

## The future of work and ever-growing importance of L&D



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With reskilling being critical to organisational success, the transformation of the learning function is beyond doubt going to follow suit.

### **Snapshot**

Learning is no longer only a retention measurement, but overtime has become key in realising business strategy.

In the future of work, L&D is about building a culture of continuous learning throughout the organisation. L&D will need to undergo a significant transformation to successfully reimagine learning.

In the current edge of constant change and scarcity, the disruptive workforce landscape requires organisations to largely restructure the way they are doing work, which has a significant impact on the capabilities that business leaders expect from their people. In addition, automation may displace 85 million jobs by 2025, whereas time now spent on tasks will be equally divided between people and machines. For these reasons, workforce roles will change and so do the skills needed to perform them. Many leaders are aware of this so-called approach to upskilling and reskilling and admit that learning is no longer a retention measurement but instead a key in realising business strategy.

### ***But how can the Learning & Development function best respond to this need?***

At first instance, it is essential for L&D functions that are aiming to upskill and reskill to understand that L&D is much more than providing training for the workforce only. In essence, it is about building a culture of continuous learning throughout the organisation that emphasises the role of coaching,

feedback, leadership and ownership. It is, however, not surprising that a strong continuous learning culture is not implemented overnight and requires powerful transformations in processes and mindsets. Here is what organizations and L&D teams should keep in mind when transforming their L&D function in order to keep up with many of the challenges that leaders and organisations are facing today:

### **Diversification of your L&D function**

**“Learning & Development is about building a culture of continuous learning throughout the organisation”**

It comes as no surprise that a strong alignment between the corporate strategy, the talent agenda and the learning agenda is a prerequisite in achieving a continuous learning culture that helps the organisation and workforce to move into the right direction.

Therefore, L&D should be incorporated in a broader organisational framework, so as to avoid a segmented approach that might be counterproductive in today’s realities. In order to achieve that, the L&D function has to be organised in the shape of multidisciplinary teams that put co-ownership between L&D professionals, talent management and the business itself forward. Having a stable cascaded governance with regards to strategy, people, processes, structure and technology is hereby of importance, even though the learning function should also be able to operate in a more agile way when required.

In addition, the L&D function should ideally consist of a set of diversified profiles, for example a combination of graphic designers, content curators, facilitators but also data analysts. A strong diversification of L&D will give the team the levers to respond quickly to a changing environment and ever-changing needs.

### **Learning in the flow of work, working in the flow of learning - The Netflix of Learning (on demand learning)**

***“Learning & Development needs to think about how learning can be integrated in the flow of work, so that the workforce and business is able to grow as much as possible given shorter, faster and integrated learning”.***

In order for this multidisciplinary L&D function to be ready to bridge the skills gap, organisations need to understand that continuously improving the way learning is conceptualised or delivered is essential.

Today we can observe that, although the skills gap is one of the main concerns of business leaders, the workforce only has limited time available to dedicate to learning. This means that L&D needs to make learning more accessible just like Netflix and prioritise certain learning interventions over others. Briefly, L&D needs to think about how learning can be integrated in the flow of work, so that the workforce and business is able to grow as much as possible given shorter, faster and integrated learning.

When talking about learning in the flow of work, we want to move from a transactional just-in-case approach to a transformative just-in-time approach. For this purpose, the set-up is two-folded. On the one hand, the workforce should receive continuous learning opportunities in the form of bite-sized or micro-

learning stimuli, implemented in their daily working environment. On the other hand, the workforce should be able to immediately retrieve relevant learnings whenever they need them in their work environment, an on-demand learning if you wish. Most L&D functions entrust full responsibility to the individual learner in terms of selecting learnings that are in line with their direct needs and interests. Although these self-selected learning plans have shown to be beneficial for individual learner engagement and accessibility, there is always the risk of losing connection to actual individual and business needs. Therefore, an optimal balance between organisational steering based on strategic imperatives/priorities and individual responsibility based on self-assessed needs and interests in selecting relevant learnings is of big importance.

But how about flipping the coin? Learning in the flow of work is actually only half of the picture. Working in the flow of learning is at least as important. The principle is simple in order to achieve a continuous learning culture, the majority of learning should actually take place on the job itself. Moreover, any formal learning incentive that is self-selected by the individual or encouraged by L&D should be directly linked to practice on the job. To allow for working in the flow of learning, it is the role of L&D to enable informal learning throughout the organisation, for example by designing and incorporating interventions that support on-the-job coaching and mentoring.

### **Get down and dirty to the science - Let data speak to you**

“Many have said data is a superficial advantage in a boardroom, however, if applied and analysed correctly, data can be a game changer within the functioning of corporate L&D and help the function earn their spot as a strategic partner.

So, allow me to then pose that the above arguments are clear: Learning and Development need to become a strategic partner to the C-suite and the business strategy. Moreover, L&D requires a personalised approach with a focus on the learner experience and including content in the flow-of-work. Unless each corporate L&D team significantly grows in size, these requirements for future proofing the L&D function are only possible by leveraging one often overlooked source of organisational knowledge readily available: data. If applied and analysed correctly, data can be a game changer within the functioning of corporate L&D.

Firstly, every well-developed L&D strategy has key performance indicators to evaluate the progress relative to the predefined L&D target goals. Often companies already use status-based metrics such as completion rates and attendance statistics to make their KPIs measurable. This is a good way to analyse the delivery progress within the L&D silo. Nevertheless, to rightfully step in as a strategic partner, KPIs need to evolve to indicators showing how L&D strategy contributes to the business performance. For this, a complementary use of longitudinal, outcome-based metrics, such as analysing the impact on team sales numbers and employee performance, is crucial.

Secondly, the role of data within learner experience is crucial. Most companies already made a considerable part of the investment: deploying an AI driven content library, often connected to or

integrated into their Learner Experience Platform (LXP). But why does your costly, supposedly end-user friendly, AI driven system still does not offer relevant content for your learners? Although AI-based technology is evolving rapidly, algorithms are still evolving and, therefore, AI is only as good as the data it uses. For this reason, the focus should not only be on choosing which L&D technology has the most features, but also on how to populate it with the relevant data. To give a very concrete example: having an LXP that can give content recommendations based on (future) job profiles but not feeding the system with characteristics about the actual job profiles of your employees is an often seen missed opportunity. This is only one example out of many on how data can support your employees in what to learn at which moment, while bridging the gap between your employees' skills and the knowledge the organization needs.