

Educating and Inspiring the World at Work

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2019

WORKSPAN | November/December 2019

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The Future of Learning: Cultivating Learnability



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Let's take a trip down memory lane. Remember when you went through school, picked a specialty, studied hard and emerged ready to conquer your chosen career? Maybe you went back for an additional degree or you took a certification course. But for the most part, your education and on-the-job experience would set you up for success and comfort.

And now, let's get real. If those idyllic days ever existed, they're certainly over now. Deloitte research tells us that the half-life of a learned skill has fallen to about five years. In other words, half of what you learned five years ago is completely irrelevant today.

If you're running an organization and that doesn't make you squirm, I'm not sure what would.

Here's my takeaway from that scary stat: All of us need to be in the business of learning. All organizations need to be reimagining their learning and development (L&D) programs to deliver the changing skills people need to stay competitive.

CEOs who are not investing in learning are going to miss out.

The economic collapse a decade ago brought huge cuts to many corporate training and development programs. We started thinking of formal learning as "nonessential." Here we are, 10 years later, and organizations are scrambling to restart their L&D programs.

With this renewed focus on learning at work, there are opportunities to do more than just rebuild what was there before. Organization leaders have an opportunity to build the L&D team of the future. They need to be thinking about questions like "What kind of L&D do you need to take your organization through

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the next 20 years?” and “How do you future-proof the L&D for your organization?”

Here’s what you should know about building the L&D mindset that will move your organization into the future.

Invest in Continuous Learning

We all know we’re at full employment. There are more organizations that need people with in-demand skills like robotics and AI than there are people with those skills. And geopolitical changes and disruptions, like restrictions on immigration in the United States, are further hampering employers’ ability to recruit the right talent. In its wake, this perfect storm of workforce issues leaves organizations unable to meet their talent needs.

For employers, education is the solution to the talent problem. Continuous learning should be the backbone of an organization’s talent strategy. Furthermore, organizations should completely rethink their recruitment strategy to focus on investing in current employees’ continuous learning, rather than throwing more and more money at recruiting new talent.

Given the reality of the half-life of skills, even hiring talent with the skills you need today won’t work as a long-term strategy. Those in-demand skills are going to be radically different in five or 10 years. You need an L&D strategy that can keep pace with those changes. And that means continually investing in upskilling and reskilling your workforce.

Decentralize and Outsource Learning

Leaders also have the opportunity to rethink what learning looks like at an organization. Developing internal platforms for employee training and education is one option that organizations are exploring. But this path risks giving employees training that is too organization-centric and that misses out on larger market trends and the expertise of people outside of the organization. It’s also costly and difficult to do well.

Decentralized learning gives employees the education and training they need in the most efficient and cost-effective way. Online learning platforms are making this easier than ever before. Coursera, for example, recently partnered with L’Oreal to offer self-directed learning opportunities that helped the organization identify employees with the aptitudes and interests they need.

Micro-credentials are also offering employers new ways to help their talent maintain cutting-edge skills. Employees no longer have

to enroll in multiyear degree programs and wait for tuition reimbursement programs to kick in. Now, they can choose from a host of certification or micro-credential programs that provide the targeted training or knowledge they need when they need it — and at a much lower cost.

Cultivate Learnability

Ultimately, these approaches to workforce education are all underpinned by “learnability.” Learnability means that people have a drive and curiosity to learn new skills and that they have a growth mindset and the motivation to continually upskill and reskill to stay current.

So, how do you cultivate learnability in your organization’s culture? It starts with hiring — you have to infuse learnability into your organization as a major part of the selection process. Hire for curiosity and innovativeness, no matter what your field is. And, make it very clear to potential hires that your culture is built on integrating learning across every position.

But it’s also crucial to ensure that your people have the time and mental energy needed to learn, to read and to participate in projects outside of their normal workday that sparks different thinking within your organization.

In our commoditized world, a lot of organizations essentially do the same work. Your people are your differentiator. Make learning a priority and ensure your people know you value and reward curiosity, growth and learning.

We’re never going back to the “good ol’ days.” But we are all going to get smarter. It’s our only option. **WS**

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