

NEW WAYS OF WORKING MEAN NEW WAYS OF LEARNING

BY LENA ROSS



The shift to new and agile ways of working is transforming all elements in the workplace, including how people are learning and acquiring new information. In a business environment characterised by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity ('VUCA'), change is relentless and fast. People want to build their capability at the speed of

such change, and even faster to stay ahead of the curve.

At the same time, newer ways of working are transforming the way employees are collaborating and communicating across digital and social enterprise platforms. The increased focus on iterative product and service development, means

we're seeing more tolerance to experimenting and failing.

LEARNING IS CHANGING

The backdrop is a fast-moving, complex and ambiguous world, where it's impossible to know all the answers. The 'speed of knowledge' means the demand for new and emerging skills is often unpredictable.

As a result, the days of planning our professional development one year ahead as part of our performance review cycle will wane. The speed at which new information appears and is accessed decouples learning from performance reviews and scheduled conversations.

At the same time, curiosity is now a much-applauded attribute. A curious, learning mindset is becoming more valued than an expert mindset. The availability and ease of digital channels to source new information means we can learn at any time. This just-in-time access is shifting our learning preferences to shorter episodes rather than longer, scheduled events, enabling learners to apply or test new information immediately.

WHERE CHALLENGE MEETS OPPORTUNITY

According to the 2019 *Deloitte Global Human Capital Trend* report, the top trend for organisations is to rethink the way people learn. At first this appears to present a challenge, but it's also an opportunity. By exploring new ways to build capability, we can be creative in our approach. In the new 'workscape', organisations can find the clues to approaching new ways of learning by tapping into two elements:

1. Our digital lifestyle and preferences
2. How we are hardwired to learn

DIGITAL LIFESTYLE AND PREFERENCES

Learning through the availability of numerous digital tools that deliver

short bursts of information has shifted our expectations to learning on demand.

Research continues to support the notion that our attention spans are decreasing while we continue to crave new information. Microlearning, which is defined as a short and focused piece of learning of less than 15 minutes, is the ideal way to address this. Shorter learning episodes ease the cognitive load of longer training events that deliver volumes of



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information. If you consider what you've learned in the last 12 to 24 months, and how you've acquired the new information, chances are high that a great deal of it has been through less formal digital channels and in shorter chunks.

HOW WE ARE HARDWIRED TO LEARN

Because a great deal of microlearning occurs through multiple digital channels, we can learn anytime, anywhere. The nature of self-serve learning in itself means acquiring information on demand (much like the way we watch movies, listen to music etc.) and it grants us greater autonomy.

Our brains like choices and options. Offering this level of autonomy to learners activates a reward response in the brain, making it more likely that they will participate in learning activity. This inspires employees to direct their own learning paths. When our pursuit for knowledge is on our terms, the motivation to learn, retain and experiment with new ideas is at its peak. Learning on demand provides the autonomy that enables us to craft our own learning paths.

Digital channels are also making it increasingly easier to share our learning with others. Just as we are hardwired to be social, we are designed to learn from our peers.

In the French restoration period in the early 1800s, the French Ministry of Education introduced peer-to-peer learning in the form of 'mutual schools' as a short-term solution to a teacher shortage. In these schools, students learned to read and write from older students and completed a six-year curriculum in a two to three-year period.

Success, ahead of its time, can be both a blessing and a curse. In the 1800s, the success of peer learning was regarded as a threat to order and to respect for traditional teaching. This learning model, that was borne out of necessity, wasn't to survive the perceived threat to conventional education and authority. But we can learn from their ideas.

WHAT ORGANISATIONS CAN DO

Organisations can make learning magic happen when they combine

An agile workplace is one that values iteration, prototyping, testing and learning in a safe environment

microlearning with peer-to-peer collaborative learning.

This can be achieved by encouraging and recording microlearning content that taps into employees' existing expertise and newly acquired knowledge. For example, by introducing lunchtime learning sessions or shorter 'lightning talks.'

A lightning talk lasts for no more than five minutes, is often delivered without slides and is an effective way for team members to report back on an event they've attended. In a conference setting, lightning talk slides are often set to move every 15 seconds for discipline to stay on topic and on time.

Similarly, *pecha kucha*, the Japanese phrase for 'chit-chat', is known as the 20x20 presentation, where 20 slides – which ideally feature more images than text – are each shown for 20 seconds, making the duration six to seven minutes.

These short, peer-to-peer presentations build a climate of psychological safety across organisational silos while enabling employees to shine and self-actualise, unlocking human potential. When team members attend a formal learning event, ask them to share their key learnings with their peers when they return to the office, either

as a lightning talk or *pecha kucha*, or present a lunchtime session that is longer in duration.

The motivation to learn is accelerated when employees are invited to share their key insights from what they've recently learned or share what they already know. While the concept of 'teaching to learn' is not entirely new, the application is very relevant to new ways of working where co-creation, collaboration, connection and autonomy are highly valued.

REAPING THE REWARDS

The powerful combination of microlearning and social learning has an added bonus: for very little financial outlay, the organisation reaps great benefits.

An agile workplace is one that values iteration, prototyping, testing and learning in a safe environment. Organisations know that learning fast is the new superpower to remain future-fit. New ways of working are shifting expectations and the ways in which we collaborate and learn.

Now is the time for organisations to think differently about building an agile learning culture that leverages these trends. When the digital tools that enable microlearning and sharing of information meet social learning, you will find the sweet spot!

LEARNING IS CHANGING

LESS	MORE
Cycle driven	▶ Cycle agnostic
Expert mindset	▶ Curious mindset
Event driven	▶ Episode driven
Scheduled	▶ Just in time
Employer directed	▶ Self directed
Facilitator centred	▶ Peer to peer

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FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES

Educational Alternatives: Different Schools, Colleges and High Schools (Des Écoles Différentes, 2018) <http://ecolesdifferentes.free.fr/ensorcellementscolaire.htm>

Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends 2019 (Deloitte, 2019) <https://www2.deloitte.com/au/en/pages/human-capital/articles/human-capital-trends.html>

The Human Attention Span Infographic (Digital Information World, September 2018) <https://www.digitalinformationworld.com/2018/09/the-human-attention-span-infographic.html>