

From Facilitator-Centric to Self-Directed Learning Models

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Change and continuity in the L&D paradigm shift

In my last blog post, I looked at the big-picture evolution of learning and development over time. One lesson I draw from that evolution is that when new learning models come onto the scene, they don't simply supersede older ones; rather, at any given time, a multitude of different models — old and new — are likely to be found coexisting, in some cases even blending together.

In other words, the rising popularity of self-directed approaches to employee L&D doesn't mean classroom-based learning is going to vanish. Far from it.

So what's driving this shift toward increasingly bite-size, available-on-demand, “just-in-time” content that employees can access when — and where — they want it? There are several causes, but here are two of the major ones.

- **Millennials on the rise — with new expectations.** Statistically, millennials overtook their Gen X counterparts as the majority of the U.S. workforce in 2016. A lot has already been written about millennials' expectations around technology, so let me just underscore two of those expectations that particularly stand out from an L&D perspective. First — millennials expect to be able to use their personal technology devices at work the same way they do at home. And second — they expect content to be immediate, individualized and intelligent, reflecting their unique interests and needs.
- **New technologies — and new skill needs.** Technological advances like AI and automation mean many companies are looking for employees with new skill sets. Right now, too few companies are committing the resources necessary to invest in upskilling and reskilling — and, according to an Accenture report, only 3% of executives say they intend to significantly increase investment in training and reskilling programs over the next three years. Nimble, customizable and self-directed L&D platforms can help to keep down the cost of high-value, on-demand training content.

For enterprises, the benefits of self-directed L&D solutions go way beyond lowered costs, and these benefits are often felt downstream of, say, enhanced onboarding processes — for instance, in employee retention rates, employee performance, employee engagement, customer satisfaction, even revenue. What's more, hyper-personalized experiences, which self-directed L&D solutions make possible, contribute directly — and immediately — to day-to-day employee productivity.

Considering all of these advantages, how should strategic leaders effectively support the transition from a facilitator-centric to a more self-directed L&D model? What should they look for in a technology vendor or partner? And how can they ensure the outcomes they care about right now continue while the transformation is underway?

Best practices: towards a future-ready, learner-centric L&D model

In the future, as we have discussed, learning content must be made available to employees in an immediate, individualized and intelligent way — any time, any place, on any device and in any language. In this future, enterprises create the infrastructure and tools — but leave the question of “how” up to each individual employee.

At the moment, however, many companies are struggling with the migration to learner-centric models. Business leaders looking to put their organizations on the path to self-directed L&D should pursue the following in any technology solution:

- Cloud-based multimedia learning management capabilities, with the ability to integrate learning management systems with key professional development, succession planning and compensation management tools
- Ability to gamify content
- Ability to create targeted, impactful experiences combining custom, licensed and curated content
- Single touchpoint for addressing a wide range of organizational needs, from employee wellness to reward management and learning administration
- Diverse modes of just-in-time learning for employees and third-party resellers
- Access to, and support the delivery of, manager tracking capabilities for user-selected learning experiences

Above all, self-directed L&D technology solutions must be flexible so that enterprises can maximize the value of humans and machines working together, while minimizing some of the inherent risks of an economy characterized by rapid and ongoing technological disruption.

Key Takeaways

Not only is technology changing right now, but the cost and effort associated with installing, updating and managing complex IT systems appear to be increasing. While most organizations are interested in transitioning to a self-directed L&D model, many of them are struggling to implement a right-sized approach. In fact, very few are likely serving up the right content for the right platform — every time. For forward-thinking enterprises, this needs to be a business priority. The sheer volume of information available in the digital age is growing exponentially, and traditional approaches simply can't keep up.

Keep in mind, there's no technology implementation, or strategic change initiative, whose success is not bound up with the training function — and that, above all else, is what excites me about L&D: It's the area of the enterprise where transformation becomes reality.

