful increments that are easy to digest. By accepting 'digital learning' as a way of learning and not a type of learning, we are able to see it for the opportunity it is.

• **Personalise learning.** One-size-fits-all is as good as a miss. New digital tools make personalised learning more affordable and readily accessible. Customised programmes that consider existing skills and close specific knowledge gaps are more productive, more rewarding, and offer a better ROI in the long term.

• **Use L&D as a key differentiator when it comes to attracting – and retaining talent.** Entire industries have emerged in the last few years. As quickly as conventional roles become obsolete, new ones are created. The skills required to fill

them are equally fluid. Fortunately, millennial employees are less fixated on careers for life and more focused on continual development and enrichment. The opportunity for personal growth and to learn new skills and technologies has rocketed to the top of the employee priority list. Progressive L&D programmes can entice quality talent and encourage commitment to the organisation.

• **Develop L&D strategies that support rapid learning.** On-demand consumption, learning on-the-go, and gamification goes a long way towards creating an agile, optimised platform. The best way to make up for learning deficits is through collaborative within industries. Sharing knowledge might sound counter-intuitive, but competition is making way for curiosity and collaboration across like-minded organisations looking to develop scarce skills and upskill at a rapid pace.

• **Measure Value. For Real.** Developments in Artificial Intelligence and machine learning mean guesswork will finally give way to genuine measurability. Algorithms can now analyse data from specific teams and make accurate predictions about their expected performance. For the first time, companies can actually quantify training outcomes, assess how effectively learning is applied, and identify future development opportunities as individuals and teams perform better.

In closing, the essence of digital transformation is as much about shifting mindsets as it is about replacing technologies. In a relatively short time, L&D has made great strides. From long content-intense courses to a variety of multimedia, mobile apps micro-learning experiences, and intelligent, responsive learning platforms that lend themselves to personalisation.

Employees live in an experience-rich world and are coming to expect the same from their workplace. There is a lot to be learned from the likes of YouTube, Google, Uber, and Netflix. These disruptors might have a technology platform, but their success comes from the manner in which they are able to engage their target market. As much as L&D is looking inwardly, much can be gained from drawing inspiration from the outside world, where learning is a natural and instinctive process.

> ***Feeling like your L&D space is being ubered?*** *Then attend the* [*2018 Learning Innovation Africa Conference*](#) *taking place 3–4 September 2018 at The Wanderers Country Club, Illovo, Johannesburg – a two-day conference which promises to stimulate new thinking and inspire action as some of the industry's top thought leaders and pioneers tackle human capital's biggest change disruptors.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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