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Microsoft CHRO Kathleen Hogan got a big assignment from CEO Satya Nadella last year: help develop a “growth mind-set” at the tech giant. Here’s how she and her team have tackled the challenge.

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'Integrated Learning' Gets Real



Corporate learning is in the throes of a game-changing metamorphosis, and that's a good thing, according to the experts.

BY TOM STARNER

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It's no longer enough for workplace learning to exist as an afterthought – a checkbox that keeps dropping to the bottom of a long to-do list. To engage talent and maintain competitiveness, smart employers realize that they need to make always-on learning a key piece of company culture.

Successful workplace learning is becoming more like what we're seeing in the consumer world – engaging, on-demand, social, and created by the real, in-the-trenches experts. Employers adopting this philosophy are trying to make learning both easier to execute and more interesting for workers.

Yes, basic learning and compliance tasks will still reside within the workplace learning universe, and rightly so. But learning must now engage workers by opening the door to new opportunities or achieving personal and professional goals. At the same time, employers need to continually re-skill their workforce to fend off competitors and keep growing in a constantly changing world.

To explore some of the reasons behind this paradigm shift, *HRE* spoke with several learning experts, including Stuart Bowness, vice president of learning software development at Workday, Christopher Myers, assistant professor at the Johns Hopkins Carey Business School, and David Price, director of Engaged Learning in Leeds, UK, and author of *OPEN: How We'll Work, Live & Learn In The Future*.

A Shift in Approach

Workday's Bowness says that with the talent marketplace's focus on developing new, more in-demand skills, learning has taken on new importance; it's being transformed into much more than the next online course, retreat or self-directed program.

"Employers have increasingly diverse and demographically broad workforces, so they need to provide learning tools and options that appeal to millennials, Gen X and baby boomers alike," Bowness says. For example, "consumerized" learning is one of the ways to actually bridge the generational differences, and enable each generation to learn from the strengths and expertise of others.

With a content shift to more self-directed and expert-driven learning and a technology shift to new delivery platforms and strategies (such as streaming video, mobile and gamification), Bowness contends



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– Stuart Bowness, vice president of learning software development, Workday

there is a corresponding move from “jumbo to micro” learning. Content is broken down into short, easy-to-digest and on-demand snippets to meet an immediate need, instead of a being delivered as a massive collection of lengthy, linear courses on a given topic.

“Traditionally, learning had followed the jumbo path but today, learning more and more is moving to the micro strategy, Bowness says. “It’s how people now learn in everyday life, so it applies to the workplace as well.”

Other experts say that learning is at the early stages of a transformation that will take learners from a static, coursework-driven environment to a more dynamic one that can offer benefits to both employer and employee.

“Some of the most significant issues and changes in learning relate to balancing the technological and personal aspects,” according to Myers of Johns Hopkins. “For a long time, we saw a push toward moving learning to a more technology-centric approach (transforming everything possible into online modules, for instance), and now I think we are seeing the pendulum swing back a bit toward a recognition that the person-to-person aspect is often critical.”

Myers explains that there are many types of knowledge - particularly tacit knowledge - that are better learned via on-the-job, person-to-person interactions. Some of the trends he is seeing today include employers trying to determine the kinds of knowledge that can be learned in a technology-centered approach versus a person-centered approach, and employers seeking ways to leverage technology to support person-to-person learning interactions, rather than replace those interactions completely.

Myers offers two examples. One is when employers push more traditional learning issues (compliance, anti-harassment, etc.) towards technology-centered approaches, while more interpersonal skills (interviewing, having difficult conversations, etc.) are taught in-person. A second example is the balancing act of finding ways to help technology support in-person training similar to the move towards what is known as “flipped classrooms” in the university setting. With this strategy, learners do more of the “content-exposure” aspects of a course online, and then spend time in class engaging in exercises to apply the content or concepts. By contrast, a typical classroom model offers the reverse - a lecture to cover concepts and then application exercises, such as homework or essays, are assigned to be completed outside of class.

Broadening the Model

Price from Engaged Learning explains that corporate learning is struggling to get past the “directed” model to a more self-determined, social model, one where people learn by watching or interacting with others.

“We see how active people are when they’re learning socially, but we haven’t quite worked out how to ‘manage’ social learning - if it can be managed at all,” Price says.

Recently, there has been much discussion about putting more of a consumer spin on the tools and apps workers use today. Learning is no different. Myers says that moving to a more learner-focused approach is easier said than done.

“It’s something organizations are wrestling with,” he says, adding that anytime people create learning courses, modules, or online training programs, there’s an assumption that the person creating the materials knows what it is people need to learn. But, Myers says, with the increasing specialization, dispersion

and diversification of work (and the people performing it), it is becoming harder to know what it is that people actually need to learn for success.

“It requires a change in the engine of learning - rather than being a push from above, it needs to be driven more by the individual learner,” Myers says. “That is something that companies are increasingly recognizing and trying to address.”

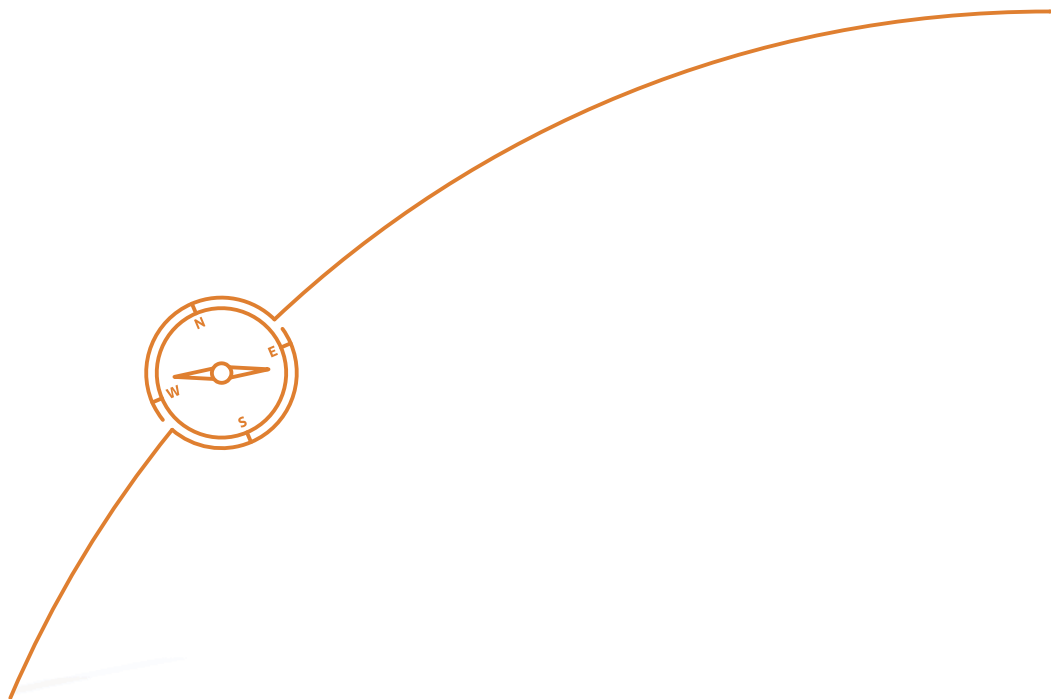
Workday’s Bowness says that the learning and development team is broadening its knowledge base and at the same time looking to depend on leaders to curate this new, less easy to identify content. “You can go to a vice president of a business unit and ask, ‘what do your folks need to learn?’ ” he says. “It’s an ‘ask the expert’-type of situation. There has to be learning in everything. You have to trust the leaders in your business to help source the content.”

He says that Workday employs this content sourcing method internally and that it’s much more collaborative than their older learning model. For example, when the Workday application development team gets together to evaluate training

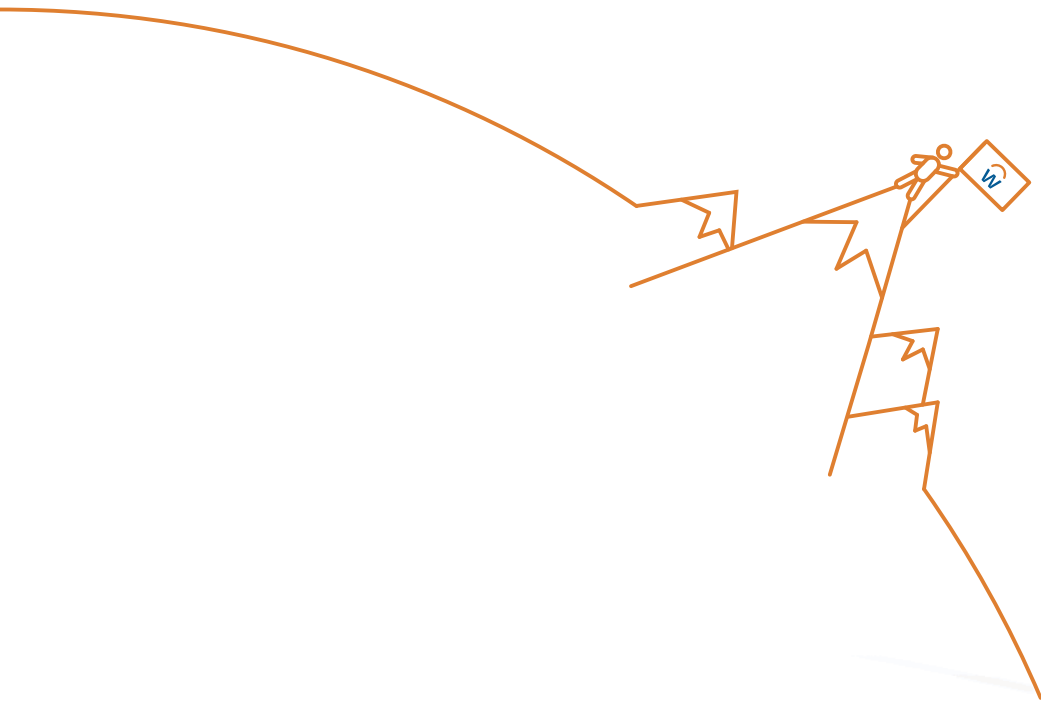


for new members, department leaders determine what is needed to help create the best learning programs. Some of it is created in-house, some from external sources. Then they ask the L&D team to help them pull it all together.

Price adds that the trick is you can’t “make” anyone learn anything, so creating an environment where employees drive their own learning is crucial. “We don’t buy anything on Amazon we don’t



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‘Integrated Learning’ Gets Real

want,” he says, “and it’s a reality that organizations make decisions that require workers to learn new processes, knowledge and skills that are essential to the organization’s mission, but that the worker doesn’t particularly want to learn. We just have to find more engaging ways of making that happen.”

Myers explains that company mission and philosophy, for example, are “felt aspects” of the job and are learned through exposure to others and the hands-on experience of working in a particular culture. So incorporating learning more into day-to-day work allows this cultural learning to unfold more organically than when it is stated explicitly via video or during onboarding.

“Stated descriptions of the mission and philosophy are helpful for creating cognitive awareness of a company’s culture or mission, but to translate those principles into action requires a ‘lived’ learning experience,” he says.

With agreement that limiting learning to the so-called “blocking and tackling” tasks like compliance and anti-harassment today falls far short of what learning must accomplish overall, how can employers engage workers and provide career-path opportunities? In fact, what specifically is learning’s

role in employee engagement?

Price, in doing the research for his book, says he was continually surprised that employers didn’t connect the dots between innovation, employee engagement, and learning. As an example, millennials “seek social purpose and what they can learn. The really innovative companies, those that have great engagement outcomes, ensure that people are learning and sharing their learning in a collaborative – not competitive – culture,” says Price.

“It’s about attitude – without that you’ve got problems,” he says. “Your job in HR is to enable motivation, mastery and intellectual stretch through learning.”

Price says focusing on how learning unfolds in day-to-day work also allows for more two-way learning. In the traditional training setting, employers are usually imposing a rigid, one-way transfer of knowledge that mutes some of the opportunities multi-generational peer-to-peer learning.

Spurring Employee Development

When it comes to the emerging “micro” learning trend, experts agree that smart employers are

LEARNING by the NUMBERS



More than eight in 10 executives (84%) in this year’s survey view learning as an important (40%) or very important (44%) issue.

Source: Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends 2016

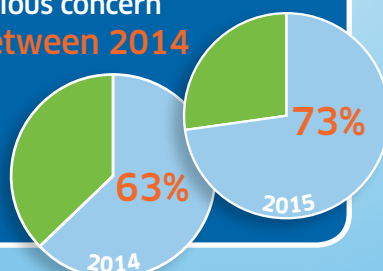
61%

Executives who report challenges in moving their organizations toward an external self-directed-learning approach.

Source: Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends 2016

CEOs who view the “availability of skills” as a serious concern climbed 10% between 2014 and 2015.

Source: PwC 18th Annual Global CEO Survey (2015)



In 2020, the global corporate e-learning market is projected to reach \$31 billion in revenue.



Source: Technavio Global Corporate E-learning Market 2016-2020

integrating micro-learning into their strategic learning plan because it aligns with the way many people learn in their lives in general.

According to Myers, “Small learning bites” that come at the right time – say, for instance, after an individual has experienced something on the job – can be incredibly powerful because they provide learning content at the moment the individual is most receptive – after having struggled or even failed with a particular task or issue.

“This gets at the tension between a one-shot course that covers everything and a more iterative, small-bites approach,” Myers says. “It’s a great example of how we can think about blending technology and on-the-job, in-person learning in ways that benefit employee development.”

Myers cites the example of trying to cover all potential issues in an onboarding training session, which effectively asks new workers to lock away information about how to deal with a particular issue that may or may not happen to them in a particular task that they don’t understand yet – before they even know where their desks will be.

“If that information could be delivered at

the exact moment of need, it could be far more powerful,” he says.

Data’s Growing Role

Internal data, which allows employers to get to a granular level in knowing more about their employees and their work, will continue to play a larger role in modern learning.

“Employers can leverage data and information about workers and their expertise in new and exciting ways,” Myers says. For example, he mentions a group of students at Harvard Business School who are launching a startup that helps employees find experts within their own companies.

With this startup’s approach, if an employee searches a particular term on the company’s website, the application pulls up a list of individuals who have also searched similar terms as suggested resources for advice.

“The difference here, and the value-add of big data, is that it doesn’t require individuals to update a knowledge-management profile or expertise-keyword list; it is generated from their actual work activity,” he says, adding that privacy aspects also must be considered.



87%

Learning and development professionals who cite improved user experience as a top reason for switching learning technologies.

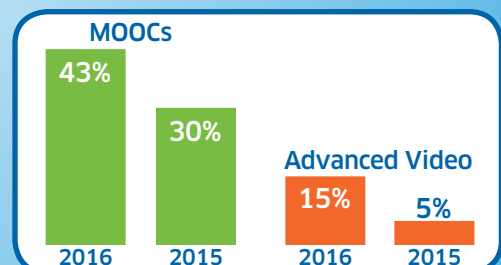
Source: Brandon Hall Group 2016 Learning Technology

58%

The percentage of millennials who expect their employers to provide them with learning opportunities relevant to their jobs.

Source: EdAssist’s The Key to Attracting Millennials Report (2015)

The percentage of companies that feel comfortable incorporating massive open online courses (MOOCs) into their learning platforms rose **13% between 2015 and 2016**, while those comfortable incorporating advanced video tripled.



Source: Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends 2016



Other Emerging Platforms

With modern workplace capabilities like video conferencing and telepresence, employers need to find a balance between in-person and virtual learning approaches that lead to the best outcomes for both casual and formal learning.

“The new tools can enable person-to-person learning in ways that we used to think were too difficult, like connecting people in different countries, but we have to be wary of thinking of them as an automatic replacement for in-the-moment, on-the-job learning,” Myers says.

According to Price, just like they are in the rest of our lives as consumers, these new tools will be massively helpful with learning. For example, Price recently helped a client create a webinar of short video presentations. The client was going to hold a conference, but with Price’s advice, realized the lasting value of something that can be repeatedly accessed.

“Think about the learning we do via videos posted on Facebook, TED or Twitter – why would work-based learning be any different?” he says.

The Future of Learning

Whether learning continues to move into a critical role – as part of an integrated strategy to build engagement and culture – remains to be seen, but learning experts are clear that there’s a bottom line impact for companies. The challenge is getting the message out. As Price says, “I don’t think many C-suite people really understand the value in learning right now.”

According to Price, some employers are still dealing with the aftershocks of the 2008 recession and that many of their CEOs feel that engagement is a luxury for when the sun is shining and business is going well, but not a priority when the outlook isn’t so great.

“It’s perhaps counterintuitive for them to think, ‘We need to encourage staff to be innovative, so we need to invest in their learning,’ but it would pay dividends if they did,” Price says. “The stand-alone nature of learning only continues to exist because many senior managers don’t believe learning is integral to performance and purpose.”

“Learning should absolutely be part of the holistic view of individuals’ preparation, engagement and development in their work,” Myers says, noting that getting to this point is challenging because



it’s messier than simply equating learning to stand-alone, formal training. Employers can count, mandate and certify that individuals attended a training session; it is vastly more difficult to mandate or certify how individuals have developed over the past year, taking into account what they may have learned in training events, on-the-job or through outside experiences.

“But at the end of the day, it is this actual development that drives improvement and innovation,” Myers says.

Workday’s Bowness explains it this way: Workday sees a major change among its clients as employers move from learning management to “learning enablement.”

“Learning enablement is about taking employees on a journey throughout their time with the company—from onboarding, through development opportunities, to promotions and role changes,” he says. “And that journey needs to be highly engaging and supportive of the employee’s growth, with personalized recommendations. We believe that Workday’s unified suite is uniquely suited to supporting that concept, given its management of the entire employee lifecycle and the rich data that is available as a result.”

The experts agree: workplace learning can no longer be an “out there,” disconnected process; it has to be tightly and carefully woven into a worker’s experience, integrated into the fabric of the modern workplace. The challenge for employers is to find the right learning process and best data, and blend them into an effective technology platform that will ensure that not only is learning intuitive, easy and fun – mimicking the consumer experience – but also leads to higher engagement and, as a result, productivity and competitiveness gains.