

THE NEW LEARNER ISSUE

The Curve

GET AHEAD OF IT

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...GIES BUSINE
...NG CHANNEL
...MUNICATING LEARN



**Meet the
Fastest-Growing
Learning Technology
Since the Blackboard**

Also

Crowdsource your content

Mysteries of the entrepreneurial mindset

Haptics: Learning you can touch

DX at River Island

Learning Cities: 'They call me Lucy Luton'

Play Buzzword Bingo!

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ISSUE 8

ISSN 2631-536X (Online)



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Today I realised
my brain is
blooming marvellous

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EDITORIAL

Our theme this issue is the New Learner. So let's meet them, these new learners.

How different can they really be?

Well, for a start, each one of them has a device in their back pocket many times more powerful than all of NASA's combined computing in 1969. Granted they're probably using it to get moth memes rather than landing someone on the moon, but, notionally at least, they have access to all the knowledge in the world.

And, unlike the first generation of digital learners, they don't just have eyes and ears to learn with. Now they can talk back, in conversation with a range of digital assistants – Alexa, Siri, chatbots, learnbots ... Soon we'll be using haptics and smell synthesis as well, in ever more immersive learning experiences. Touch and smell the learning. Taste it.

Not all of them are human, of course. 'Learner' is slang in AI circles for a machine-learning program. There are going to be more and more of these non-meat learners in your organisation from here onwards, so learn to deal with it.

We're all new learners now, and learning professionals have perhaps the 'new-learningest' job in learning just to keep abreast of it all. Let's get the skills. Let's get learning.

John Helmer FLPI
Editor in Chief



ANDREA'S COLUMN

WHY THE FIVE-HOUR
RULE IS ONLY HALF
THE STORY

Recently it's come to light that some of the richest, most successful – and busiest – people in the world are constant learners. Bill Gates read a book a week and took a yearly two-week reading vacation throughout his career; Arthur Blank, co-founder of Home Depot, reads two hours a day; billionaire entrepreneur David Rubenstein reads six books a week ... the list goes on.

It seems that successful entrepreneurs are great learners. I'd go further than that, however. People say you should obey the five-hour rule and reserve five hours each week for learning – but I'd say these fantastically successful people are devoting even more time to learning than that.

What entrepreneurs do in their daily business lives – experiment, fail fast, learn, adjust, iterate, improve – is in itself a type of learning; maybe the most important type of learning we do in life. In fact, you could say that entrepreneurs are not just great learners, they are the archetype of what learning is all about. The new learner, for me, is an entrepreneur. We are all learners now and, by extension, all entrepreneurs.

I've been really inspired recently by meeting people like Susan Amat, who writes in this issue about the entrepreneurial mindset, and Alexandra Isenegger, the young founder and CEO of Linkilaw, who spoke at a recent **me:time** event for my team. I love their passion, I love their belief – but, above all, I love their bravery. It's a willingness to be bold, challenge the status quo and not take no for an answer in everything you do.

That's how we all have to be as new learners, and it's a daily inspiration for me to work in this industry, where our whole purpose is to help and support people in becoming bolder, better learners.

Andrea Miles

Director, Lumesse Learning



GUEST EDITOR'S LETTER

I WANNA TELL YOU
A STORY ...

THE GUEST EDITOR FOR THIS EDITION OF *THE CURVE* IS CARL CRISOSTOMO, STORYTELLER AT **me:time**, LUMESSE LEARNING

For years now we've been looking at research into how learners are evolving, and usually the picture is one of incremental change from one year to the next. However, in 2018, for the first time, we've seen a massive shift happening for one particular group of users, one so strong it pins the needle to the red end of the dial.

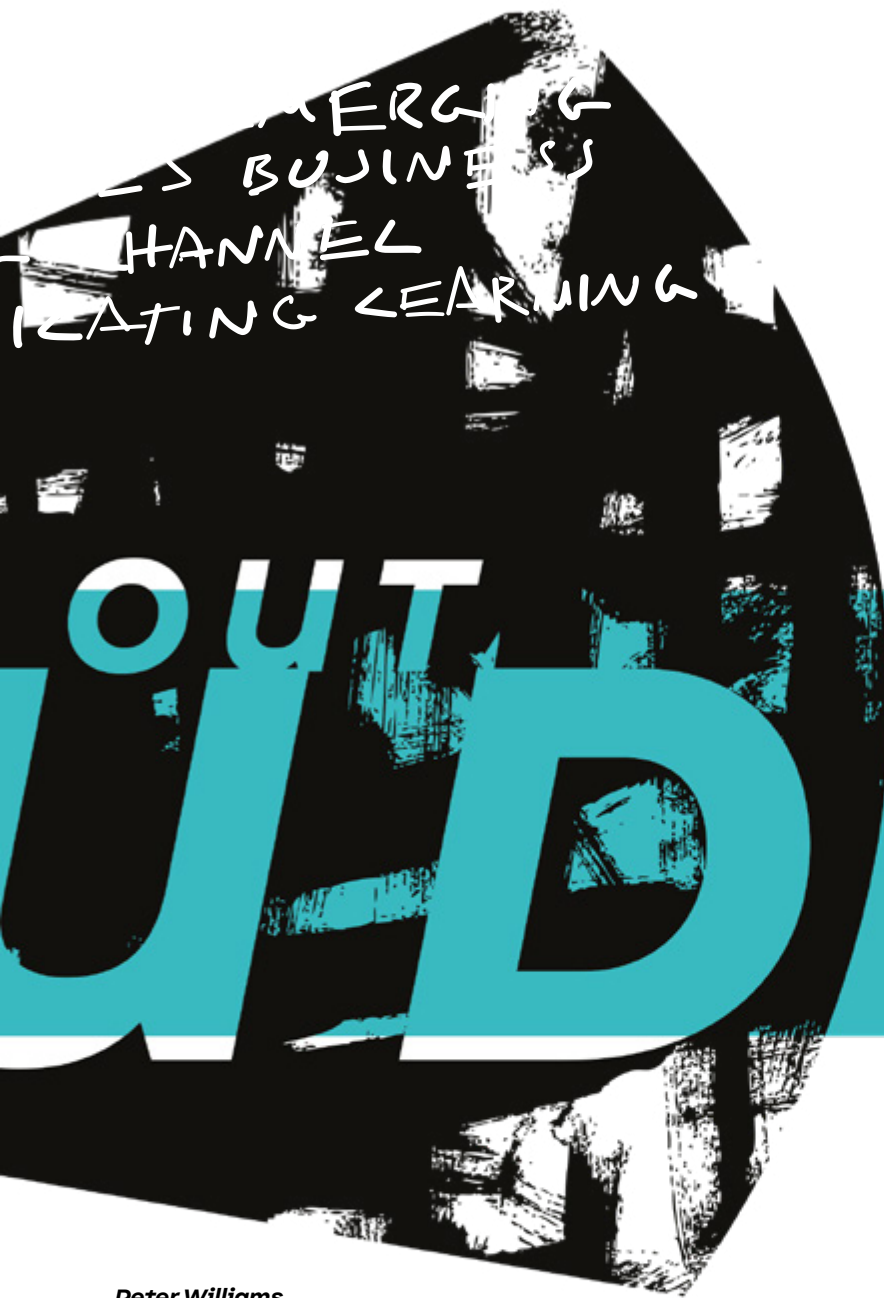
And which group is experiencing such a seismic change in attitude? Learning and development professionals. According to Towards Maturity's 2018 benchmark research ('The Transformation Curve: The L&D Journey to Deliver Lasting Business Impact'), 70% of those in L&D believe they don't have the skills to implement digital transformation in learning – a figure up from 53% last year. And other sources confirm this isn't an isolated finding; the Learning and Performance Institute told me that they have had to completely revise their L&D capability map this year because the number of new skills needed has proved so large – something that has never happened before. In fact, this trend has been supported by a wide range of datapoints from our own research as well as that of other organisations; it seems that L&D professionals will have to become uber-learners to keep up with what is coming their way.

But, interestingly, this is not a phenomenon confined to the world of learning. We've recently been working with professional service companies – the advisers who help organisations of all kinds through digital transformation – to ensure they have the right skills and knowledge to be able to empower their clients. It appears that the need is equally pressing for everyone at the sharp end of this particular boat.

To employ another watery metaphor, there's a knowledge cascade going on here. Reskilling ourselves for the fast-changing digital world is a joint enterprise for all of us in business.

We're all new learners now!

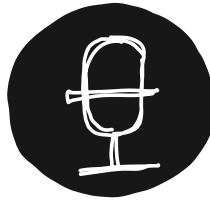




Peter Williams

Meet the Fastest-Growing Learning Technology Since the Blackboard

With our fingers and thumbs set to be overtaken by our voices as the next major computer interface, voice technologies will impact the business world in a big way. Everywhere there are signs that voice is emerging as a key enabling technology, and it looks likely that it will become an important channel in business for communicating with both customers and staff. This makes it a natural channel for learning – but, as Peter Williams finds out, it is still very much an emerging technology.



Patrick Givens, vice president of VaynerSmart, the division of US digital agency VaynerMedia that focuses on internet-of-things and voice-enabled devices, has commented that ‘even with the rapid adoption of voice-controlled smart speakers in the past few years, we’re still in the very early days of exploring voice-experience design and all the ways it can impact how we engage with content and technology. With that in mind, we are also imagining new ways voice can impact learning.’

However, there are already examples of great creative use (see ‘Finding Our Creative Voice’ opposite) and sophisticated application in difficult areas (see ‘Project Kitchen Table’ on page 13), and elearning commentator and guru Donald Clark affirms that voice is real, tangible and here to stay. ‘Millions of consumers using Amazon’s virtual assistant Alexa and Google Home and speaking to their machines is evidence of this; and before that we’d had the rise of voice in Apple’s Siri and Microsoft’s Cortana. Already over 10% of searches are by voice.’

Clark, who is involved in WildFire Learning, an AI-driven content-creation business, believes we need to think about voice in the context of the pedagogy of dialogue. He argues that the Socratic method of cooperative argumentative dialogue between individuals (a form of voice-based learning) was successively undermined by ways of passing on knowledge using blackboards, overhead projectors and PowerPoint. He therefore suggests that voice is simply a shift back to an earlier method of learning – saying, ‘People started getting bored witless in lectures or conferences’ – and argues that ‘We are social, speaking and listening creatures, and we’re natural grammatical geniuses by the age of three. In teaching you use dialogue to enable retrieval, elaboration, questions. It is so natural.’ We can see this in the use of chatbots, which are already employed throughout the whole learning journey.



FINDING OUR CREATIVE VOICE

Kane Simms is the host of VUX World, the voice-user experience and strategy podcast, which is aimed at voice UX professionals, VUI designers, developers, brands and anyone with an interest in the voice space. Here he shares some thoughts on how voice can be used creatively.

An interesting example I came across recently includes voice being used to learn about a company. It does this by turning the company's intranet into a voice application so that you can ask Alexa questions like 'What's the paternity-leave policy?' If you were to ask 'Who's the best person to speak to about training budgets?' it'll respond with the person's name and their contact details. This is not only good for new starters but all employees, especially in a large company.

Voice is also a great way to help kids learn. Aside from built-in knowledge bases – which help with things such as spellings, definitions and questions – games and

interactive stories are really useful and fun. One I came across recently is Alien Words, which helps kids recognise real words by eliminating the 'alien' ones that don't exist. The aim of the game is to go into space to rescue all the real words and bring them back to earth. Great creativity.

It's not hard to envision a world where tailored and personalised training is delivered via voice. One startup, called Chattie, helps people learn a new language via voice. Let's say you want to learn Mandarin. The program will give you some Mandarin words and definitions, which you then repeat. When you start speaking, Chattie listens and will tell you whether you've pronounced things correctly. Not only are you learning the words but you're also learning whether you sound convincing when you say them.

Where it will go in the future is anyone's guess, but there are enough examples of great potential right now that would suggest voice for learning presents genuine opportunities.

But don't forget your audience

As with all emerging technologies, if you are after clarity and certainty then disappointment awaits – for now, at least. Ben Sauer is a Brighton-based independent design strategist who focuses on voice user-interface design. He says that organisations are aware of the coming deluge of voice interface, but they don't know where to start or what to build. 'The question I get asked is what use case should we design for and prepare for.' But, because no one knows how things are going to change, he is urging companies not to become obsessed with getting the right answer. 'The main takeaway for organisations is that no one knows. What you really need to be doing is learning.' In order to do that, he suggests bringing together tech and design (including learning design) and to brainstorm some ideas and then try some small experiments, even if they are only of the 'Wizard of Oz' kind.

Laura Morinigo is a software engineer who, as a Google Ambassador, has worked on Google Assistant. Her first encounter with voice was in the education sphere. Like Sauer she is keen to see experimentation, but she also believes it is important to remember the audience and what they are trying to achieve. 'Voice is the next step after mobile devices. Voice is a completely different experience. It is like a tool to bring another dimension to education.'

Giving brand a voice

Sales, marketing and branding are corporate areas where voice has already made itself heard. Perhaps that should come as no surprise, as personal and home use of digital technology has often blazed a trail that business has subsequently followed.

Gemma Bianchi is head of marketing at digital agency Greenwood Campbell in Bournemouth, a company that focuses on the use of emerging technologies in marketing communications – so it seems entirely appropriate that when you arrive at their website landing page you are (at the time of writing) asked: 'Are you ready to experience something amazing with Google Assistant?'

Bianchi feels that the ways in which voice can impact brands is still not well understood. She considers voice to be 'a major opportunity, along with AI and chatbots. We see it as a way for brands to connect with people on another level.' Voice allows brands to interact with clients or the public more easily than by phone or email and is a good way to affirm brand values. 'With a voice action, companies can use a voiceover that is on brand, talks in the way your brand talks, does not have to be corporate and formal and can be fun. It's just a really great way to connect.' Understanding the crucial advantage of speech, which is that 'it is about convenience; we don't want to spend lots of time just booking a ticket,' Bianchi's company was able to help one client create a voice booking app for cinema, which can be used in any number of ways, from enquiring which horror films are playing through to booking and paying.



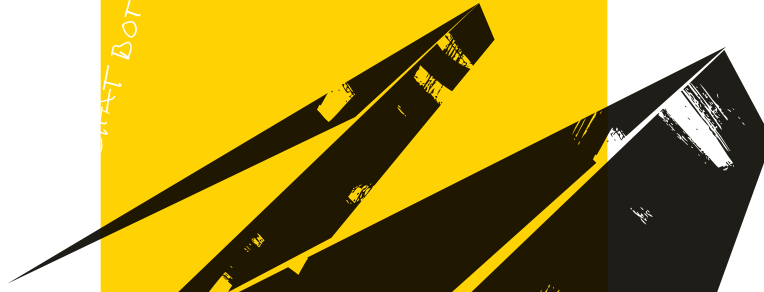
SONOS

**WILL WE EVER FEEL
COMFORTABLE TALKING TO
MACHINES?**

For something humans do instinctively from an early age – making sounds that develop into speech – speaking into a device can still feel a little odd; in fact, a 2017 survey by the UK's Institute of Practitioners in Advertising reported that a third of British people found it a challenge. Gemma Bianchi of Greenwood Campbell points out that when the App Store opened in 2008 it was new and strange but is now a familiar part of people's lives, and she believes that 'voice will go the same way'. Laura Morinigo, who worked on Google Assistant, agrees that there is something bizarre about using voice to interact with a machine at first, and therefore voice designers need to think about offering services which are most comfortable for users. VUX World's Kane Simms also acknowledges the issue, saying, 'The real challenge right now with voice in the workplace is that not everyone is comfortable speaking to their devices in public, particularly at work in a quiet office.'

**'Organisations are aware
of the coming deluge of
voice interface, but they
don't know where to start
or what to build.'**

– Ben Sauer, design strategist



5 FACTS SHOWING THAT THE VOICE-TECHNOLOGY REVOLUTION IS ALREADY WITH US

1 US analytics company ComScore predicts that 50% of all internet searches will be voice searches by 2022.

2 At the end of 2017 Amazon announced Alexa for Business, a paid subscription service that allows companies to use Alexa to join conference calls, schedule meeting rooms and install custom Skills designed by third-party vendors – including leading companies such as SAP, Microsoft and Salesforce.

3 According to analytics firm S&P Global, smart-speaker shipment worldwide was 2.2 million units in 2015, 6.5 million in 2016 and 31.7 million in 2017.

4 While the USA has led the way in embracing voice – the ‘Smart Audio Report’ published in spring 2018 states that 18% of Americans own a smart speaker – China is also beginning to catch the voice habit and, in Europe, 6.5 million units were sold in 2017, with the UK being the biggest market.

5 Financial services are also starting to spot opportunities. Bank of America, for example, has introduced Erica, a voice-activated personal assistant available to its 25 million mobile customers. Most everyday transactions can be undertaken by speaking to this virtual assistant – and the bank is keen to remind customers that the more they talk to Erica the smarter she becomes.



‘The challenge for computers is to understand us crazy humans and the way that we talk with different accents and the way we mumble.’

– Charles Cadbury,
SayItNow

Voice for learning

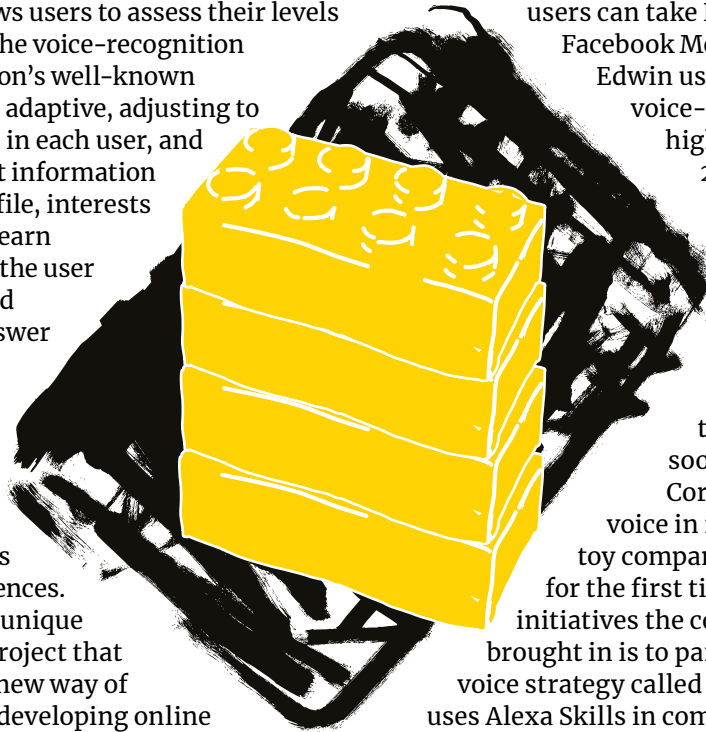
Perhaps one obvious way to use voice technology is in language acquisition. The online English-language school ABA English and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Auto-ID Lab have jointly developed an English-proficiency test that interacts conversationally with Alexa. English Test, as it is called, is the first Alexa Skill that allows users to assess their levels of English through the voice-recognition technology of Amazon's well-known assistant. The test is adaptive, adjusting to the level it identifies in each user, and is designed to collect information on the student's profile, interests and motivations to learn English. In this way the user enjoys a personalised experience: each answer they give to a profile question opens up a new path of proficiency and generates more profile questions adjusted to the user's interests and preferences.

'English Test is a unique and revolutionary project that opens the door to a new way of understanding and developing online learning,' says Maria Perillo, chief learning officer at ABA English. 'Alexa is designed for use in open spaces, away from the computer or mobile and while you're doing other things, so it adapts to the context you're using it in: learning moments are increased, and

the possibilities for personalisation are enormous.'

This is one sector where it is likely that there will be intense competition for a place in the market. US company Edwin has built an English-tutoring system powered by machine-learning to help students pass the US Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). At present, users can take Edwin courses through Facebook Messenger. However, because Edwin uses Google's proprietary voice-assisted technology, it was highlighted by Google in May 2018 as one of the startups that would be receiving funding, guidance from Google staff and marketing support through Google's existing channels, and Edwin says that Google Assistant will soon also be supported.

Corporates are also using voice in innovative ways. In 2017 toy company LEGO® saw profits fall for the first time in 13 years. One of the initiatives the company has subsequently brought in is to partner with Amazon on a voice strategy called LEGO DUPLO Stories. This uses Alexa Skills in combination with LEGO's pre-school DUPLO® blocks to tell stories that toddlers can interact with using the bricks, helping them to learn colours, numbers and develop their language skills along the way. So far the company seems pleased with what *it* is learning.

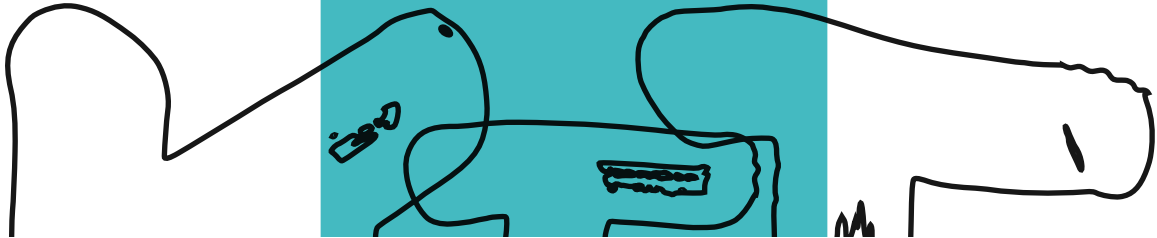


Conversational channels

Charles Cadbury is CEO of SayItNow, a technology company that helps brands take advantage of opportunities created by consumers shifting to conversational channels. His business helped to create Dazzle, an award-winning voice-activated assistant for the hotel sector that is designed to take the place of the phone and guest directory in hotel rooms. He says, 'The learning I am taking from chatbots and voice is that the big innovation at the moment is natural language processing. The challenge for computers is to understand us crazy humans and the way that we talk with different accents and the way we mumble. Voice is ten times faster than typing if we are incredibly succinct, but none of us is.'

The proposition of his business is that any brand should be able to respond immediately to any question that a customer has – and the answer should be the same whether the question was asked via Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp or Twitter. 'Once you can get one central assistant talking across different channels then you can have a consistent conversation, which is more in line with how us humans interact. We have a conversation on LinkedIn, then email, then phone, then switch to Slack or Skype. The assumption is that we remember the back-and-forth conversation that we have had in the meantime.'





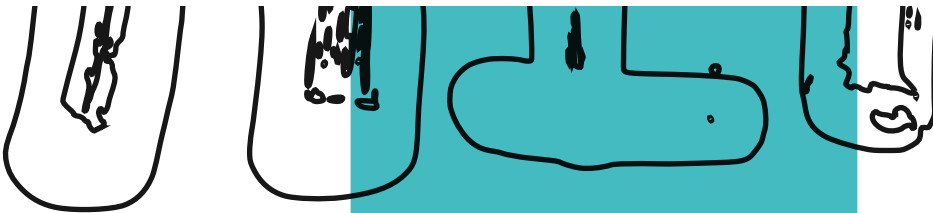
A CASE STORY: PROJECT KITCHEN TABLE

Sophie Hebdidge and Aimée Bryan are co-founders of Project Kitchen Table (PKT). PKT is now building KIT, a digital coach, companion and confidante designed to empower t(w)eens with the social skills and emotional resilience to manage mental health issues. Hebdidge says, 'There's a correlation between communication and mental health. When it's good, it's great; when it's bad, it can be downright ugly. We're on a mission to offer kids another way to learn the social skills they need for life.'

Their research into mental health and Hebdidge's expertise with chatbots led the duo to emerging voice tech as a possible solution. 'Voice tech is so new in the market, we find ourselves

pushing the boundaries of its capabilities. But, for the younger generation, they're equally comfortable with silent tech as they are with new and emerging voice tech.'

KIT is a private and safe conversational partner that helps people feel more comfortable using their voices in the moments when it might be easier to keep silent. 'With KIT, we want kids to voice, converse, release and make space for more light and laughter in their lives. We've built our prototype on Amazon Alexa because there's an explosion in voice – this ability to use speech recognition and text to speech – and accessibility for all to voice-assisted devices.'



'Voice is going to explode and drive companies the size of Facebook and Instagram. Voice is the future of a frictionless world.'

**– Gary Vaynerchuk,
VaynerMedia**

3 WAYS VOICE WILL IMPACT LEARNING

Patrick Givens, VP Vaynersmart, lists three areas where voice could have an impact on learning in the near future

ADAPTIVE INSTRUCTION

Much of our traditional learning comes from sources that are inherently linear in their presentation of information. This is true of most books, recorded audio and video communication. But in voice experiences we are able to facilitate more dynamic conversations. We can ask probing questions and adjust the next phase of the conversation based on what we learn from the response. A well-designed conversational flow is more like the ways in which we communicate naturally, and when information doesn't need to be channelled into a linear format it allows for much more engaging and effective exchanges.

ROUTINE

Part of the beauty of voice-first platforms is how easily they facilitate simple interactions that become a part of everyday routines. From checking the weather in the morning to cooking in the evening, there are many moments in which we regularly invoke a voice experience. Many of these moments could be opportunities to deliver small portions of a progressive lesson each day. Media platforms are already facilitating this kind of delivery with formats such as flash briefings and daily updates, and we anticipate seeing new features soon that will give us even more opportunities to integrate small moments of learning into regular routines.

FUN

More than perhaps any other factor, learning relies on engagement from the learner. Voice-first platforms present us with a new canvas on which to delight and entertain users while conveying information. From better-produced audio to increasingly dynamic experience design, we are just beginning to explore this medium. As quality improves, user engagement will increase as well – and engagement is a perfect start for learning!

And the downside ...

Powerful though voice may become, it would be foolish to claim it as a panacea, as it has its disadvantages. Gemma Bianchi suggests we could be expecting too much from voice, drawing a parallel with chatbots. 'Chatbots have lots of potential. However, because the technology is so accessible, lots have been published without a proper use case, user-experience research and without true understanding of conversational flow.' From her company's experience with chatbots and voice applications, people ask all kinds of questions as they are testing the limits of the technology. 'Voice agents and chatbots are usually designed for very specific purposes – to book something, give advice or information and so on. Our Glastofestbot, designed for Glastonbury festival-goers, was asked some very random questions quite unrelated to logistics or to which acts were on.' One can only imagine.

The user experience of voice also bothers Laura Morinigo. 'There is a need for engagement, whether it is marketing or learning. If it is boring or the user doesn't find what they want they just quit' – a 'keep-your-audience' sentiment that should be a mantra for L&D professionals. New technologies, same challenges.

Sophie Hebdidge of Project Kitchen Table, which uses voice technology in the field of mental health (see page 13), says that although it is new and exciting, working with this cutting-edge technology does raise concerns over privacy and the use of data. 'Some real legal and ethical restrictions are placed on voice tech, which influences our decisions over what we do. It is something we are constantly battling as we develop our product.'

But perhaps this isn't a downside ... Even though he believes we're in a new paradigm, Ben Sauer reckons the future is unlikely to be voice only or even voice first. 'Many in this space acknowledge that voice on its own will augment other things, such as screens and buttons. While it is great for issuing commands, it is not great for listening back because it relies much more on working memory than a screen. Voice is not best for helping people remember.'

However, despite these doubts,

investment money thinks voice has a future: Google is investing, and Alexa could be a US\$10-billion megahit by 2020 according to 2017 research by RBC Capital Markets. Similarly, there will be big prizes in developing the voice-services businesses that consumers are prepared to pay for.

That future will involve voice, facial gestures, screens, cameras and microphones all working together – pushing a button, looking at a screen and, crucially, speaking all at the same time. Think of Apple TV or the Amazon Fire TV Stick but less clunky. If you can get those different modes working in tandem then that could shape a powerful experience.

Charles Cadbury agrees with the idea of multi-modal. In learning, he points to watching an online lecture. 'At any particular point while watching the learning you could say, "Hold up, I don't understand what was said about oxygen," then the voice element could substitute or enrich that other medium – they could go hand in hand.'

Gary Vaynerchuk, CEO of VaynerMedia, a respected entrepreneur and long-time advocate for voice, said in July 2018, 'Voice is going to explode and drive companies the size of Facebook and Instagram. Voice is the future of a frictionless world.' If he's right, many of us – including L&D – need to hear that message and work out what it will mean for the way we work and learn. 

Peter Williams is a financial journalist and editor of *The Learning Technologies Awards Newsletter*.

TIMELINE: THE EVOLUTION OF VOICE

1877 Thomas Edison invents the phonograph, the first device to record and reproduce sound, using a tinfoil sheet and a rotating cylinder.



1907 The Dictaphone dictation machine goes on sale, using wax cylinders to record and replay voices.

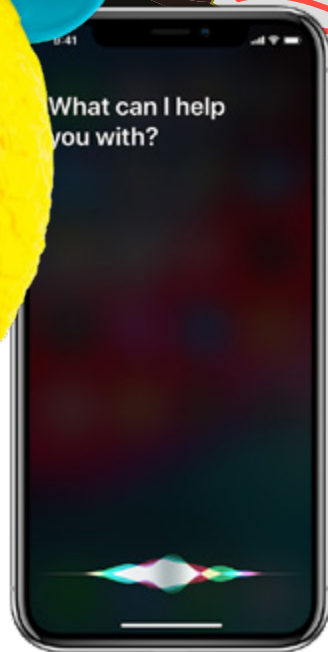
1937 Bell Telephone Laboratory's Voder (Voice Operating Demonstrator) is the first attempt to electronically synthesise human speech by breaking it down into electronic signals that can be sent along telephone lines.

1952 Bell Laboratories design the Audrey system, which recognises fundamental speech sounds and understands digits spoken by a single individual's voice.



1961 IBM demonstrates their Shoebox computer, which understands 16 English words and performs simple arithmetical calculations in response to voice commands.

1968 When Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* is released, the HAL 9000 computer on its fictional *Discovery One* spaceship is notable for its use of voice in its interactions with its human crewmates – 'Just what do you think you're doing, Dave?'



Georgia Jones
Marketing Executive Intern,
Lumesse Learning

1970s Bell Labs introduces a system that is able to interpret multiple people's voices.

1976 After several years' work, Carnegie Mellon University's Harpy speech-recognition system is now able to understand 1,011 words, on a par with the vocabulary of a three-year-old.

2016 Google Home voice-activated smart speakers are introduced.

2017 Timekettle announce their WT2 real-time in-ear translator set – so maybe the Babel fish wasn't such a fanciful idea after all!

2014 Affordable real-time translation seems to become a reality with the introduction of Skype Translator, which can translate 10 languages. This is followed in 2015 by Google Translate, then a number of portable devices, including the Travis, the Indiegogo Pilot and Ili, before Google Pixel Buds appear in 2017.

2014 Amazon announces the Echo smart speaker and Alexa voice-control system.

2013 Microsoft's virtual assistant Cortana (named after a popular synthetic-intelligence character in Microsoft's 'Halo' video game) is demonstrated for the first time.

2011 Apple's Siri is installed on the iPhone 4.

2008 Google releases its Google Voice Search for smartphones; personalised voice recognition is introduced for Android phones in 2010 and for Google Chrome in 2011.

2000s Speech recognition and voice commands are built into all Windows and Mac OS X computers.

1998 Hasbro's Furby is released. At first the toy speaks only 'Furbish' but, as you continue to speak to it, it begins to 'learn' English, gradually incorporating words and phrases into its speech.

1996 BellSouth's VAL voice portal, a dial-in interactive voice-recognition system, is introduced; people ring and ask VAL for information (and sometimes even get the answer they're looking for).

1990 Dragon Systems Inc. releases the first speech-recognition product for dictation, Dragon Dictate, which retails for a whopping US\$9,000 (around £7,000).

1978 The Babel fish – an extraterrestrial creature that, when placed in your ear, can translate every language in the universe – is created by author Douglas Adams in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. This name is subsequently used for a real-world translation website launched by Yahoo in 1997.

1987 Worlds of Wonder's Julie doll is launched, which children can train to respond to their voices – 'Finally, the doll that understands you'.

SPACES

THE NEW LEARNING SPACES

Here they are. A range of online spaces from powerful and sophisticated - to simple and quick-to-deploy. Capable of serving both mandatory and self-directed learning. Use them standalone or as part of a hybrid agile ecosystem.

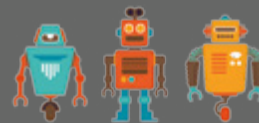
me:time

me:time
Designed from the ground up with the needs of self-motivated learners in mind, **me:time** gives instant, anywhere access to curated learning, supported by AI-driven recommendations.



Learning Gateway

The learning management system (LMS) for how we work now. Built and supported by learning experts, this is highly customisable to your organisation, or to a particular audience or contingent workforce.



Custom Portals

Community hub, academy, information and awareness site ... learning spaces come in all shapes and sizes. We'll build one bespoke to your exact needs.



CURVEBALLS

They come at you from unexpected angles. You've no idea (until you engage with them) exactly where they'll end up. That's why we call them 'curveballs'.

They're pitched by practitioners, gurus, experts in fields related to learning – and occasionally people who just wander in off the street.

Entrepreneurs: Born or Made?

Susan Amat, Ph.D. – Founder and CEO of Venture Hive

Nice Things

Simon Rupniak, Lumesse Learning

5 Key Factors for Learning Success that Have Nothing to Do with Content

Andy Kennard, General Manager, Learning and Development, Industry Forum

Buzzword Bingo

Peter Manniche Riber
Senior Digital Learning Manager, Siemens Gamesa

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Entrepreneurs: **BORN OR MADE?**

Susan Amat, a seasoned entrepreneur whose company, Venture Hive, provides content and tools to support corporates, accelerators, incubators and universities, reveals the mysteries of the entrepreneurial mindset.

Susan Amat Ph.D.
Founder/CEO, Venture Hive

How disruptive is your team? And I don't mean just to the department next door; I mean, is your team or your company disrupting the industry, or is it more comfortable waiting for someone else to show you what your customers want?

According to a PwC report, 'Reinventing Innovation: Five Findings to Guide Strategy Through Execution', CEOs of companies across the globe continue to rank innovation (or the lack thereof) as one of the top three concerns keeping them up at night.¹ Innovation programmes and corporate accelerators are a dime a dozen, wooing startups with the promise of a solution to all their problems. Most programmes, however, skip the essential foundational work of clearing a pathway for innovation and experimentation, which results in inexperienced pseudo-corporate venture capital and

very few integration success stories. They also lack the rigour to ensure a clear return on investment, relying on continued excitement and CEO buy-in to keep the programme alive.

Despite having built acceleration programmes for startups from more than 60 countries, my favourite work has always been in developing corporate teams, not only because this means I am able to work with startups but also because it allows me to act like them. Corporates are enamoured of the speed and agility startups possess – and their apparent lack of constraints – which allows them to churn out a

minimum viable product in less than a week (sometimes in a few hours) and jump into the market at a price tag comparable to that of a catered team lunch. The talent, data and resources within corporations should make their teams unstoppable, but the culture and pace often prevent this potential for greatness from being realised.

Whether your goal is to position your company to be able to onboard, invest or integrate with technology from external startups, or to supercharge your team to disrupt your business or industry from within, you will need the following ingredients for a truly entrepreneurial mindset.



1 **Continuous learning**

Curiosity may be a good way to think about this topic. While we all know experts with an incredible depth of knowledge about their subject, what you will find with entrepreneurial thinkers is that they are comfortable reaching out into other industries and seeking to connect the dots beyond what may seem immediately relevant. What are you reading that is deepening your skills? What meetups or videos are helping you to reframe the future of your industry?

2 **Experiential learning**

While a colleague with an impressive education may be a source of joy for everyone, it is only when this education is applied that it becomes valuable and measurable for the company. It is in the practical testing, iteration and validation of 'how it should work' that we learn about our customers and our markets – and often about ourselves. Characteristics such as resilience and the ability to make data-driven decisions without emotional blinders is often acquired only through experience. In the words of the Confucian philosopher Xunzi: 'Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn.'

3 **Mission – and survival – driven**

Startups have to stay focused on making things happen fast so they don't die – literally. There are no pay cheques if they don't hustle. The commitment to changing the world or revolutionising and/or disrupting an industry can be incentive enough to live like a college student again and abandon normal working hours.

4

Empowerment

This is often overlooked. It is easy to tell a team that it is empowered to run with an idea, but, more often than not, approvals and bureaucracy slow down the momentum to a point where they feel worse than if they were employees clocking on at a regular job. The sense of ownership of their vision – and its destiny – can be managed by offering some clear goals or guard-rails around profitability range, budget, timeline, demographics, etc. By setting preapproved thresholds with finance, purchasing and any other departments that may be involved, the budget and other resources will be waiting and ready to be accessed. These controls ensure the necessary transparency in the process while simultaneously helping the team win and giving the next group of innovators hope.

5

Accountability

On an innovation project, your job title goes out of the window. Everyone does everything – much like the CEO of a five-person startup, who is often customer services, admin and janitor combined, while also writing code and building decks. Giving a team that is creating something new real autonomy allows leaders to emerge organically and share their expertise with a gusto they may never have felt was appropriate within a departmental hierarchy. To achieve this, their corporate sponsor needs to manage the team in a way that will allow everyone to shine regardless of tenure, stature or education. This requires a system where everyone gets credit for their successes but also takes accountability for any failures.

6

Customer-centric

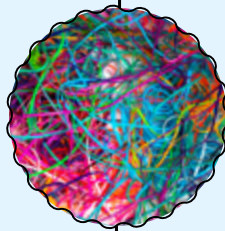
Startups have adopted the stance that everything needs to be about solving problems for the customer, creating the optimal experience, etc. When you are coming from a place with a lot of assets, that focus may be lost in trying to leverage as many existing processes or capabilities as possible. Not wanting to step on toes or cause friction by challenging the ‘way it is done’ can stop teams from developing, testing and iterating lean solutions for fear of trespassing on another jurisdiction. Can you create a sandbox to allow for enough freedom for teams to try something that may have greater returns than just the product itself?

7

Everyone loses in competitions

OK, so you finally got 30% of your employees to submit ideas for the big challenge. If what you want is an extrinsically focused theoretical activity in entrepreneurship: congratulations! If you want to foster a broader culture of trust and innovation and help your team members develop confidence as they research and communicate their concepts, then you have to create opportunities where those willing to meet the requirements have a shot. It may be that six concepts can be piloted if each is supported to be very lean. How can we get every department, every employee, to cheer for one another? Isn't that the goal?

If you want to recruit and retain the best talent, much of the secret lies in helping them self-realise their dreams in the safety and support of a great company. Good people want to learn, be challenged, work for a purpose, feel empowered and know they are doing something interesting. Help them find that within your company – or, very likely, the business they leave you to create will be hiring soon.



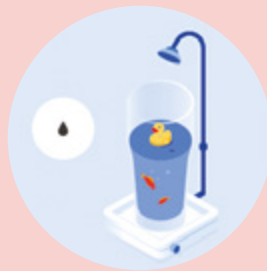


At Lumesse, we're always on the lookout for the latest and greatest. Whether it's behavioural science, UX research or some awesome digital content, they all inspire us and shape our future projects. When we find something great, we share it – we call them 'Nice Things'.



THE LAWS OF UX

It's fair to say that much of the elearning industry simply hasn't kept up with the rest of the world as far as user-experience design is concerned. It's time we changed that, and <https://lawsofux.com/> is a great place to start. These are more than stuffy theories; they're evidence-based principles that UI and UX designers use to create digital experiences all over the web. Check the sources, read the blogs and print the posters if you like. Let's lead the way and stop playing catch-up.



YOUR PLAN, YOUR PLANET

Although our industry likes to talk big about 'personalisation', this is often just another word for a 'role selector'. But what if it wasn't? What if you put individuals at the heart of your design?

<https://yourplanyourplanet.sustainability.google/> asks you about your personal behaviours and choices, shows you the impact that you have and gives you some personalised strategies to make a difference right now. It's what personalisation should really look like, and it's been executed beautifully, too. Check it out.



MIND THE GAP!

This one isn't new. In a past life I was a geography teacher, and I got students using this tool to explore the development stories of different countries. It's a fantastic example of what an interactive infographic can be. I should also say that this 'nice thing' is a homage to Hans Rosling, whose work made this visualisation possible. Take a look – is the world really on the negative trajectory the media would have you believe? <https://www.gapminder.org/tools/>

Simon Rupniak is Head of Design at Lumesse Learning



5 Key Factors for Learning Success that Have Nothing to Do with Content

Andy Kennard
General Manager,
Learning and Development,
Industry Forum

We've all been there. A client graciously shares a business problem with you, and they look to you, hoping that you have the answer to their prayers, the silver bullet or magic pill that will make everything OK.

You are so eager to help that you immediately jump to proposing the 'content' that will solve the problem. Although this may feel good at the time, as you give the client hope that their troubles will now simply vanish, this approach rarely leads to sustained success and often comes back to bite you on the proverbial.

Why? Because the content is only part of the overall solution. Yes, the content has to be right, fit for purpose, engaging and lead to sustainable behavioural change – this is almost a given now in the world of L&D – but without careful consideration of the following five points, even the best content in the world will not have the desired impact.

1. SET THE PROJECT UP FOR SUCCESS FROM THE START

Your client says, 'I need to increase sales ... I want to improve how performance is managed ... I want to increase customer satisfaction ...' and this is when it is most tempting to respond with, 'I know just the training programme for you ...' This is a big mistake. What your client has shared may be their goal, but what you really need to understand is what outcomes your training initiative can deliver that will support this end goal. Once you know what these are you can agree up front how you will be able to measure them so you can monitor the success of the programme and ultimately demonstrate the ROI (return on investment) or, more accurately, the ROE, the return on expectations. This is like turning the four-level Kirkpatrick Model (reaction, learning, behaviour, result) on its head: working out the results (Level 4) you want to measure first and then building your programme around delivering the right skills and knowledge with appropriate measures along the way. This is much more effective than trying to shoehorn some measures in after you have designed – or, worse still – already *run* your programme.

2. DIAGNOSE THE CURRENT 'STATE' BEFORE YOU START

You now know where you want to get to, but don't forget to do a thorough assessment of where you are now so you can start to build an effective plan to get you from A to B. This isn't just to diagnose the current levels of skills and behaviours to establish the development gaps, it is also (and often more importantly) about identifying the barriers to the success of the programme. Have you got the right HR/L&D systems and processes in place? Is the programme aligned to the organisational goals? Are your key stakeholders on board? Are your managers ready and equipped to support the individuals to embed the learning back at the workplace? Do you have the right learning culture in place? If you consider these elements in advance you can factor the findings into your implementation plan.

3. PROVIDE THE TOOLS AND FRAMEWORK TO HELP PEOPLE APPLY THE LEARNING

We all know that sustainable behavioural change is unlikely to be achieved in a two-day workshop alone. Yes, you can provide some great skills and tools, but it will need continuous practice for the behaviours to be perfected and become habit. How will your programme ensure this happens? Don't leave this to chance or assume that you have done your bit by delivering an ovation-worthy workshop. After the euphoria of the course has faded and the pressures of the day job return, much of the learning will be forgotten.

So make sure you provide robust tools and guidance to support the participants to embed the learning after the formal learning part of the programme. And this is where the participant's managers play a key role ...

4. MANAGERS ARE KEY TO THE SUCCESS

Like it or not, the success of your programme is as much in the hands of the managers in the learner's organisation as it is in your own, so involve them from the start. Make sure they are bought in, understand their role in supporting the learners to embed the learning and ensure that they are supported with the skills and knowledge that they need. Think of them as participants, even if they are not taking part in the programme itself. They will still be an important part of it and will have their own pathway of events, so plan your communications and supporting tools carefully.

5. DON'T SCRIMP ON EVALUATION

Measuring results is hard. It takes effort and resources to do it well, and it can be tempting to cut it from the programme if budgets are tight. But if you ask yourself why budgets are tight, the answer is probably because you have never been able to justify the ROI of L&D in the past, and so the organisation has become hesitant when it comes to spending a lot of money on something that has intangible benefits to the bottom line. And why are the benefits often intangible? Yep, it's because they are often not evaluated effectively. So you can see we end up with a

chicken-and-egg situation. My advice is never to cut back on the evaluation. Evaluate in detail to assess satisfaction and knowledge acquisition – not just during the programme and immediately afterwards but also at set periods after the content has been consumed (at three months, six months and nine months perhaps) so that you can track and report on improvements (the behaviours and results) over time. If you do this you will be able to close the loop by measuring and reporting on the ROE you agreed with your client in Point 1 – then you will both be able to raise a glass of champagne to celebrate your combined success.

... Oh, and
by the way,
make sure
the content
is great, too!

***Ladies and
Gentlemen,
It's Time to Play ...***

BUZZWORD BINGO!

***... with Peter Manniche Riber,
Senior Digital Learning Manager,
Siemens Gamesa***

*We gave Peter free rein to air his pet
peeves about some of the modish
verbiage that afflicts our space. He gave
us both barrels, straight from the hip. All
views writer's own!*

‘Microlearning™’

I get that when you push out short videos, exercises or anything else that doesn’t take long to consume, people are more likely to start and maybe even finish them. But ‘microlearning’ is not a real term and definitely not one in need of a trademark – it’s common sense. Quality, timing, relevance and availability are still the determining factors in whether people learn. As a friend of mine said, ‘Sometimes learning is a marathon not a sprint.’

‘Bite-sized’

Cutting crappy, long elearning into chunks does not make it any less crappy, just less long. I know, because I used to do just that. I would like to apologise for that now.

‘Adapted to your learning style’

My learning style changes by the hour. In the morning I can read stuff; by the end of the working day all I can bear is eight seconds of video and maybe a podcast for the commute home. From then on, it’s Netflix or HBO ...

‘Netflix of learning’

Yes, you might offer a nice-looking website from which people can pick and choose videos or courses with beautiful stock photos and catchy titles. You might even offer recommendations about what you think they might like. But a model based on what they’ve clicked on before won’t always give them what they need (or don’t even know that they need) to develop themselves. Piggybacking on the Netflix concept to market another smart storage facility of assets for learning does not make people learn. We all like beautiful things, but they have to provide us with good content and meaning.

‘Gamification’

Gamification has become a buzzword applied to any learning where you can earn a badge or throw a ‘like’ at something. But gamification should not be used everywhere. We don’t need a leader board to tell us how many times someone has logged in to their LMS or a silly avatar to show where the next button is. Like the ability to recommend a video to your colleagues, such things barely qualify as gamification.

‘Rapid-authoring tool’

When has the speed of your authoring abilities ever made anyone learn better or faster? Yes, you can release stuff quickly with some of the good authoring tools out there, but we’re not talking about an extra month’s work because you use one tool rather than another. Most likely, it simply doesn’t matter.

‘On-demand learning’

I don’t even know what this means. People in 2018 search for things when they need them. They are interested in the right resources to solve things that need solving and good experiences to make them reflect, create and develop. Obviously that is ‘on demand’. No need for a marketing term here.

‘Easily converts your PowerPoint presentations into elearning’

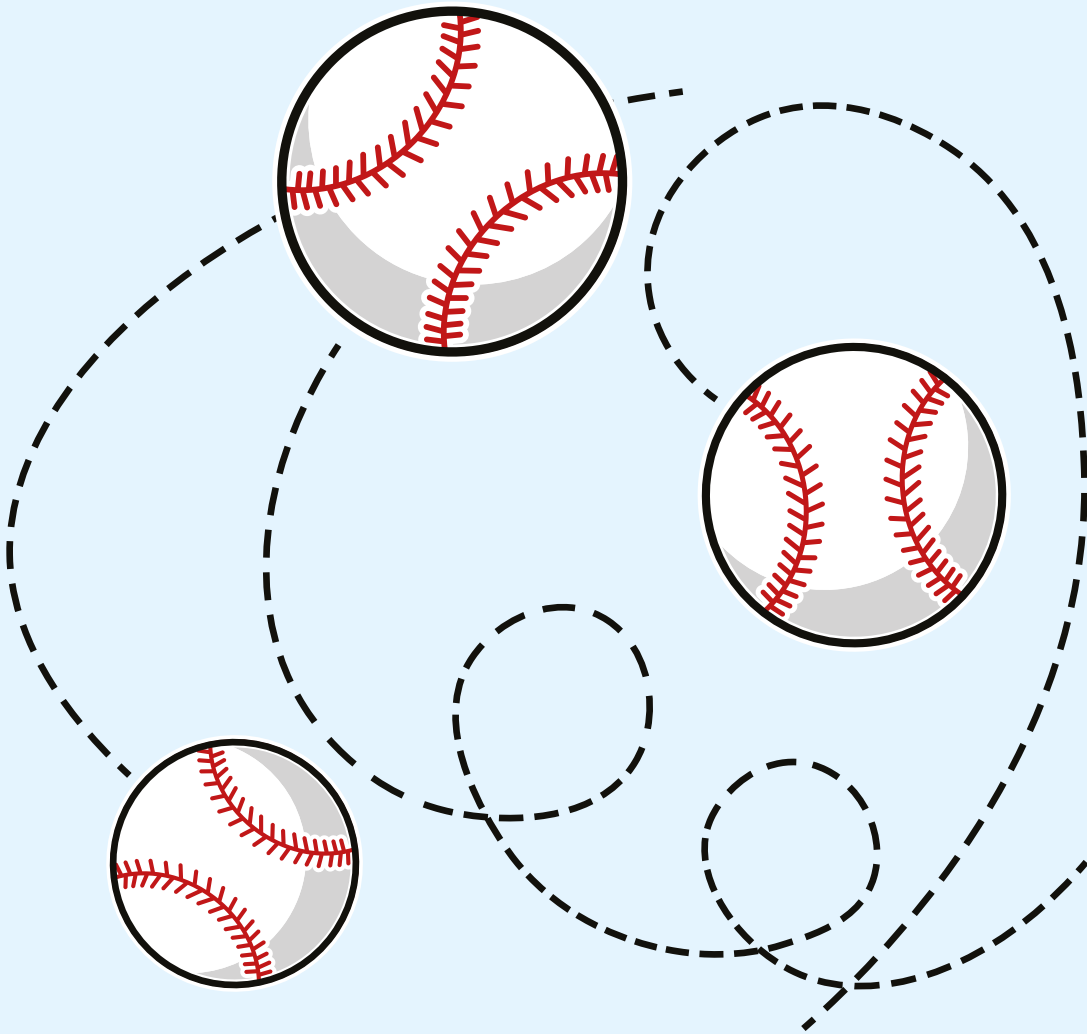
Just ... *no!* Your PowerPoint presentations should probably never have been published in the first place. You should have kept them to yourself. Adding a ‘next’ button and a voiceover is not going to change that.

‘Next-gen LMS’

Whatever the world needs, it is *not* another LMS. People don’t access an LMS voluntarily, no matter what kind of gamification you put in there. I get that newer LMS-type solutions have added engagement and social elements to their product. This is great – we need that. But no one cares which generation it is – and has anyone actually defined what qualifies as being a ‘next-gen’ LMS anyway?

‘Learning ecosystem’

It kills me when a sole provider claims to have an ‘ecosystem of solutions’. Your solution(s) could work alongside others as part of an ‘ecosystem’ – if you *have* to call it that. (After all, an ecosystem really refers to the interaction of plants and animals with the environment in which they live.) How anyone can relate this buzzword to learning is beyond me.



SEND US YOUR CURVEBALLS

If you've managed to distil the essence of a lifetime's learning into 800 words that the world badly needs to read – or if you've just got something to get off your chest – why not send us your own suggestion for a curveball?

Pitch it to us at curveballs@lumesse.com

WE CAN SEE AROUND CORNERS

We look beyond today at what's coming tomorrow. And when we discover something exciting, we share it with you. We look for trends, new technologies, useful science - and the new thinking that will create your future success.

**The Curve**

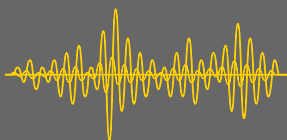
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- Have valuable conversations with peers, experts and tech entrepreneurs in an unpressured environment
- Get hands on with emerging technologies - touch the near future of learning!
- Experience **me:time**
- Relax, refresh, recharge

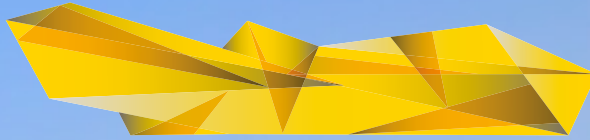


LOUNGE TALKS

Our popular Lounge Talks will be running throughout the day. Hear panel sessions with the thinkers, makers and entrepreneurs who are creating the future of learning, and personal war stories from your peers who have led and bled.

Themes: Voice, the Learning Brain, Design Thinking, Digital Transformation, Entrepreneurial Thinking

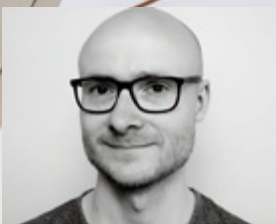
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SPEAKERS INCLUDE



Peter Manniche Riber
Senior Digital Learning
Manager, Siemens Gamesa



Chris Hildrey
Director, Hildrey Studio



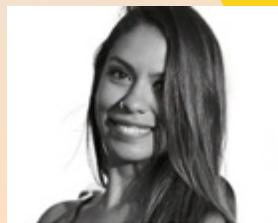
Jamie Brassett
Course Leader,
Central Saint Martins



Susan Amat
Founder CEO/Venture Hive



Kane Simms
Host, VUX World Podcast



Laura Morinigo
Google Developer Expert,
CIO DMod Labs



Anastasia Leng
Google, Picasso Labs



Charlotte Hills
Neuroscience Guru,
Lumesse Learning

TOWARDS
MATURITY **Laura Overton**
CEO, Towards Maturity

Are Today's Workers Leaving Their Learning Teams Behind?

TODAY'S WORKERS ARE CONTINUALLY ADAPTING TO NEW ENVIRONMENTS AND EXPECTATIONS. THE WAY WE MANAGE, THE WAY WE SELL AND THE WAY WE MANUFACTURE GOODS OR CREATE SERVICES HAVE ALL CHANGED DRAMATICALLY IN RECENT YEARS.

Managers are increasingly working with virtual teams, exploring new ways of collaborating with and empowering individuals to deliver against a constantly changing backdrop. At the same time, sales teams are working with customers who know more about their products than ever before, while they – and their competitors – have access to ever increasing amounts of information about their customers. As a result, sales professionals are finding new ways of opening conversations, closing deals and keeping one step ahead. Manufacturing teams, on the other hand, are excited, and perhaps even a bit threatened, by the use of AI and machine-learning to reduce time to market, improve customisation and shift the way that supply chains are managed to increase customer value.

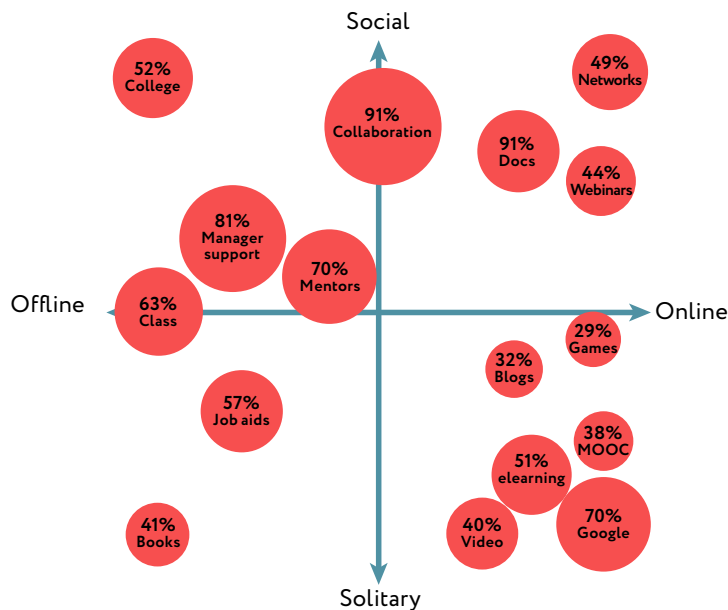
TOWARDS MATURITY

In short, digital is transforming the way we work. Our careers are no longer slow marathons but a series of sprints. The one thing that workers across all disciplines are facing is an increasing need for speed; the ability to adapt, respond rapidly to demand and change direction are now paramount to success.

In the middle of all this change, learning as a standalone activity might not be the number-one priority for today's workers – but one thing is for sure, they know that finding new ways to learn is vital.

How do modern workers learn what they need to do their jobs?

In the latest round of Towards Maturity's Learner Intelligence research, 10,000 workers of all ages and levels of responsibility were asked how they learn what they need to do their jobs today. Response options included online and offline, formal and informal approaches and solitary and social methods, and the findings revealed a large variation with no one-size-fits-all approach. Take a look at the diagram below, which shows those methods that workers said they found essential over the last 18 months.¹



So when it comes to keeping up to date and driving their careers forward, today's workers are looking for fast, convenient learning on demand, as often as not enabled by technology. Three out of ten use YouTube for insights to help them in their jobs, and over half are using in-house social networks such as Yammer or Slack to get answers to their questions.

So, where's L&D in all this?

The shift enabled by always-on technologies for the evolving needs of the modern workforce in the digital workplace creates new challenges for L&D, whose go-to medium of choice is either face to face or basic elearning packages. Although elearning is being provided as a flexible alternative for formal learning (55% of which is still face to face and pulls workers out of the workplace and into the classroom), much of this (89%) has so far only been used for mandated compliance training. However, although L&D professionals express a real desire to see greater change – with over 90% looking to integrate learning and work, increase learner engagement and support self-directed learning – fewer than one in four are reporting any progress. What's more, 44% think learners are reluctant to learn with technology, and 65% believe learners do not have the skills to manage their own learning. Why? Because they are not engaging with what's on offer. Yet our new managers, our new sales people and our new starters are all avid online learners – they just don't always appear to choose to learn through the conventional L&D offerings.

L&D – coach or competitor?

What should be a shared exploration of the new opportunities for learning feels like it has become a competition, and in the race to find new ways of learning, of acquiring knowledge, of testing and refining new ideas with their peers, workers are forging ahead of L&D. They are demanding more of themselves and their colleagues and harnessing new media and communities in powerful ways. But we need to remember that the role of L&D shouldn't be to compete in any such race; instead, it is their job to ensure that those who are running know how to run well, are able to run the distance and can change direction rapidly and without injury. In this 'race' mindset, if our workers are perceived to be ahead in a 'preferred medium' then L&D feels it has to catch up and match them in order to be learner-centric. We have, for example, seen a recent rush on games as a strategy for improving learner engagement on the basis that: 'Millennials love games; L&D loves millennials; L&D loves games.' Don't get me wrong, elements of gaming strategy absolutely have their role in powerful learning, but often such a 'me too' approach is misdirected, and our focus should be on helping them to use those strategies to work for them to maximum effect. 



Today's workers are harnessing the opportunities around them to learn and adapt continually, and L&D teams are struggling to keep up.

HERE ARE A FEW EXAMPLES OF THE WAYS IN WHICH WE
CAN BE BETTER COACHES AND EQUIP OUR WORKERS
MORE EFFECTIVELY FOR THE RACE AHEAD.

ENABLING COLLABORATION

If 91% of workers find collaboration essential, then clearly L&D has a role in enabling and facilitating that. However, only 23% of L&D leaders report that they currently *actively encourage* learners to collaborate and share their knowledge and ideas. We should therefore take every opportunity to model effective practice around collaboration in our formal interventions, helping individuals to practise and refine their skills.

EQUIPPING MANAGERS

Four out of five workers turn to their managers for help in learning what they need. Only 61% report that their managers support them in the consolidation of formal learning in the workplace, and 57% report that their managers coach them to learn, develop and improve their performance. How can L&D facilitate managers to support their teams better? We invest heavily in our training programmes and interventions, and yet most L&D teams do not proactively include managers in their thinking when designing learning, and only 26% provide managers with the learning resources they need to support their teams.

MAKING SENSE OF INFORMATION OVERLOAD

‘I want it, and I want it now!’ This is not just the cry of the snowflake millennial but also the primary motivation of every harried manager, sales person and worker in the modern workplace. We all use the internet to fill in the gaps in our knowledge – 71% of workers say that it is an essential aspect of keeping on top of their jobs – yet everyone is challenged by information overload. Helping staff navigate and make sense of this would be a natural next step – but only 18% of L&D is using some of their technology budget on content-curation tools, and only 15% have a strategy for helping staff find, organise and make sense of the learning resources available to them.

SHIFTING FROM PLAYER TO COACH – A
CUSTOMER-ACTIVATED LEARNING STRATEGY

Towards Maturity first shared evidence about the power of a customer-activated learning strategy back in 2013.² This revealed that becoming learner-centric is not about keeping up with workers’ changing tastes in technology, rather it’s about understanding what they need and working out new ways of using the technology to support them. Understanding the behaviour of today’s learner better equips L&D to design interventions that truly engage them and support their needs.

Find out more about Towards Maturity Learner Intelligence research at
www.towardsmaturity.org/learners

1. ‘Bridging the Divide’, Towards Maturity, 2018. <https://bit.ly/2wOj4sg>

2. ‘The New Learning Agenda’, Towards Maturity, 2013. <https://bit.ly/2QbOi4w>



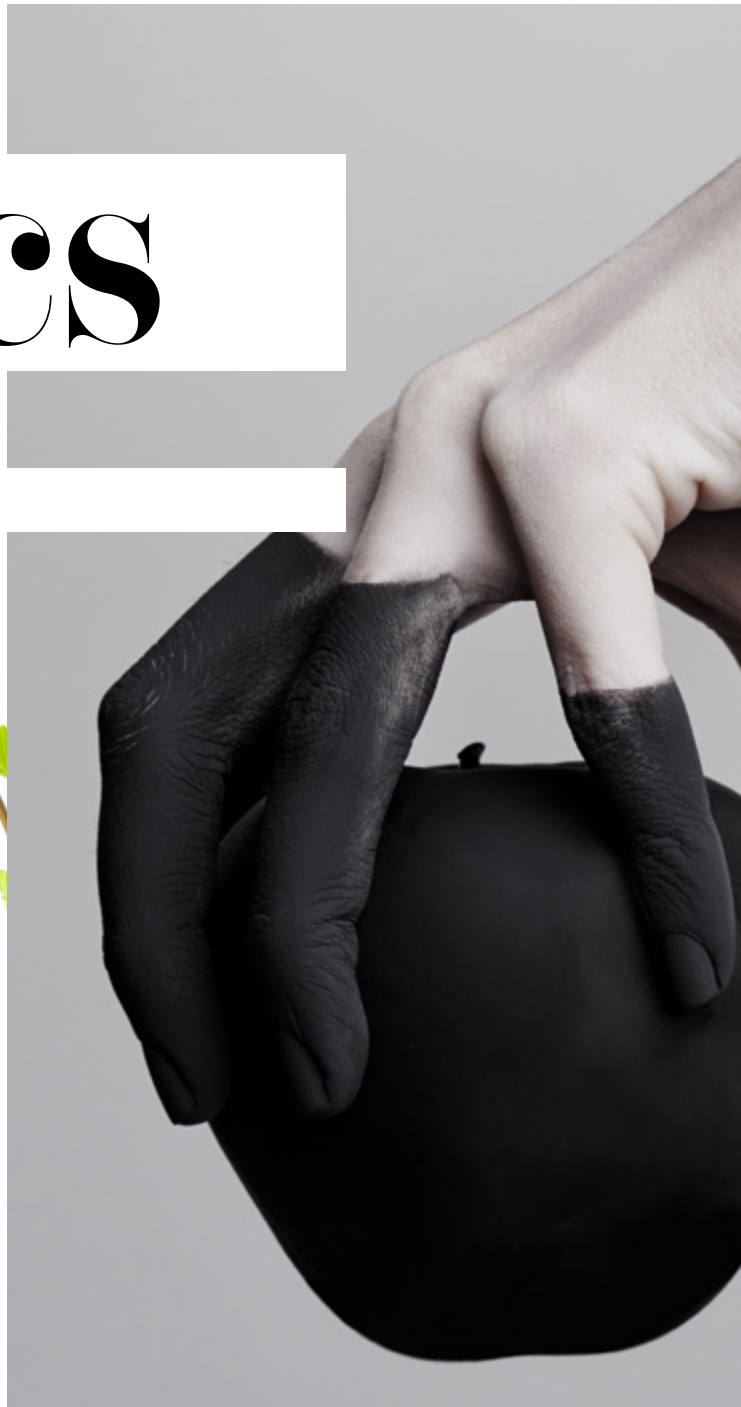
Haptics



IN TOUCH WITH REALITY



Imogen Clare
Learning Designer, Lumesse Learning



To understand haptics and haptic technology we need to engage one of our primary and vital senses, that of touch.

Most of us take for granted that we rely on the nerves and receptors in our hands, our fingers in particular, to navigate the world around us. During our early years we learn what we can and can't touch, as messages about our touch experiences travel from fingertips to brain and we form an understanding of pain, pleasure and the usefulness of touch in our lives.

Haptics is the science of touch feedback, and haptic technology (also referred to simply as 'haptics') re-creates our sense of touch, allowing us to interact with virtually created worlds in entirely new ways. It is a two-way process, so rather than robotic sensors providing an automated experience regardless of the nature of the user's actions, a haptic system will respond to the nuances of touch in an intuitive way. Put simply, haptics simulates our real-life experience of touch. Let's take an example: if you squeeze a stress ball in your hand it will compress under the pressure you exert; haptics will simulate exactly that. A haptic system has within it a representation of a virtual environment or object that responds when the user interacts with it. Responding to the user's specific input, the haptic device applies forces that create the illusion that the user is touching objects that aren't actually there. When haptics is combined with VR, we have the potential for a really meaningful human experience at our disposal.

Virtual touch

Imagine putting on an Oculus Rift and plunging into a virtual world – it could be a classroom, your favourite gaming world or sitting across from a loved one. For the sake of argument, let's say you've chosen a classroom. Imagine your fingers slotting into 'thimbles' that link to robotic arms that have motors and sensors embedded within them that generate the sense of touch. You start to interact with your environment. You're able to touch a piece of chalk with your thumb and forefinger and exert enough pressure to pick it up. Then imagine that sensation is accompanied by something equivalent to the extraordinary visuals of Tilt Brush (if you haven't heard of it, take a look at www.tiltbrush.com – it will blow your mind). This would allow you to watch yourself drawing on a blackboard and, as your brain



Touch simulation

assimilates the visual information that gives you the illusion you're making a mark, your sense of touch would be receiving the slightly crumbly texture of chalk pressing against a hard surface. This is what a really exciting company, Toia, is working on right now, creating a multi-finger device that allows you to pick up objects in a virtual toy box. You can even turn off gravity.

Now consider the impact haptics could have on learning. The opportunities are almost unlimited, and its commercial potential so far remains untapped. When combined with VR, haptics has the power to change the way we interact with one another, work, play and thrive in a digitally driven world. This is especially true in education, where it is already striving to enhance the training of hands-on clinical skills.

Consider what you've just read about the enormous power of haptics to create realistic and meaningful experiences. Now imagine a trainee surgeon is about to operate on their first patient. You'd hope (if you were the patient) that the trainee had practised in some way before making the first incision. However, the traditional mantra of 'see one, do one, teach one' within clinical training allows little time to hone the manual skills vital to performing procedures safely. Consequently, it is common for trainee clinicians to practise on one another (injections, for example, rather than surgery – fortunately), on mannequins or, in the case of dentistry, pigs' heads.

With simulations offering a combination of visual, auditory and touch feedback, trainees have the opportunity to sharpen their skills in an immersive environment and can do so

repeatedly, in complete safety, without risk to themselves or their patients. Haptics can also allow trainee doctors to familiarise themselves with a healthy internal environment before developing the ability to detect pathology. In surgery and dentistry, haptics can give trainees the chance to learn the motor skills required to operate specialist tools in order to perform the most intricate operations under pressure. Physics algorithms can compute the exact behaviour of tissues, from skin to muscle to bone. From laparoscopy and endoscopy to X-ray guidance and injections of all kinds, the scope of procedures available for haptic simulation is almost as broad as an encyclopaedia of medical conditions. Having real-time, hands-on experience is further enriched with objective feedback and measurable results that allow students and tutors to set learning targets and monitor



The impact haptics could have on learning is almost unlimited, and its commercial potential so far remains untapped and underused.

progress. This can be integrated with customised learning pathways, designed and adapted for every level of training, from novice to expert, from routine to rare procedure, creating multi-layered, multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary learning that has the potential to raise standards of excellence across clinical training and patient care. Another amazing company, Generic Robotics (www.genericrobotics.com), is doing exactly this, working to revolutionise clinical education across the disciplines with touch feedback.

The future is closer than you think

It doesn't stop there. If haptics can replicate the finest textures and surfaces in the human body, what's to stop this level of simulation being translated to other forms of learning where hands-on skills are required and

valued? Distance learning is a key area, as it can give students a practical experience of subjects they might otherwise be able to study only theoretically. The Open University (OU) is a perfect example of an institution that brings education to those who might be unable to access learning in other ways. If you're taking archaeology but you can't get away to join a field trip, imagine a centralised learning portal that allows you to connect remotely with fellow students, immerse yourself in an archaeological dig and record your findings. Suddenly you have an *applied* learning experience, which develops your interpersonal skills and advances your hands-on expertise.

This is already being explored through the OU's OpenSTEM Lab, which gives students and tutors the chance to conduct experiments 24/7 through online access to tools and equipment. The OU is also exploring using

haptics as a means of helping visually impaired students in the creative arts to build confidence by navigating a touch-enabled virtual studio where they can put brush to canvas, sculpt clay and even learn to sew.

And this is just the start. We haven't even begun to cover other areas of learning where haptics could, and likely will, also make waves – in academic disciplines such as physics and biology, and industries such as automation, aviation, engineering and construction.

Most forms of learning cannot and do not rely on theory alone. In a world where the digital is an increasing part of our daily lives, haptics offers exciting new opportunities for more realistic, immersive and engaging learning. Haptics is set not only to aid us in this process but take us further in learning than we've ever been able to go before.

Where would you like to see it applied? 

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CROWDSOURCE YOUR CONTENT TO POWER BEHAVIOUR CHANGE



Charlotte Hills
Senior Learning Designer,
Lumesse Learning

A little way into my career as a learning designer, I had a bit of a crisis. I lost confidence in my ability to design in a way that would actually, measurably, change people's behaviour.

As an industry, we'd become better at focusing on what people had to do differently rather than just on what they had to know – thanks in part to the influence of US learning designer Cathy Moore (author of *Map It: The Hands-on Guide to Strategic Training Design*) and her action-mapping approach. But, hand on heart, I didn't know if I'd managed to tap into what would motivate people and whether they'd bother to change anything at all. I suspected that spelling out the 'what's in it for me?' or attempting to scare them with a disaster story wasn't enough. I therefore wanted to write this article to share a strategy I've found useful personally, and which has been proven to work.

CROWDSOURCING IS WELL SUITED
TO EMPOWERING SELF-DIRECTED
LEARNERS TO TAKE CORE PRINCIPLES
AND APPLY THEM TO THEIR OWN
NEEDS AND JOB ROLES.

Following the crowd

When I started looking into it, I found the world of marketing had a lot to offer in terms of models such as AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action) – after all, advertisers are experts in motivating people to buy new things, and I quite liked the idea of modelling myself on *Mad Men*'s Don Draper, hooking the audience in with a slick message or an emotional story. Thankfully, a little while later I came across behavioural science, and a whole new evidence-based world opened up to me. At Warwick University, where I'm working on my Ph.D. in psychology, I'm lucky enough to have access to a world-class behavioural-science hub. I could talk about this research area for

hours, but I'll focus on one of the educational approaches that was trialled there and is one we use at Lumesse: crowdsourcing.

Crowdsourcing simply involves reaching out to a group – usually members of the audience – to collect content. That might involve gathering stories from peers to use in an elearning course, bringing together a community of practice to share expertise or turning traditional teachers into facilitators. Broader interpretations include MOOCs and open-access learning materials.¹ The evidence shows that crowdsourcing can be a useful strategy in engaging people and getting them to do things differently.



HERE ARE THREE REASONS WHY I THINK IT MIGHT WORK FOR YOU:

1. It's personalised learning

Warwick professor of behavioural science Thomas Hills (no relation!) published a paper in 2015, 'Crowdsourcing Content Creation in the Classroom'.² One line really reflected a personal concern of mine: 'Students are at risk of being increasingly met with boilerplate environments that are designed to reduce knowledge to its most clickable form.'

Professor Hills looked for new learner-centred approaches to empower students to connect with core principles in ways in which they saw relevance. So, instead of getting students to listen to him lecture on 'Influence and Persuasion' he sent them out into the real world to create course materials in the form of blog posts for each other. The content had to be based on examples they saw in their daily lives and were interested in personally. He checked and published the blogs online for others to study for the final exam.³ Take a look, and you'll see that the submissions were excellent. They ranged from describing the maze IKEA uses to make visitors spend more to the techniques on which 'charity muggers' rely.

Hills explains: 'Students are explicitly asked to bring prior knowledge and idiosyncratic interests to the task. This facilitates a sense of ownership, motivation, and the foundational constructivist principle of embedding content in what the student already knows.' Crowdsourcing drew overwhelmingly positive comments from students – 'A breath of fresh air'; 'Highly applicable to the real world' – and has been used successfully for the past six years.

Translating this to the world of corporate learning, the approach is well suited to empowering self-directed learners to take core principles and apply them to their own needs and job roles. By allowing peers to share their experiences, learners are also likely to find content that is already tailored to their jobs.

2. It's active learning

There's a huge added bonus to learners who create the content – they go from being passive consumers of content to active learners. When they link personal experiences to key principles they undertake a process of testing their understanding – checking that what they see matches what they've studied. This brings about the 'test effect', where learners are better able to recall things they've been tested on. Although the figures behind the assertion that 'people remember 10% of what they read ... and 90% of what they do' have been debunked, there is evidence that teaching others enhances learning. Thus the act of creating content is a good thing: don't keep it to yourself; share it with your learners. Finally – and this is important – as a learner, if you're going to share content to a large group of peers you'll think long and hard about it. There's nothing like failing in front of a group of people or being rewarded by those you want to impress.

Which leads me to the third point ...

3. It uses powerful social influences

We've used crowdsourcing – well, more like 'in-crowd' sourcing – for a while now at Lumesse, especially in big-change programmes such as Digital Transformation at EY (which won a Brandon Hall award).⁴ Instead of just focusing on messaging from the most senior colleagues, we reach out to quietly influential colleagues and champions at all levels to share their insights. The research says – as has been neatly summed up in Jeni Cross's TEDx talk, 'Three Myths of Behavior Change: What You Think You Know That You Don't'⁵ – that we humans are deeply influenced by and largely willing to conform our behaviour to the groups to which we belong. One way to tap into this power of 'social norms' is to represent people who learners feel

are like them and those they want to be like. But it's crucial that you include the right people: studies from the 1970s show that whether individuals recognise themselves in the group is a key to whether or not they'll change their behaviour.⁶

Even in courses where I might have thought I'd gone a bit overboard on peer stories, the survey feedback is that the learners want more. People really like to hear what others are saying – if it's a story. While some people are natural storytellers, others (like me) struggle to come up with the goods when put on the spot. I recently heard about StoryTagger (www.storytagger.com), a clever mobile product that uses handy prompts to help people plan and record a snappy, compelling video of their story. I wanted to find out more about the thinking behind the design, so I reached out to Cheryl Clemons, whose company LearnerLab created the service, and here's what she had to say:

'It's well recognised that reflecting on your previous experiences is a key part of helping you to learn and progress. When we looked into the research we found that it's actually more effective when you involve others and share your personal story. We've also known for a while that peers have a powerful influence on what people choose to buy. This extends to learning. So when you get to appraise and talk about your real experiences, you help to change your behaviour and nudge others, too.'





‘IT’S WELL RECOGNISED
THAT REFLECTING
ON YOUR PREVIOUS
EXPERIENCES IS A KEY
PART OF HELPING YOU TO
LEARN AND PROGRESS.’

– CHERYL CLEMONS,
LEARNERLAB

Add your voice to the sound of the crowd

As humans, we’re heavily influenced by the communities to which we belong. We’re also resistant to learning new things passively unless they are relevant to us personally. Crowdsourcing acknowledges these traits to help learners change their behaviour. As Thomas Hills explains: ‘social influence typically leads students to mimic one another (even if not explicitly)’. So when you share examples of the learner’s peers demonstrating the behaviours you want to reinforce, you’re more likely to get them to want to do those things, too.

I hope I’ve convinced you to give crowdsourcing a go – or have at least given you a bit more rationale as to why it’s a good thing if you’re already doing it. 

1. For an overview, see Paulin, Drew, and Caroline Haythornthwaite, ‘Crowdsourcing the Curriculum: Redefining e-Learning Practices through Peer-generated Approaches’, *The Information Society: An International Journal*, Vol. 32, Issue 2, 2016. <https://bit.ly/2NE3EjQ>

2. Hills, Thomas T., ‘Crowdsourcing Content Creation in the Classroom’, 2015. <https://bit.ly/2oXk8FV>

3. <https://bit.ly/2O7W6mC>

4. <https://bit.ly/2CKFNuR>

5. <https://bit.ly/PcQng4>

6. Burnkrant, Robert E., and Alain Cousineau, ‘Informational and Normative Social Influence in Buyer Behavior’ in *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 2, No. 3, 1975, pp.206–15. <https://bit.ly/2oWFp2w>

FT: CORPORATES CHANGE THEIR MINDS ABOUT EXECUTIVE EDUCATION



THE PULSE REPORT 2018,
FINANCIAL TIMES | IE BUSINESS
SCHOOL CORPORATE ALLIANCE

John Helmer

‘We are seeing a profound change in companies’ concerns,’ said Gustaf Nordbäck, CEO of FT | IE Corporate Learning Alliance, launching the third annual *Pulse Report*. ‘Rather than seeking to invest in skills development for its own sake, they are wanting to prepare their leaders to meet the specific challenges facing modern business’.

John Helmer holds the wrist of corporate learning and looks at his watch.

One of the interesting things about the *Pulse Report* for me is its broad focus. It surveys business priorities not only among L&D professionals but also HR, senior managers and C-suite executives across 13 countries in Europe, the Gulf and Asia. Too often in our rather parochial industry, discussions focus narrowly on the needs and concerns of the learning department at the expense of this wider organisational context – the true context within which workplace learning actually happens.

So, in this respect, the *Pulse Report* is useful in reminding us that ‘the Learning Organisation’ is not just an academic construct but a living, breathing commercial concern, plugged into the real economy and the real world, with all the messiness and (occasionally nightmarish) shocks and scares that this implies.

Responding to a world in turmoil

Cybersecurity plays big among business priorities for the 1,000 senior professionals surveyed (+73% since 2017), perhaps not surprisingly since we hear so much in the news about large-scale data breaches, malicious state-sponsored attacks and the many nefarious ways in which bad actors seek to influence social media. Geopolitical changes have also taken a big jump (+75%) since last years’ report (which we covered in Issue 7 of *The Curve*) – again, no surprises there, since factors such as Brexit and the radical White House agenda on issues like trade, immigration and regulatory easing have immediate effects on companies’ bottom lines and long-term destinies.



At the same time, and no doubt influenced by some of the macro drivers mentioned above, issues of digitalisation and data management have come to the fore this year with increasing urgency. The report shows an uptick in technology-driven change as a driver of organisational priorities. And perception of the need to tackle organisational change effectively is up by a whopping 133%.

The picture that emerges is one of a world and markets in turmoil, creating a need for leaders who can perform in times of change. Organisations must adapt rapidly to the need for new skills and new perspectives that bring with them changes to policy, process and culture.

An outlier year – or the new normal?

The wider question seemingly raised by this report and Nordbäck's statement at the head of this piece about its significance is just how profound a change of mind we are really seeing – how temporary or irrevocable. Do the results of the survey simply show the response to one particularly tumultuous year in world affairs? In other words, is this just a blip? Or is it the new normal? If the latter, we could be seeing the map of corporate learning completely redrawn.

One potential downside to the widescreen approach taken by the Pulse Report is that learning professionals can find it hard to join the dots in connecting macro business drivers to their day-to-day experience of running a learning department. However, that seems much less of a danger this year. Not only other, more L&D-focused research but also our own conversations reveal that many are in the throes of digital-transformation programmes or facing an accelerating number and intensity of new demands to provide learning in skills areas such as data analysis, AI and agile working that have not necessarily been part of the landscape before. Would it be fanciful to see in this a greater degree of alignment between L&D and the business when it comes to what should be everyone's top-of-mind concerns?

However shared consciousness of the problem does not necessarily mean that the right conditions are in place to provide its solution, with fewer than half of senior professionals believing that their organisations are well equipped to adapt to changes in the marketplace.

Providers must improve on innovation and alignment

When it comes to executive education and leadership development year-on-year, says Nordbäck, respondents are more likely to point to a lack of support from senior leadership and the misalignment of programmes with company strategy as key reasons why senior leaders don't feel past investments in such programmes have added value. Of senior professionals polled, 41% say that executive education could be improved by better alignment with business goals, and Nordbäck finds an appetite for providers to offer new ways to help them face business challenges with those goals in mind.

Challenges for all therefore, as organisations move to keep their vital signs healthy through 2019 and beyond. 





Learning Cities

Luton



Lucy Littler
Learning Consultant,
Lumesse Learning

Luton often gets a bad rap and has had the dubious honour of appearing near the top (or should that be bottom?) in more than one 'worst-places-in-Britain' poll in the past. But is that a fair assessment of this historic town? Lumesse Learning's Lucy Littler believes there is a lot more to celebrate than you might think.

They don't call me 'Lucy Luton' for nothing. If I'm not at first-division Luton Town Football Club, then you'll often find me at the Luton Hoo country house and estate, indulging myself with a sumptuous afternoon tea – with bubbles, of course!

Whether it's company travel or leisurely time away, it's as easy as can be when you have Luton

Airport – the fourth largest to serve London – on your doorstep. I love a city break, but when I'm not flying I can hop on the Thameslink train and be in central London in just 25 minutes to meet clients, to explore the capital or to 'shop till I drop'. So, when you add its location beside the M1 corridor to these excellent transport links it's no surprise that many companies – including Barclays Bank, Astra Zeneca and Whitbread – have been able to attract high-quality talent and business opportunities to the area. You've got the bright lights of London, the bucolic delights of the Chilterns and cheap flights from Luton Airport. What more could a busy learning professional want?

1

The town's foundation dates back to the 6th century as a Saxon settlement on the River Lea – from which Luton derives its name. Loitone, as it is called in the Domesday Book, had a population of 145 households in the 11th century, with most inhabitants involved in agriculture.

2

Despite the modern town now being home to a population of close on a quarter of a million, Luton isn't actually a city, having failed in three attempts to gain city status. However, undeterred, the town is still preparing to launch a bid to become the UK City of Culture in 2025. (Don't worry, Luton – in our eyes, you're already a winner!)

3

Vauxhall Motors only began to make cars in Luton in 1903, but the firm's name and its famous griffin logo both have much older associations. This fabulous beast featured on the coat of arms of Sir Falkes de Breauté, a mercenary soldier who was given the Manor of Luton by King John in the 13th century, and it was his mansion, Fulk's Hall, which eventually became known as 'Vauxhall'.

4

Budget airline easyJet has its head office in Hangar 89 at Luton Airport (Campari anyone?), and the carrier is a major employer in the area. The building is easily distinguished from its neighbours, decorated, as it is, in easyJet's distinctive orange livery (Pantone 021 if you're interested).

5

By the 17th century, hat-making, particularly the manufacture of straw hats, had become well established in the town, and this industry continued to grow until its heyday in the 1930s, when around 70 million hats of all kinds were made there annually. However, despite the post-war decline of the industry, the town remains associated in many people's minds with millinery, which is why ...

6

... Luton Town Football Club is known as 'The Hatters' – their mascot, Happy Harry, even wears a straw boater. The team's orange kit is currently sponsored by Indigo Residential, a Luton-based estate agent – but, no surprises, the colour was introduced during easyJet's sponsorship of 2009–15 (although those in the know will tell you that orange had previously featured in earlier Hatters' strips). Celebrity fans include the late comedian Eric Morecombe, poet John Hegley and cricketer Monty Panesar.

7

Other notables associated with the town are screenwriter David Renwick and TV presenter and documentary-maker Stacey Dooley. Renwick is the son of a Luton milkman and has been a dominant force in British comedy over recent decades, scripting such shows as *Jonathan Creek*, *The Two Ronnies* and, most famously, *One Foot in the Grave*, featuring grumpy pensioner Victor 'I don't believe it' Meldrew. Dooley worked as a shop assistant at Luton Airport before her TV career took off with *Stacey Dooley Investigates* and her recent appearance as a contestant on the 2018 season of *Strictly Come Dancing*.

8

According to the 2011 census, around 45% of Luton's population is of mixed-race or non-white parentage and it is home to a Muslim population of 25.6%, which places it high in the rankings of most ethnically diverse cities in the UK.

9

From humble beginnings in 1976 the annual Luton International Carnival, held during the Spring Bank Holiday weekend, is now the largest one-day carnival in the UK and the second-largest overall after London's Notting Hill.

10

Between 1764 and 1779 Lancelot 'Capability' Brown landscaped the park at Luton Hoo, a Grade I-listed country house that is now an upmarket hotel. This famous landscape gardener lends his name to the nearby Capability Green business park, global head office of ... (drum roll) ... the Lumesse Group!

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AT RIVER ISLAND

Nebel Crowhurst and Mike Collins of River Island talk to *The Curve's* John Helmer about how one major fashion retailer is transforming the ways it does L&D.



RIVER ISLAND

What's driving your process of digital transformation?

Nebel: Our business is continually evolving as customer expectations and purchasing habits are shifting. As a result, we increasingly need to look beyond being just a bricks-and-mortar retailer and think about what digital means for the customer experience. This evolution in customer habits and our need to consider how we improve digital experiences and technology for our customers means we also need to ask what we can do differently for our own people. How can we ensure that our staff learn more effectively and have easier access to development?

At River Island customer experience and people experience are running in parallel – we're using what we know about our customers and bringing that understanding in-house to make sure that we've got a great people experience in line with our customer experience.

Mike: The whole of retail is striving to deliver seamless shopping experiences, and we believe that our L&D team has got to deliver seamless learning experiences. We have to look at the ways in which we can use mobile, virtual classrooms, user-generated content and social media so that we can connect with our employees in ways that are relevant to building our employer brand and communicating what it means to work at River Island.

In much the same way that the company has had to stop thinking of stores as simply physical retail spaces, we, as a learning team, also have to move away from the idea that the only experience we can provide is in the classroom – our bricks and mortar. We can't get our managers and retail team into all-day workshops, travelling the length and breadth of the country to attend courses. So, as well as a technical shift, we also need a change of mindset – an active acceptance of the fact that learning isn't something that only happens in a classroom.

On this basis, we've been able to make use of the time that our employees have in-store by creating much shorter pieces of content and enabling our teams to create more content themselves. We've swapped our role from content creator to one of support, coach and encourager, and – where we're able – we're helping people share their knowledge and expertise across other River Island stores and the wider business.

Do you think there are particular challenges for retail compared with other sectors?

Nebel: Yes. Huge challenges. Traditionally a retail store might only have one back-office PC, and that would have made it difficult to provide learning opportunities for staff at the moment of need. But, because we have this tech transformation from the customer-experience perspective, this has meant that new technology is now going into stores that staff can also use to access learning tools. Similarly, if we're going to focus on digital to create a better customer experience, then we need advanced Wi-Fi connectivity. This improved network access means that staff will be able to engage with learning more effectively in-store, giving us opportunities to introduce new ways of working.

We're also exploring how staff can use their own devices

to access learning. But, while this is something we want to encourage, we are mindful that not everyone will want to go down that route. We have to be open to enabling people to use their own devices if they choose to – but not force them to do so.

How different is learning once you take it out of the classroom and do it digitally?

Nebel: The traditional workshop in a classroom still has its place, but the value of this doesn't necessarily translate into an equivalent virtual workshop – a whole day's online learning is probably not the best approach. It's more about looking at what learning experiences we want people to have, what bite-sized chunks we could create to deliver this and how we can provide people with the tools, information and support mechanisms that they want so they can access these at the right time. So, instead of a one-day

workshop on management skills, we might provide an online learning platform that people can access 24/7.

We hear quite a lot about making things 'bite-sized'. Is there still room for learning that takes a bit longer and needs more reflection?

Nebel: It depends what it is. There are times when you need to take more time over it, and I remain an advocate of the benefits of learning in a room with other people. Where that room might be doesn't really matter; it's not about the classroom environment, it's about people being together. But while you can be present collectively in a virtual classroom, I think you can still benefit from coming together in a physical space where people can learn and share experiences with one another.



'IN L&D WE'VE SWAPPED
OUR ROLE FROM CONTENT
CREATOR TO ONE OF SUPPORT,
COACH AND ENCOURAGER.'

- MIKE COLLINS

Of all the new initiatives you've implemented, which has had the most impact?

Mike: Video. Whether it's through Instagram, Twitter or Snapchat, video is so powerful. We've done a lot of work over the past two years on creating more video-based content and developing our own in-house skills and capabilities. We've helped people make their own videos, which they can then share across the business – and whether it's talking about our brand, a particular product or a change programme, those bite-sized chunks of information really communicate what those key messages are. For example, our retail-operations team probably has the closest ties with retail stores, so we work hand in hand with them to understand what they're trying to achieve and how video can support that. It's not the only solution, but video has definitely had the best feedback of all the initiatives we've supported.

Some of the most popular video content comes from River Island staff in-store or working in head office. There's been a real culture change, and people want to do more of this; staff understand how video as a medium really supports how we can communicate key messages and help people understand us.

Nebel: I think that mirrors life. Going back to my point about creating great people experiences in line with customer experiences, the reality today is that we all look at video – so, if we do that outside of work, why shouldn't we do it in our work environments? It's a much more efficient way of accessing information quickly without having to wait for a course to become available at some point in the future.

Mike: I'm no Steven Spielberg – and we don't have any Hollywood-blockbuster directors at River Island – but we've been able to adopt an agile approach, and through this we're able to turn things around really quickly. We know we won't get an absolutely polished video at the end of it, but what we do produce is something that's authentic and relevant and which people can relate to.

We touched on virtual classrooms earlier. Using video, we have been able to take some face-to-face activities, distil them down into their key learning points and make them as interactive and engaging as possible.



We also recently launched 'Learning Live in 75' – a series of 75-minute online sessions based around online chat, polls and slide decks. These try to get across to people that they can collaborate and share ideas and information in completely different settings, locations and stores and have an *experience*. We give people top tips and things they can do to change their behaviour straight away. Then we follow up to make sure that we've hit the mark. Demand is soaring, and the feedback's been overwhelmingly positive.

Nebel: Video and virtual classrooms are so effective and create such a great experience for people. And, as Mike noted earlier, you reduce the need for people to take time out to go to learning events – which has an added bonus of saving on travel costs.

Could you tell us a bit about the programme learning pathways that you use?

Mike: OK, one example is linked to the customer experience at River Island, which is based around eight pillars, some key words that describe what it should be like to shop at River Island. We've created specific induction programmes for different roles aligned to those eight pillars so that when somebody comes into the organisation, rather than just doing some general induction or onboarding, they are given a programme that allows them to trace how their learning, their development and the work they do all link to the customer experience. That, as a learning pathway for all our retail managers, has been really powerful.

How has all this changed the way your people think about learning?

Nebel: As a result of expanding our learning offering and making development more accessible, we have had a complete culture shift in terms of people development and career growth in the business. If we wind back around three years, we were doing some work at head office that was OK, but we actually did next to nothing in our retail network. Bearing in mind that around 9,000 of our 12,500 employees are in retail, we recognised that we had to do more to enable those people so that they felt their development was being invested in.

At the same time, we also realised that some employees appeared to be leaving River Island because they didn't feel their careers were being developed sufficiently. To address this, we've moved away from traditional appraisals and introduced a mindset of employee-led career development. This has been a major overhaul for us as a business, but it has worked well; our more progressive approach to performance management within the business aligns with everything we've been doing to support business performance – and by having digital learning in place that reinforces our employee-led philosophy, we're saying to our staff, 'There's this stuff available to you, you just need to grab hold of it and take advantage of it.'

Would you say you're creating a culture of self-directed learning?

Nebel: Absolutely!

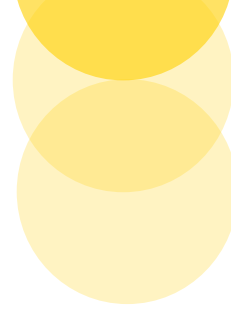
Has the process of digital transformation changed the skills you need in L&D?

Nebel: Yes. There's been a noticeable change from when I joined River Island just over three years ago. Today you're always keeping an eye out for what the new opportunities are and the ways in which you can evolve. You can't go from A to Z overnight – you have to do it gradually – but I think most of us realise that L&D has gone way beyond being people who just stand at the front of the room and deliver workshops. We recognise that there is a much broader skillset required to find new ways to enable businesses to work more effectively. But key within this has always been – and will always be – having the commercial mindset to recognise that everything you deliver in the learning space must directly impact the bottom line of the business. Otherwise what's the point?



'I THINK MOST OF US
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GONE WAY BEYOND BEING
PEOPLE WHO JUST STAND AT
THE FRONT OF THE ROOM
AND DELIVER WORKSHOPS.'

- NEBEL CROWHURST



Given this, we must continually ask ourselves how we are adding value and how we are improving business performance. And here I guess it's more about the approach and attitude, because if we're saying that we must have the skills to create video, then people must be able learn those skills. Having the right attitude around how a learning function actually impacts business performance and grows revenue is much more of a priority than being able to lecture a room full of people.

Mike: If I were to summarise, then for me there are three elements that are critical for a modern L&D team. The first is to move away from simply delivering courses towards thinking about campaigns. This involves borrowing the appropriate competencies and skillsets from our marketing friends. How do you run a successful campaign? How do you track that campaign? How do you measure the success of that campaign, click-throughs or attendance? How do you test and split test key messages and subject lines? And how do you then demonstrate that one campaign is a success compared with another?

Second, is to review how you understand analytics. The potential for data is huge, which scares a lot of people, but you need to ask yourself how you can use analytics to identify trends and patterns and how you can integrate this within your decision-making. It's so easy for people to be subjective – and everyone's got an opinion – but how do you cut through this and really lead with an evidence-based approach?

Finally, I think the last thing is for L&D to stand up and say, 'This is what a modern organisation *should* look like.' We have to be credible, and if we don't understand modern ways of working – whether it's network and collaboration tools such as Yammer or Workplace or productivity tools like MS Teams – then I think this creates a real barrier to other people adopting them.

Both Nebel and I believe that L&D can be so many things. That's why we hope we can be role models for different ways of working that can help support, enhance and embrace change. Some of these require technical capabilities and skills, but the most vital element is actually just having a mindset for continuous improvement, one that is always asking how we can do things better, quicker and smarter – and how we are able to create positive experiences and support people so that they can be their best selves at work. I think the fact that we can have such a massive impact on an organisation is why I got into learning and development. It's what still resonates with me and fuels my passion. Either we come in and just deliver training courses or we can think about work, learning and performance differently.

Right, I'll get off my soapbox now! 

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– MIKE COLLINS

MIKE AND NEBEL'S 5 DOS AND DON'TS FOR USING DIGITAL TO TRANSFORM L&D

1.

DON'T WORK IN A SILO

You can't achieve a true digital approach without working with your tech partners, your marketing teams and all the other teams that might touch on employer brand, recruitment and customer experience. There has to be a joined-up approach and vision.

2.

DON'T ASSUME THAT EVERYBODY IS DIGITALLY SAVVY AND SWITCHED ON; NOT EVERYONE HAS A DIGITAL MINDSET

Yes, the vast majority of people these days have a smartphone and use them to access information, but you can't make the assumption that everybody relates to technology in the same way.

3.

DO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT WE ARE COMPETING WITH THE LIKES OF GOOGLE, YOUTUBE, FACEBOOK, SNAPCHAT AND INSTAGRAM

While their use may not be work related, the experiences that these platforms provide is setting the benchmark for what people expect everywhere. L&D's duty is to consider every experience and ensure that things are joined up and don't feel broken or disjointed.

4.

DO BECOME A BELIEVER IN PILOTS, TRIALS AND TESTING THINGS OUT

We work in an agile way and are very comfortable being iterative. Start with something small, test it out, gather feedback by getting people's opinions and then build on it gradually, because that tends to lead to far greater success.

5.

DON'T FORGET THAT LEARNING MEANS DIFFERENT THINGS TO DIFFERENT PEOPLE

Whereas, as L&D professionals, you might habitually talk about evaluation levels and the Kirkpatrick Model or ROI, achieving real buy-in and influence becomes a lot easier when, instead, you start talking in a way that helps people outside L&D see the value of speed, productivity, performance and efficiency.

Nebel Crowhurst and Mike Collins work for River Island, Nebel as head of people experience and Mike as senior digital LX and UX specialist.

Parenting and Work

‘Parenting has made me more present in the moment, a better listener and more patient.’

Vicky Wylde

Juggling the responsibilities of new parenthood with a return to full-time employment can be daunting, with both seemingly in constant competition for your time. However, Vicky Wylde tells *The Curve* it is possible not just to work around this but also use it to bring newfound skills into the workplace.

How was it returning to the workplace after parental leave?

I was incredibly lucky to be able to take a good chunk of paid maternity leave, to have a great support network of family and friends and a brilliant childcare provider when I returned. Although I realise this isn't everyone's experience, I think it really helps to set yourself up for success as far as possible – and to be confident in the people you rely on. The transition can be tough, so plan for that by recognising that you need to give yourself time to get back into the swing of things. I found agreeing a phase-back plan really helped me, as did sharing my experiences with friends and colleagues. Having a supportive boss is a huge advantage, and I've been incredibly fortunate in that, too.

The single best piece of advice I was given was to stop apologising – just changing my language from 'I'm really sorry, but I have to leave to collect my child' to 'I've got a hard-stop at 4.30, so I'm going to have to wrap up then' made a huge difference to the way I felt.

What additional skills that you've learned from parenting do you think have boosted your capability in your paid work?

Developing additional multi-tasking and time-management skills are a given, but in a talent role I have found the more subtle things have actually been the most powerful. Parenting has really helped me to become present in the moment, to listen more carefully and to be considerably more patient – also never to underestimate the influencing power of a chocolate button on colleagues and children alike!

Has being a parent changed the way you operate in the workplace?

I've made some very practical changes, such as starting earlier to help me to finish on time, planning my travel schedule weeks in advance and trying not to procrastinate over the less exciting tasks. But the most interesting thing for me has been how you evaluate your own success – I've become much more purposeful about wanting the work I do to have meaning and to make a lasting impact.

How do you cope with the head switch between managing at work and managing the home?

That's a very interesting question, because I'm not always sure I do. I think the reality for many people today is that the way we work is changing. Having the flexibility to work at home or in the evenings has been hugely beneficial for me – it means that I have had to find a way to integrate work and home rather than seek a holy grail of 'balance' between the two. The most important thing helping me to make it all come together is to try to be present in whatever I am doing at that moment and to take pleasure in it.

Do you have any advice on managing your time effectively in a flexible-working role?

I think it's key to realise that there isn't one silver bullet – manage your priorities carefully, try to plan ahead as much as possible, don't leave tasks to the last minute if you can avoid it, manage your stakeholders' expectations and ask for help when you need it.

Oh, and I find coffee helps, too!

Vicky Wylde is global talent and organisational development partner at Tate & Lyle.



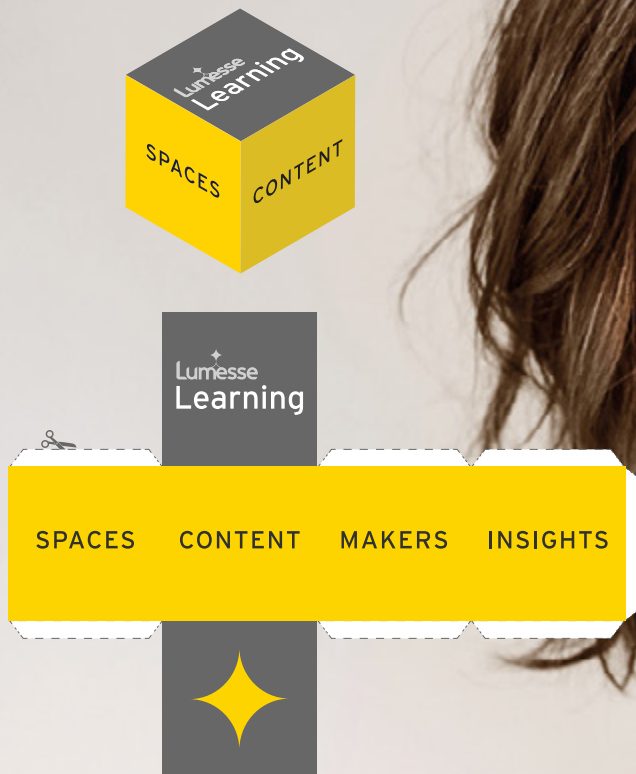
MAKERS

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